

Grass Roots

Number 6 May, 1974

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Our plans for participation

BY DICK WILSON, LEADER OF NOTTS. COUNTY COUNCIL

THE NEW, LARGER COUNTY and District Councils face a number of difficulties in obtaining public participation on the many major and minor issues that local Councils handle. What are these difficulties?

The first is that many of the issues that face a Council are very complicated. Two years ago, the City Council put out the proposals for the road changes in the City centre. It consisted of many pages of text and maps. The well-publicised Local Plan for Bulwell cost 50p; it was even longer. Traffic proposals, the siting of houses, the siting of factories and offices, are all inter-related.

These matters are baffling enough for Councillors; how ever much opportunity is given for individuals to make their own views known, they will very often be opinions on a mere fraction of the issues.

Opinions

Secondly, the Council often has to make a choice to the advantage of one group of electors and to the disadvantage of others. Spend more on the elderly - and the rates go up! But when Councillors ask the public for their opinions, and then choose amongst these opinions, those who are overruled easily become disillusioned about the process of participation.

Thirdly, the opinions the Council hears are not necessarily representative. Those with complaints complain; those who are satisfied keep silent. This again is a limit on participation. What can a Council do:

To make better information available to electors at large; to explain the reasons for its decisions, both when they are proposed and after they have been taken; to get as many members of the public as possible to join in the decision-making?

Some of the things I shall suggest are already being done by the new

County Council; others we have barely begun.

- * The papers for all meetings go, before the meeting, to the press, public libraries and any members of the public who subscribe - papers of a single Committee, £1.50 a year; all papers, £10 a year.
- * Several Joint Committees with staff and voluntary bodies already exist.
- * The Governing Bodies of all County schools now have parents on them.
- * Comprehensive education plans are widely discussed at public meetings.
- * The Structure Plan and the Nottingham and Environs Transportation Study are based on lengthy consultations and public opinion surveys, and will go to Public Inquiry.

These are only the first steps. In addition, we have the following plans:

1. We are increasing the size of our Information and Public Relations Department. Telling people clearly and accurately what we plan and what we are doing is an essential pre-requisite to their telling us what they think about it.
2. Our Interim Planning Policy had to be prepared in some haste, to be ready for use on the 1st April this year. It is now available for consultation and comment, until we finalise it in the autumn. We propose to continue to publish policy documents of this kind as "Green Papers" for public discussion, before a final decision is made on them.
3. We plan a lengthy process of community review, in which in the course of time every community in the County will have the opportunity of discussing with the Council, through public meetings, meetings with its representative bodies, and other forms of opinion, research and consultation, to make known to the Council its own local needs and problems as its people see them.

BACK PAGE



HELP DECIDE YOUR OWN FUTURE!

CATCH A BUS AT SLAB SQUARE and you can arrive at County Hall in ten minutes. But for many people in Nottingham, the County Council seems like another world, separate and distant from their everyday lives. Nevertheless during the coming months some vital decisions affecting the future shape and pattern of the city will be made by the planners and politicians at County Hall.

A Structure Plan for the future of Nottingham and its surrounding suburbs (Carlton, Arnold, Beeston, and West Bridgford) is at present being prepared by a team of high-powered planners. This deals with such subjects as housing, jobs, shopping and transport and will seek to lay down broad policies and proposals for the Nottingham area during the next 10-20 years.

To avoid the criticism of being remote and unresponsive to people's needs, the Structure Plan team have attempted to involve the public at each stage of preparation, interviewing 1500 Nottingham families in the process.

Continuing dialogue

As part of the continuing dialogue between people and planners, Howard Jackson (Assistant Director of Planning and Transportation at County Hall) will be talking about 'Participation in Planning' at an open meeting to be held on Tuesday, 21st May at 6.15p.m. in the Friends' Meeting House, Clarendon Street.

At this stage the planners want to know from the public what issues concern them. For example: Do people want to be rehoused in far-flung suburban housing estates?

Are they willing to move to new jobs in the Mansfield or Alfreton areas?

Do they resent the loss of corner shops in the city?

These are the sort of questions to be tackled by the Structure Plan team. If you feel strongly about these issues and have not yet 'participated', why not come along on the 21st? After all, it's your future that's being decided.

Grass Roots

Homelessness

SHOCK STATISTICS just released by the People's Centre for their first month show a depressing picture of homelessness and eviction in Nottingham. At least one homeless family or person found their way to the Centre every day - despite the short time the Centre has been open, and the fact that it is not yet widely known.

