

DEPUTATIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

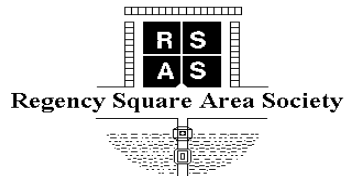
A period of not more than fifteen minutes shall be allowed at each ordinary meeting of the Committee for the hearing of deputations from members of the public. Each deputation may be heard for a maximum of five minutes following which the Chair will speak in response.

Notification of one Deputation has been received. The spokesperson is entitled to speak for 5 minutes.

**Deputation concerning Review of Hostels
(Spokesperson) – Mr. D. Cameron**

Supported by: Teresa Webber, Julie White, Nigel Rose and Monsignor Jerome Lloyd.

SUBMISSION TO PPOLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE
REGARDING HOSTELS POLICY



The Regency Square Area Society is concerned about the West Pier Project, and its location in three large buildings in Regency Square. We believe that the WPP is:

1. failing to provide an adequate service to its 45 residents, many of whom have dual diagnosis, and is
2. having a detrimental impact upon the entire area.

and as a result negative feedback loops have developed, leading to a constant “knife edge situation” – inside and outside the hostel.

The RSAS is, however, in favour of much that appears in the B & H Council’s Single Homeless Strategy 2009-2014.

We quote four principles in this report that we as a society fully support –

1. Page 2 - *“Focussing our resources on the city’s most vulnerable residents”*
2. Page 10 – Key Themes in Hostel Policy - *“individual supportpersonalised to meet the needs of the individual”*,
3. Page 10 -*“Hostels...are not a place of last resort but are there to provide and create opportunities to change negative behaviours, overcome barriers and to promote independence”*.
4. Page 11 – Our Guiding Principles - *“Engagement – active community, service user and stakeholder engagement”*
5. Page 11 – Our Strategic Objectives – *“Reduce offending and anti-social behaviour”*.

The West Pier Project has failed to comply with these fundamental principles. An in depth review of WPP operations is urgently needed.

THE RSAS BELIEVES THAT THE WPP HOSTELS ARE NOT FIT FOR PURPOSE.

THE RSAS URGES B & H COUNCIL TO CARRY OUT A REVIEW OF HOSTEL POLICY AS IT RELATED TO THE WPP, AND TAKE STEPS TO MOVE RESIDENTS ON -

TO MORE SUITABLE LOCATIONS IN BETTER QUALITY AND LESS INSTITUTIONAL SURROUNDINGS, WHERE THERE IS A REAL CHANCE OF MIXING WITH THE SURROUNDING COMMUNITY.

THE RSAS WOULD BE VERY HAPPY TO COOPERATE IN SUCH A REVIEW AND WOULD LIKE TO BE KEPT FULLY INFORMED ABOUT POLICIES AND DEVELOPMENT.

Regency Square Society Supporting Information

Here is a brief list of the key failures –

- **Anti-social behaviour – (see principle 4)** The hostels are a source of anti-social behaviour, not only as a result of behaviour shown by residents, but also because they attract other non-institutionalised B & H residents with similar behavioural problems. (Just before the time of writing a homeless man with a close friend in the hostel has been camping out every night opposite the hostel).
- **Economic impact on the area –** Hoteliers in the vicinity of the hostels suffer actual economic harm. In order to understand the impact that these hostels have on the centres of B & H's tourist industry the council should engage with hoteliers and see the situation from their point of view. Some hoteliers have kept diaries of anti-social and criminal behaviour linked to the hotels and would be prepared to share their information with the Council.
- **West Pier Trust residents' human rights – (see Principle 2)** in an attempt to control the “knife edge” situation the Management of the WPP have restricted resident's freedom of movement. They are not allowed to congregate – to sit on the steps – to enter the gardens – to have more than one person in their rooms. Do these humiliating restrictions “create opportunities for change”?
- **Lack of relationship with the surrounding community – (see principle 4)** It is rightly said that “no man is an island” and 45 people with severe behavioural and psychological conditions living in close proximity to each other 24/7 cannot by any stretch of the imagination be described as “creating opportunities for change”. The local community in Regency Square is tolerant and diverse – but quite unable to do what any humanitarian community should do – accept people with behavioural problems as members. It is unlikely that a resident could achieve a behavioural change by interacting only with other residents, non-institutionalised people with similar problems, drug dealers and social workers.
- **Unacceptable interpersonal relations in the hostel – (see principle 3)** We pass this information on as hearsay but we have been led to believe that inter-resident relations in the hostels are worse than poor. We suggest that an external auditor should investigate what happens in WPP hostels in order to evaluate the truth of these claims.
- **Obsolete and discredited hostel model (A) - (see principle 2)** Hostels are meant to be a humanitarian replacement for large institutions. By putting 45 such residents together in very close proximity to each other with little relationship with the outside community the residents are being in effect institutionalised.
- **Obsolete and discredited hostel model (B) –** some years ago a current model of social care believed that clients would benefit if a group of people with the same problem were placed together. However it is now believed that this view is unverifiable. A better model is to mix people with different needs in smaller mixed groups. Much recent research is critical of such models.

- **Terms of lease** – The lease states clearly that there should be no anti-social behaviour from hostels. The project is in breach of the lease therefore.
- **Fire regulations** – It is highly unlikely that the three buildings are fully compliant with fire regulations. We suggest that this urgently be investigated by an independent consultant.
- **Drugs policy** – We understand that the WPP policy on drugs is known as “harm reduction”. But the police policy on drug possession and use is one of “zero tolerance”. We do not think these two diametrically opposed policies can be effectively triangulated. If so the WPP must be allowing illegal drug possession and use on council financed premises which is not acceptable.
- **Cost calculations dictating policy – (see principle 1)** – It has been stated on a number of occasions that one advantage of having a large concentration of residents with demanding needs in one place is one of cost reduction. This would seem to be a case of the tail wagging the dog – if the institution becomes dysfunctional as a result of a cost reduction policy is this unfair to hostel residents who should expect a better quality service surely?
- **Externality costs as a result of short-sighted cost reduction calculations** – The extra costs that the WPP project is throwing onto to community are many – the cost of extra police time, the cost of fire ambulance and hospital services, the cost to local hotels from lost business, the cost to local residents as a result of lower house prices
- **Inappropriate location of hostels (A) see principle 4** – Brighton is one of Europe’s leading drugs cities – and the seafront is a focus for the drug culture. It is also one of Britain’s most alcoholic cities – and Preston Street and West Street are one of the key drinking areas of the city. B & H is also a key location for the distribution of designer drugs such as “poke”. It makes no sense at all to place hostels for residents with both drug and alcohol problems in this area. To claim a “harm reduction” policy in such an area is hard to credit.
- **Inappropriate location of hostels (B) see principle 4** – Preston Street with its sometimes aggressive drinking culture can be a dangerous location for the WPP’s many residents who demonstrate bizarre behaviour. Not surprisingly WPP residents are a frequent target for bullying and violence. Is it right to place such vulnerable people in an area where they are bound to be targeted?
- **Questionable strategy in entering into agreement with owners of the three buildings** - in the light of the many disincentives to placing these hostels in Regency Square we would ask how the decision was made to take a lease on these unsuitable buildings in an unsuitable location. We would ask for this question to be investigated.

DUNCAN CAMERON
RSAS COMMITTEE MEMBER

27 November 2014