

## **John Branston statement to Full Council on 21<sup>st</sup> July 2016**

Earlier this evening a group of us presented a petition with over 1,000 signatures to the Chair of the Planning Committee in opposition to a planning application for a development in Oldfield Park. Without touching on that specific application, there are some wider points I'd like to address.

Implementing the Article 4 Direction (HMO Cap) in 2013 was a welcome step for OP – although the stable door was rather belatedly bolted, given that the HMO concentration in the area far exceeds the 25% threshold. But it was important that the Council recognised the concept of 'fragile social balance' and the problems that come with this high density of HMOs. Concerns about social balance across the authority area are heightened when people see applications being made to put additional student housing in areas that are already saturated with HMOs, or on sites that were earmarked for key worker housing or previously approved for affordable housing, or when the sort of lower-grade industrial space that is perfect for small business and start-ups (and shown to be in high demand) comes under threat in the same way.

Once you've accepted the issue of social imbalance and the necessity of the HMO cap, the measures proposed by Cllr Sandry at Full Council in March are surely only a logical next step. These would see the council debating the introduction of additional measures to limit purpose-built student accommodation developments in areas where HMO saturation has already been reached.

Given the Universities' importance to the city and their growth aspirations, the student housing clearly has to go somewhere. But residents in affected communities also have perfectly reasonable and quite straightforward aspirations of their own which are directly at odds with some of the proposals coming forward. And the point we want to make is that the detail of the design and siting of purpose-built student accommodation must be scrutinised in the light of the impact that it will have on existing communities, who don't necessarily have a strong collective lobbying voice apart from organising ad hoc in reaction to individual developments.

As residents, we have to rely to a great degree on the planning procedure. But our own specific experience of the procedure has been quite an eye-opener... it doesn't feel geared towards an even-handed review of competing concerns. That is why it is not only important that clear planning guidance in relation to purpose-built student developments is brought forward and hopefully adopted as soon as possible, but that it is then upheld at every stage. And this is where you come in, both as individual councillors and as a council, to do what you can to support transparency of process and the upholding of agreed and adopted policy. And to ensure the interests of the communities you serve are represented, as a fundamental part of the difficult balances that you as a council are trying to strike. Please: Protect our communities! Thank you.