

26 July 2024

Cllr John Cotton  
Leader of Birmingham City Council  
Council House  
Victoria Square  
Birmingham  
B1 1BB

Dear Cllr Cotton,

**Re: BCC - A Year of Empty Apologies**

I am writing on behalf of the residents of Central Ladywood to express profound concerns about the situation we find ourselves in one year since the regeneration and gentrification of Central Ladywood was formally announced, to include all residents within the zone edged with a red line. As described in The Guardian this week, for the residents of Central Ladywood, "it's physiological economic violence." Yet, one year on, nothing has improved. The council moves from one blunder to another, causing nothing but distress to residents, leading to a string of empty apologies that fail to address the underlying issues or alleviate the residents' suffering.

It is well documented in the media that over the past year, BCC has issued numerous public apologies. For instance, a year ago, on 21 July 2023, the Birmingham Mail reported an apology from the council promising "lessons learnt" in response to the chaotic meeting held on 20 July 2023, during which Cllr Bore attributed the disarray to "residents unprepared to listen." Such comments only served to deepen the rift between the council and the community.

On 28 November, council leaders issued another apology during a meeting with Ladywood Unite, acknowledging the poor treatment of residents and promising improvement with the appointment of a Director of Regeneration for Ladywood. However, this appointment further strained relations, as evidenced by the email sent on 20 February from BCC, which extended "sincere apologies" for the director's conduct, which was described as "not reflective of the conduct that is expected of Council employees." This matter is now being investigated by an external agency.

Additionally, the Guardian article, 22 July 2024 (attached), highlights further apologies from Cllr Jayne Francis. Despite these apologies, there remains a palpable sense of betrayal and frustration among the residents, who feel that the project has been rushed without proper consideration for the needs of the community, with priority given to ensuring a minimum 20% profit margin for the developer. All evidence indicates that little regard has been given to residents in the area, resulting in distress, unfairness, and a lack of thorough planning, all of which have had a detrimental impact on the community.

One significant issue that needs immediate attention is the provision of independent advice for residents, which you promised over a year ago. Ideally, residents should have the autonomy to choose their own providers for independent advice. However, it appears that BCC has already commenced the procurement process, potentially limiting the residents' ability to negotiate terms independently of the council. The recent survey, which many residents found inaccessible, seems like an attempt to control this process. It is imperative that BCC or Berkeley fund the independent advice while allowing residents to determine the scope of this work.

Moreover, it is alarming to note the deplorable state of Central Ladywood and in particularly the Council's Neighbourhood Office (photos 25 July 2024)



This starkly contrasts with BCC's commitment to creating more open spaces as part of the regeneration project. If the council cannot maintain its own existing spaces, how can residents trust it to manage new developments effectively or indeed look after the green spaces promised? The Neighbourhood Office is adjacent to Ashton Croft. Would any member of the Council find it acceptable to live next to this building in its current state? I frequently visit and shop in neighbouring Harborne, where the streets and council buildings are kept in pristine condition. Why is this not the case for Ladywood? Additionally, I have no doubt that the deplorable state that Central Ladywood is in, through neglect from the Council, will detrimentally affect the value of our homes.

The situation in Central Ladywood is a stark reminder of the need for genuine, empathetic engagement with the community. The constant apologies, of which only a few are mentioned above, and the weak attempts to engage the community are not a substitute for concrete actions that address the residents' concerns, ensure their voices are heard and respected and meet the needs of a very close-knit community. This can only be fully achieved when residents are treated as equal partners in all decision-making processes and in line with BCC policy as outlined in *Powered by People* **"We will shift power to communities by showing that the public is our most important resource, and their contributions and needs are valued, respected and acted on."**

The continuous apologies and mishandlings by BCC have only strengthened the resolve and steadfastness of the residents of Central Ladywood. Their determination to fight for their homes and community grows stronger with each blunder and inadequate apology issued by the council.

We urge you to take immediate steps to rectify this situation and rebuild trust with the residents of Central Ladywood.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter and we look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

George Smith

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