

Council Meeting

22 September 2020

Public Participation (agenda item 1)

1. Alan Rice, local resident – Statement in support of Cllr Payne’s Motion on Eviction of Private Housing Tenants under Section 21 of the 1988 Housing Act

“STATEMENT UNDER PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN SUPPORT OF COUNCILLOR PAYNE’S MOTION ON EVICTION OF TENANTS UNDER SECTION 21 OF THE 1988 HOUSING ACT – NORTH SOMERSET COUNCIL MEETING – SEPTEMBER 22ND 2020

My name is Alan Rice of Weston Housing Action which assists tenants in private rent in issues with their landlords including threat of eviction.

55,000 private renter households in England face eviction between now and the end of October. From yesterday (Monday September 21st) those who were served notice before August 29th, and haven’t moved out, will be in danger of losing their home.

One in two people in my ward, Weston Central, privately rent and a significant number will be among that 55,000. The biggest single cause of becoming homeless is the unwanted ending of a tenancy.

The government ban on evictions ended on Sunday despite Housing Minister Robert Jenkin earlier promising “no renter who has lost income due to coronavirus will be forced out of their home”.

Many renters who have lost their income due to coronavirus will be forced out of their home and many landlords will use the dreaded Section 21 notice of eviction where no reason has to be given.

In normal times a Section 21 notice gives just 56 days for the tenant to leave the property. I have witnessed the act of just receiving one severely affecting the tenant’s mental health - causing increasing anxiety over whether he/she can maintain a roof over his/her family’s heads. Due to coronavirus, the government announced in March the notice period was extended to three months. Repossession proceedings will start immediately where the notice period has already expired and will gather speed as more and more notices reach their expiry date.

There’s more to come. Although the government are to be applauded that on August 29th the notice on new evictions was extended to six months this just kicks the problem further down the line. With furloughing coming to an end on October 31st and resultant redundancies looming, I predict there will be a tsunami of evictions as we go over the cliff edge.

And let’s not forget these are no-fault evictions, the tenant needn’t have any rent arrears and could have kept the property immaculate. Private tenants live in fear of

receiving a Section 21 notice to which there is no defence. Landlords often threaten them if a tenant complains about lack of maintenance or for example damp and mouldy conditions.

The government recognised the iniquity of Section 21 notices and made a manifesto promise to bring in legislation to end them, but it is a long time coming.

The first case I dealt with was a single mother with a 4 year old at Walliscote School and a 10 month old baby. She had left an abusive relationship in Gloucestershire but was unable to apply for social housing because she had no local connection, although she had lived previously in Weston as a child.

The letting agent would only accept six months money upfront which was the whole assured tenancy, borrowed from her grandmother. The lady approached me for help as she was nearing the end of her tenancy and the letting agency wanted £125 to renew the tenancy - £125 she didn't have. I managed to get the letting agency to drop the fees which are fortunately now illegal. But it took the government more than two years from when the Chancellor proposed the tenant fees bill making them illegal until it finally became law.

The glacial progress of the tenant fees bill does not bode well for the introduction of legislation to end the iniquitous Section 21 notice. The government needs a proverbial kick. Cllr Payne's motion seeks to give that kick and Weston Housing AcTion fully supports him and thanks him on behalf of so many anxious tenants.

Please support Councillor Payne's motion.

Alan Rice
Weston Housing AcTion"

2. Barry Edwards, local resident - Statement in support of Cllr Payne's Motion on Eviction of Private Housing Tenants under Section 21 of the 1988 Housing Act

"Homelessness is caused by inequality resulting in people's inability to compete in the housing market. In England, it's most prevalent in areas such as Bristol and its commuting region including North Somerset

In these areas, it's much more difficult for families and individuals with little money to compete with more affluent households for a suitable home. Where housing costs continue to rise, they may still face homelessness even if they increase their income.

Currently, the unaffordability of private renting is a major cause of homelessness. Over one million people currently claim Local Housing Allowance (LHA) and 35% of those people are in work.

LHA is designed to help people with little money to afford market rents. It's a vital tool in preventing homelessness, but LHA has been frozen since 2016 while rents have increased.

But because of this freeze, there's now a shortfall between rents and LHA rates in nine out of 10 areas in the country. Shortfalls are large: in one in five areas, families in need of a 2-bedroom home face a shortfall of at least £100pcm. One of the biggest triggers of applications for statutory homelessness assistance is the ending of a private (assured shorthold) tenancy, which can happen as the result of a no-fault eviction (or Section 21 notice).

At Somewhere to Go we see people who are not the standard perception of homelessness that people have. These are sometimes young couples who despite both working have fallen behind with rent and have other debt, if in this case a section 21 is given they are now in desperation. We see cases like this every week and refer to NSC housing department or Key Steps if appropriate.

Example: Today at StG a mother and daughter came in who are sofa surfing. (family abuse) Now the daughter has turned 18 she can use the facilities at StG for food and showers.

Example: A couple who used the soup kitchen at Friends Meeting House were renting last year and just about managing, she has a speech impediment and he does a manual labour type job. She was pregnant when I last saw them last year, there was a look of Joy and worry on their faces. Two weeks ago, they appeared at StG saying that they had rent arrears and had been given a section 21 for the end of October and where could they get advice.

