

## **AFFADAVIT - PROFESSOR DYHOUSE**

Consultation over the communal bins trial scheme.

We understand consultation to mean a free and open exchange of views, with unprejudiced outcomes, aiming at reaching a better set of decisions. Consultation in this sense has never taken place over the communal bins trial. Cityclean officials have clearly been determined to force this scheme upon residents. Moreover, the branding of the widespread opposition as a tiny minority has further eroded any real process of consultation.

1) From the beginning there was no consultation with residents in the areas covered by the trial: the scheme was simply announced to us as in place, pre-emptively, in leaflets posted somewhat randomly in the autumn of 2003 to buildings located in the area. The leaflets were enclosed in plain brown envelopes that many confused with junk mail. Some streets, and many households, received no information at all until it was far too late.

2) Little thought appeared to have been given to the area that the trial was going to cover. While this raised wider concerns, it was also relevant to the 'consultation' process. There was no consultation whatever over the selection of streets, and the criteria for selection appeared to be arbitrary and certainly contestable.

3) Residents in the area were horrified by the leaflets. The upshot was a meeting for residents of just one of the four affected wards (Regency Ward) in St Michael's Church Hall, hastily arranged on 21 November 2003, quite independently of Cityclean. A large number came along despite the lack of notice, and almost all were entirely averse to the scheme. The meeting was also attended by Cllr Gill Mitchell, who, when asked whether the scheme would be reconsidered in the light of the vehement opposition, stated that "the trial would go ahead", regardless of public feeling. Residents were exasperated.

4) There were two public 'exhibitions' of the bins in the Old Market Arts Centre on 26/27 November 2003. The many residents (certainly hundreds) who had not received Cityclean leaflets simply had no idea that these exhibitions were taking place. Many others found them inconveniently timed. Those who did attend again tried to communicate their horror and display at the whole idea. Again, however, we were left with the impression that we had no choice in the matter (except perhaps over the colour of the bins) - certainly not in the question of whether we wanted them or not. We were repeatedly told that there was a rubbish problem in our particular streets, even though we knew very well that this was not the case in many of the streets.

5) Petitions signed by over 95% of residents/respondents in certain streets were sent to Council officials and others (from Powis Villas, Victoria Road, Montpelier Crescent, Clifton Road, Compton Avenue, Powis Road and Alexandra Villas), and there was massive voiced opposition from residents in Norfolk Road and Western Street. These are just the streets we know about, but we are aware that there was also strong opposition elsewhere.

6) There appeared to be no consultation with groups representing the elderly or those with disabilities, who were likely to be adversely affected by the large bins. Subsequent concessions did little to reassure us that the community was being adequately considered.

7) In January 2004, Cityclean arranged a few ad hoc meetings with residents of a handful of streets (we believe four of them - other streets were not invited), in view of the public hostility in those streets. Arrangements seem to have been totally haphazard: for instance, in Norfolk Road only two residents (nos 20 and 45) were invited to meet Cityclean. The 'consultations' here seemed like belated sops to public concern rather than the kinds of structured investigation that the Council had originally envisaged. The requirements of the original project for consultation have in fact never been fulfilled. These 'consultations' came across as efforts to justify high-handed behaviour on the part of the officials concerned.

8) These meetings saw the deeply held beliefs of residents about conservation swept aside. The Cityclean officials appeared to believe that aesthetics are the concern of only an insignificant minority. The notion of maintaining a very attractive townscape or preserving architectural features and lines seems to mean little to them.

9) With the Environment Committee decision to implement the trial scheme as planned in late January 2004, suspensions of various kinds were granted to some of the streets in the original scheme. In the case of those streets given temporary relief (for six months), the residents received rather aggressive letters stating that the communal bins were still the only option for such streets, and that the Cityclean officials would be contacting residents soon for discussion that would be limited to where the bins would ultimately go. This form of 'consultation' would be of no benefit. The question is rather one of whether or not the scheme is necessary at all in streets that do not have a rubbish problem, and only proper consultation could begin to establish this.

Many of those opposing the implementation of the scheme to date would not necessarily oppose new solutions to serious problems in specific areas. The view is that the communal bins are, however, quite inappropriate in conservation areas, especially in those streets that are

populated mainly by single owner-occupiers or where there is already adequate storage for rubbish. The original Council decisions, and the subsequent Cityclean leaflets, explained that the scheme could work only with the cooperation of residents. Cooperation of this kind was undermined from the outset by the inadequacy of consultation and the coercive attitudes of the Cityclean officials.

We view this situation with dismay and regret. Rubbish collection services had shown significant improvement over the last couple of years, but the bungling of this bin trial has produced a crisis of public confidence in Cityclean.