The problem of homelessness revealed by these figures must be only the tip of the iceberg. Following reorganisation, it is now the job of the District Council Housing Department to help homeless families. But present housing policies are not geared to meet the challenge of homelessness. What is needed is:

- A clear commitment to deal with homeless people.
- A Homeless Families Officer with power to requisition empty housing.
- A well-publicised office for homeless families.

Not all of this can be put into practice by the Council alone, but they should at least be putting pressure on the Government.

Eviction

The figures also show eleven cases of harassment and eviction during the month. Most tenants are not aware of their rights or the obligation of their landlord. Many do not know harassment is a criminal offence, as is the failure to supply a properly entered rent book. Most of the evictions brought to light at the People's Centre are illegal.

It is a criminal offence to evict unfurnished tenants without a court order, which cannot be obtained without good reason (e.g. failure to pay rent). Furnished tenants may not be legally evicted without four weeks written notice to quit from the landlord. During this period the tenant may apply to the Rent Tribunal for security of tenure.

This is the law. But who is to enforce it?

The Police normally refuse to act in cases of eviction and harassment, saying that it's none of their business. The City Council, by law, are empowered to prosecute, and it is the job of the Common Law Officer to do so. At present there is no Common Law Officer in the City, but we understand that the appointment will be taken up shortly.

Some landlords are consistently defying the law. Grass Roots will give full support to tougher action against this kind of exploitation.



FILEY COTTAGES

(page 6)

FATHER WITH PROBLEMS

All too often we assume that the problems of being a single parent are confined to women. But what about the men who are left alone with children to support? What difficulties do they face? Mike Shepherd of Beeston was left with a small son to bring up when his wife died. This is what he has to say:-

"SORRY SIR", there is nothing we can really do to help you, have you had a talk with the child's headmaster?"

"Well, all I can do is ask the Parents Association, how about your friends?"
"Of course we can help you..... from time to time, how about your parents?"

A question answered by a question, nothing positive, probably a polite way of saying that we appreciate your problem, but we can't really help. I wonder how many one-parent families have faced the same situation and which is the greatest problem, a domestic one, a social one or both.

I'm fortunate, I suppose, that I own my own house, work for a company that understands my problem and is very tolerant about the hours that I work. Most of all, I have friends who have stood by me and given me help when it has been needed most. But what if the situation had been opposite.

Who could and for how long would someone be prepared to take my son to school? What about the school holidays and the times he may be ill, you know how children are, if there's a 'bug' going around, he always seems to catch it?

If I was to work from 9 - 5 who would look after him until I arrived home from work?

Will I manage the ironing, cooking, washing, budgeting, in fact everyday jobs I had always taken for granted?

These are problems that require immediate attention and if you are unable to face them then what about the personal problems, the changes in your social life? Suddenly the couples you used to go out with don't come around

any more. The jobs at home keep you so involved you become alienated from your friends. When the child is in bed at night it's surprising how lonely it can be, you realise how much you have taken for granted other people's company. It's difficult to get out because not many people are willing to give their nights up to baby sit, besides, after working all day and then coming home at night do you really feel like going out?

"Early to bed, early to rise makes....," or is it, "All work and no play...?" This is a reflection of how life must be for some one-parent families. Of course, some are more fortunate than others, some have homes whilst others none.

Shared Problems

I believe that one parent families share the same basic problems which are not insoluble as one would first imagine.

Is it right that voluntary organisations should be the first to recognise the need for help or for the parents themselves to form action groups, to help each other; I suppose that's one way of solving the problem, it certainly lessens the burden on the local Authority's shoulders. Or should the local Authority, in all its complexity, recognise the need for help and tackle the problem with a positive attitude?

Mike outlines 3 possibilities for action: help from voluntary organisations, help from the local Authority, and help by parents getting together into action groups. What do you think is needed? The Council of Social Service is in touch with several small self-help groups already operating in the City. If you would like to be put in touch with them, or if you are interested in joining or helping to form a City-wide self-help group, then please contact Robin Short or Pauline Drew at the Council of Social Service, tel. 46714.

International meeting point

A FEW MINUTES' WALK up Mansfield Road from the Victoria Shopping Centre is 61B, the old Bluecoat School, almost opposite the Woodborough Road turn-off. This is the new International Community Centre, opened in March this year, and already a number of interesting things have happened here.

The buildings have been attractively renovated by the City Council with help from an urban aid grant. The large hall is a good place for exhibitions, as many discovered when they came to the exhibition of Asian life, 'East Comes West,' last month. With the refectory it has also been in demand for wedding receptions and socials at weekends. We hope to have the refectory in action before long as a meeting place for coffee, food and drink at lunch and in the evenings. The small hall has been used for conferences and socials, and there is also a comfortable lounge, a games room, a craft room and a number of smaller meeting rooms, which are being used for various classes and meetings: the Young Muslims, the Sikh Temple, English classes for Asian ladies, dress-making classes, the Nigerian Union, and a class for children run by the Social Services Department. Part of the building houses the Community Relations Council, and we shall work in close cooperation with them.