These are just two that I witnessed in two separate visits and they are daily occurrences. Its good that people come to us as a trusted facility that they know will signpost them to our care partners including NSC. Its also true that the "fend for

yourself" attitude is good in theory but fails so many people who are disabled in ways that are not visible.

Mental health, learning difficulties, family breakdown, relationship breakdown all contribute to becoming homeless and can be pinpointed as the cause, but this is not right. It is the inequality and proportion of income that is needed for rent by the poorest in society that causes homelessness, most of the other causes listed stem from that fact.

You can, and should, judge a society by how it treats its poorest and less abled citizens. The demonisation of homeless and the most deprived is shocking, we cannot just keep walking by on the other side.

Barry Edwards

Trustee Somewhere to Go"

3. Johnny Boxshall, local resident, on behalf of Friends of Grove Park - Statement in support of Cllr Payne's Motion on tackling the climate and nature emergency

"The following statement is written by the Friends of Grove Park to support Robert Payne's motion in tackling the climate and nature emergency.

We, as a planet, an ecosystem are, in the words of David Attenborough 2. "Facing a crisis..one that has consequences for us all."

Since 1970, vertebrate, animals - birds, mammals, reptiles, fish and amphibians - have declined by 68%.

These facts are not deniable: The loss of pollinating insects results in empty fridges and barren cupboards. Trees and other plants regulate water flow and produce the oxygen we breathe. Seas are becoming deserts devoid of life with an estimated 5% of fish commonly trawler-caught left compared with before the turn of the 20th century. Disease causing pests will swarm in their multitudes with no predators to regulate them.

Many species have become extinct and we are now looking at a further one million species in threat of extinction.

It is important to clarify exactly what extinction is.

'Deniers' will claim that it is part of evolutions' natural process and in the widest terms this is true.

Extinction is a perfectly natural process- 99.99% of all life on Earth has already gone extinct, and as Earths history progresses, so will 100%. Eventually the sun will go supernova and engulf the Earth and the other inner planets. So we needn't worry right it's all going to end anyway?

Well the end is estimated at not being for another 7 billion years or so, so we need to worry about the now **NOW.**

Not all species die out. Many evolve and adapt until they become genetically distinct- a new species. Others reach the natural conclusion, either because of an inability to compete, severe genetic weakness due to a small isolated population, or a radical change in the environment. To some degree this describes natural extinction. If we consider the figure '1' to be a basal rate of extinction, then the extinction rate of amphibians globally, right now, stands at '1000': one thousand times the natural rate.
(a pause here for dramatic effect would be advised)

Why? Why does this happen? Habitat loss, water pollution, global warming, the global spread of the chytrid¹ fungus¹, the exotic pet trade, folk medicine, the bush meat industry. The list goes on...

And now for the cause of the causes... Largely one species, *Homo sapiens sapiens*- the wise man (apparently)- us.

As a species we are what can only be described as a mega predator. No other species has ever existed that predaes almost everything below it on the food chain, and also predaes itself. We persecute species because we don't like the look of them. We slaughter animals in their hundreds because the cartilage in their fins adds texture to chicken soup... We concrete over and chemically poison the lands which are the very true foundation of life on earth.

No other species behaves in this way. This form of behaviour is truly uniquely human. For all of our creativity and ingenuity we are a cruel, greedy, merciless predator.

If we continue with such a reckless and unnecessary course, we will live in a world stripped of all the beauty and complexity of life itself, save the few species capable of adapting to our ever encroaching excesses. And at that point, or probably long before, we will realise exactly how much we need those other species that we trampled under foot.

Typically when we think of conservation we think of the tiger, the elephant, the panda. That is because they are mammals, closer to us than a spider, bee or worm. They are aesthetically pleasing to us- ironically that is why the tiger is on the verge of extinction. Such species known as 'enigmatic megafauna'. When it comes to mammalian extinction, it is the humble European Hedgehog that tops the list as most in decline mammal.

Last week ministers have agreed (under a build back greener banner) to ban metaldehyde the common ingredient in slug pellets that wildlife organisations have been requesting banned for over ten years. Yet still allowing two years for this to become law. What is more important, money or life? When will we learn from our ongoing mistakes? Slugs are a hedgehogs most important food. Poisoned slugs = poisoned hedgehogs and the loss of our ecosystems in our very own back gardens. Not only in caves of bats near Wuhan!

So what can we do? Empower people to allow for nature in their lives. Stop using herbicides and pesticides in your garden. Cut a 10 cm square hole in your fence to allow hedgehogs to move between gardens. Plant wildflowers along every roadside verge and in every planter. Leave the corners of your garden to grow wild. Enforce fines for dropping litter. Educate people on the importance of not dropping litter in the first place. Make Ecology a compulsory subject in schools. Connect with and care about nature that gives us "the beauty and complexity of life itself."

If you are wondering how any of this is relevant to me, just look where we as a species currently stand. Isolated, restricted, constrained by a viral pandemic that jumped species, because we encroached once again into the natural world. Messing with nature as we do affects all of us. To borrow words again from Sir David Attenborough,

“What happens next is up to every one of us.”

1. Chytridiomycosis is an infectious disease caused by a fungus. It appears to be a major factor in dramatic amphibian declines in many parts of the world. It is particularly linked with the decline, and extinction, of tropical species and may also be affecting birds and crustaceans in freshwater habitats.

2. Extinction: The Facts. Sir David Attenborough Broadcast BBC1 in the UK on Sunday 13 September at 20:00 BST."