Like most community centres, ours now comes under the Leisure Services Department of the District. The Management Committee has representatives from Leisure and from Education and Social Services, and from the Council of Social Service and Community Relations Council, and from various cultural and ethnic organisations in the city. With the management committee we hope to devise a varied programme of activities which will encourage people of different social and cultural backgrounds to feel that this is their centre.

If you have suggestions, or would like to be kept in touch, please call in or phone me at 49842.

John Gibbs, warden.



Know your rights

How to fight eviction

THE FIRST THING people usually know about being evicted is when they are either told by their landlord to get out or they receive a Notice to Quit. The Notice to Quit usually comes with a solicitors letter.

WHAT TO DO

Decide whether you are living in furnished or unfurnished accommodation. You should know this from your rent book. If you haven't got a rent book (it is against the law for your landlord not to give you one), you are furnished if the landlord provides substantial furniture, or if you share with the landlord, or if the rent includes substantial services in the place.

Try to find out why the landlord is attempting to evict you. This may be difficult.

ACTION

1. FURNISHED TENANTS. Go immediately to the Rent Assessment Panel (Rent Tribunal) at BIRBECK HOUSE, 14 Trinity Square, or to the People's Centre. This will stop

the Notice to Quit from taking effect. If you don't do this you can be evicted on the day stated.

2. UNFURNISHED TENANTS. You need take no action unless there is a good reason for evicting you. The landlord has to get a Court Order before he can evict you and he must prove in court that there is good reason to evict you.
3. OTHER ACTION. Keep paying the rent. If you owe rent try to pay the rent plus something off the arrears every week. It is a great help if you can prove you have tried to pay up.

If the landlord won't accept the rent, then try to pay it. Get witnesses that you tried to pay it or send it registered or recorded delivery to the landlord keeping the counterfoils of the postal orders. If you can't pay it, save up the money and take it along to the court so that you can prove you have it and want to pay it. If in doubt, go to the People's Centre.

Social Security Part 2

EXCEPTIONAL NEEDS GRANTS.

Exceptional needs grants are lump sum payments made for "exceptional needs". These grants can be made for a wide variety of items. By "exceptional" they mean when the items are not covered by the normal payments or when a payment is needed to avoid hardship. The items must also be essential.

What does it cover?

Form B0/40 sets out what the needs grant covers.

Clothes (Everyone).

Overcoat/raincoat	1
Shoes	2 prs.
Vests	2
Pants	2
Nightwear	2

plus

Men/Boys

Jacket/Anorak	1
Trousers/Jeans	2 prs.
Sweater/Pullover	1
Socks	3 prs.
Shirt	2

Women/Girls

Cardigan	1
Dresses	2

Stockings/Tights	3 prs.
Slips	2
Bras	2
Corset/Girdle	1

Household

Blankets	3 per bed
Sheets	3 per bed
Pillows	1 per person
Pillow cases	2 per person

The following are not covered by the weekly payment.

Beds/Matresses
Floor-covering and curtains
Household equipment, e.g. cooker, fire.

Other Needs Payments.

Redecoration (where essential)
Travelling expenses (where essential, e.g. to look for work).
Starting work - a grant can be made for any clothing or tools needed to start work.
H.P. debts for essential furniture in certain circumstances.

Exceptional needs payments are discretionary (i.e. they don't have to make them), but you can always appeal if you don't get them or if you think you haven't got enough.
(See Social Security part 3 in June Grass Roots).

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Nottingham. Telephone: 44021.



WANTED...

People who care

Throughout Nottingham, voluntary groups have sprung up to meet a variety of different needs. The range of groups is vast. It includes helping at clubs for the elderly, playgroups, the physically and mentally handicapped, entertaining in hospitals, decorating, gardening, helping families, and befriending the housebound or lonely. Most of all, groups depend on the help of people like you. So if you've got some time to spare and you would like to help out in some way, then why don't you contact us and find out about the various opportunities that exist.

The Voluntary Work Agency,
Nottm. Council of Social Service,
31a Mansfield Road,
Nottingham.
Tel. 46714.

PLAYHOUSE

APRIL 30th - MAY 18th

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News & views

Tenants' action

EARLY IN MARCH, Nottingham corporation workmen put up signs at Kingsthorpe Close forbidding children to play on nearby open land. Angry parents complained that their children now had nowhere safe to play. Alternative play areas were of brick and concrete, and several children had been injured in falls. Parents united under the leadership of Geoff Boon to ask the Housing Department to remove the signs, but were unable to obtain a satisfactory reply. They then took their problem to the Evening Post.

As a result of the publicity, councillors from St. Ann's ward took an interest and officials were sent to Kingsthorpe Close for discussions with the tenants. They agreed to remove the notices, make alterations to an existing play-area, and provide swings and a slide for the smallest children. They also promised to look into the possibility of providing a large covered area for use by the older children, and by the rest of the tenants.

As the flats are in Mapperley ward rather than St. Ann's, the tenants invited one of their own councillors to their next meeting, but he did not arrive. They chose a committee under the chairmanship of Geoff Boon, and with the help of S.A.T.R.A., hope to develop a tenants' association. Their main priorities are an old people's group and play facilities for the children, including a play-group for the under-fives.

Stake your claims!

APPLICATIONS FOR GRANTS from County or District Committees for the financial year 1975/76 should be submitted by 31st July 1974. Voluntary organisations should also submit a statement of accounts at the time of application.

Censorship

PUBLIC MEETING on censorship at 8.00p.m. on Tuesday, 21st May at People's Centre, 33 Mansfield Road.



"I've been coping with the community worker all afternoon."
(Cartoon from 'Community Action')

"GRASS ROOTS" is interested in what is happening in your area of Nottingham. We exist to give you an opportunity to share what you are doing with other groups and individuals doing similar things and to give space for airing city-wide issues not raised elsewhere.

Please send in letters and articles. Individuals and group representatives are welcome at editorial policy meetings on May 3rd, June 7th, and July 5th, at 31a Mansfield Road.

Your new reps

THE NEW JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE which represents those voluntary organisations who have an interest in Social Services has been elected.

The new members are: Rev. T. Tyndall, Mrs D. Kabon, Mrs R. Johns, Mrs E. McGuire, Mrs S.J. Bargent, Dr P. Wilding, Mr D. Moore, Mrs A. Tyler, Mrs J. Sharratt, Dr H. Lockett.

Women at work

A ONE-DAY CONFERENCE for women at work, sponsored by NCCL, will be held at the Albert Hall Institute on Saturday 15th June. Topics up for discussion include equal pay, nurseries, women and the trade union movement and National Insurance and Supplementary Benefits. More details from 33 Mansfield Road.

Clifton Youth Club

CLIFTON YOUTH CLUB has not been around long, so things don't always work out - but we have a laugh.

At the moment we haven't a junior club, but this is being talked about. So for the time being we're blessed with an age group of the school-leaving age. Many youth clubs are at the moment filled up with under 14's - great, but usually at the cost of losing the 14 - 18's.

The average age here is 16 - 17, and believe it or not, we've more girls than boys!

The sort of things that happen here are - indoor games (badminton, volley-ball, table tennis etc.), art and drama groups, and occasionally we find someone mad enough to visit us and share their experiences of 'what goes on behind closed doors' (love to N.C.C.L.). And, of course, there's our little coffee-bar which supplies most human things - one of which is music.

So that's our little 'fun palace', folks - anybody with any old paint they don't want - just send it over. to the following address:

Clifton Youth Club, Southchurch Drive, Clifton Estate, Nottingham, tel. 213574.

Letters

Youth workers wanted

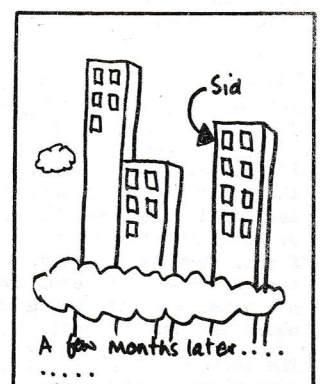
Dear Sirs,

Reading the latest issue of 'Grass Roots', I would be grateful if you would advise people interested in voluntary work that several opportunities exist within this Association and the clubs affiliated to it.

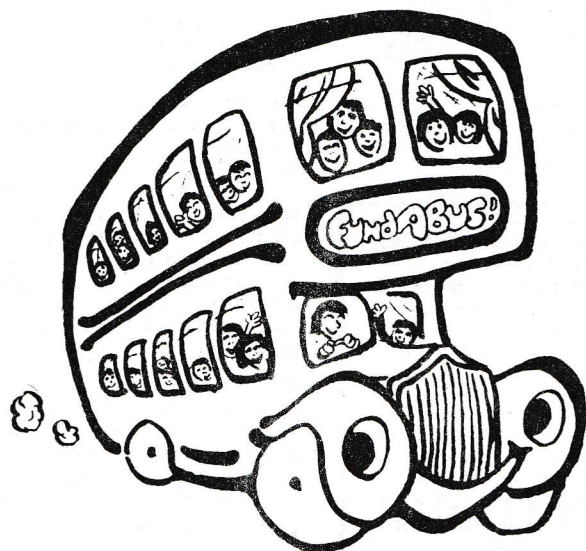
Anyone interested should contact me either by letter or by telephone at Nottingham & Notts. Association of Youth Clubs, Pelham House, Pelham Avenue, Nottingham NG5 1AJ, tel. Nottm.0602-64516.

Yours faithfully,
Geoffrey D. Parker
Organising Secr.

Sid and the System



Grass Roots



BUS in a MILLION!

THE NOTTINGHAM MOBILE COMMUNITY CENTRE has recently completed its first million miles, its second, however, is bound to be quite different. It could have been around the world five times, and yet it has not left Nottingham. It has, however, 'left' its previous routes, conventional colouring and static interior.

Meeting place

The bus is equipped with a slide, sandpit, swing, easels, tables and chairs, a wendy house and more and provides playgroup facilities for some of the city's under fives. But this is only one part of the bus's function for it also provides a meeting place for mums and is one more step towards community development and hopefully the provision of permanent facilities in the areas it serves.

The bus is now visiting Edwards Lane Estate, Crabtree Farm Estate and Top Valley Estate, for three sessions a week in each area. Already at Edwards Lane, through the interest and enthusiasm of the local mums, and the support of Nottingham's Department of Social Services a building has been found and the area now has a community centre which will house the bus' playgroup.

The sessions will be run by local mums, some of whom have had

training 'on the bus' from the Notts. P.S.P.G. Association.

The bus has other things to show for itself, literally. For it now houses the beginnings of a street theatre group and we hope to be ready for a series of shows throughout Nottingham during the summer.

The bus has also stimulated interest in other areas of Nottinghamshire, the most recent being the Social Services Department of Mansfield. The wheels are now in motion for a mobile play bus in the Mansfield Woodhouse area with the help of the local Lions Club, the Department of Social Services and outfitting by an area comprehensive school.

The bus, however, because it relies mainly on charity and grants, is always sailing close to the wind, and we never refuse any help toward the constant maintenance and equipment costs. The Nottingham and District Federation of Community Associations is responsible for starting the project and the bus is able to respond to different areas for different purposes, fulfilling a social need that is seemingly inexhaustible.

So if anyone tells you that Nottingham is dead, its people uninteresting, let them know about the house on wheels and what it is doing on its second million miles.

Stan Pochron
(Playbus organiser)

Homes not Offices

FOLLOWING RECENT REVELATIONS of plans to build another huge office block in the City, on the site behind the Theatre Royal, a campaign of resistance is growing. At the time of going to press, a meeting had been called at the People's Centre, the initiative coming from the Raleigh Street Area Residents Association - who contrast the speed with which the Council gave permission for office development with the long wait for even simple repairs to council houses in their area.

Hot air rises less

ONE SMALL SHRED of comfort has been offered to St. Ann's tenants, with the news that the cost of heating provided by the new District System is to be increased by 2p a therm instead of the original 4p rise. The decision by the National Coal Board to peg increases to 2p was the result of protests from local councillors. The increase will come into effect on May 1st.

Butt Houses shock

THE FIGHT TO SAVE the Butt Houses at Lenton ended with their demolition early in April. Astonishingly, there were still five weeks left for objectors to appeal to the High Court against demolition taking place. Even more astonishingly, the demolition was quite legal - as stunned objectors were informed by the Department of the Environment. Yet another example, it seems, of how the combination of planning laws and Corporation protects developers instead of the public!

Filey Cottages

CONTROVERSY HAS BLOWN UP over a decision by the Housing Department to offer a young mother and her three year old son a house at Filey Cottages, Ireton Street. The house is awaiting demolition in the Raleigh Street Clearance Area and was described by neighbours as an 'appalling slum' (see photo page 2).

Mrs. Baguley and her son had been on the housing waiting list for nearly 13 months but she took one look at the place and returned the keys to the Housing Department.

Existing residents were dismayed by the news that Filey Cottages were expected to remain standing for another two years. As one resident put it "The Council should be rehousing the people who are already here instead of moving in new tenants."

PEOPLE'S CENTRE: CORRECTION

THE TELEPHONE NUMBER OF THE PEOPLE'S CENTRE IS 411227 AND NOT 46641 AS STATED IN LAST MONTH'S "GRASS ROOTS".