

C & G interviewing Nic Ralph about Sheffield's Harcourt Road

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Nic (N): I'm certainly the resident who's lived longest in this road. I'm also, I am also the oldest resident in the road, and I've been here since 1973, so I guess this is my 50th year in this road last year. So what I thought was useful to do was basically give you, particularly the earlier part of the history that I know well, because, because I was part of it and so on. The latter part since, since we created Harcourt Community Action Group, as opposed to what was previously an organisation called Harcourt Road Watch. There are lots of people who can talk to you about the recent years. So, I mean, I won't ignore them, but I think mainly I should concentrate on the years that most people in this road don't know about.

Clara (C) : Okay. Thank you. Appreciate that. Yes, yes.

N: And I thought, I mean, again, I think in a sense, I start right from the very beginning with the arrival in the road, what sort of road it was when we arrived, and in 1973 and it is very, very much changed, but it's changed, in a sense, twice, it's changed in one direction, and then it's changed in another direction, two big changes. When we got here, the road was dominated by working class people, mainly, very few middle class people. It was not dominated by students. There were some students, but not very many. I mean, I actually arrived as a student to go to university, but I had a young family at the time, so we had to buy a house. We bought this house. So this is, you know, my kids were five and three at the time. Many of the houses in the road were rented too, and there were boarding houses, as we used to call them, where young, single people, possibly labourers, and various people with not professional jobs would, would have be housed together in multi occupation houses, but they were individual rooms. They were made up as rooms, a bit different from houses in multi occupation for students, which are quite a different kind of thing. So that that was the road we moved into. There were a fair number of families with with kids, which our kids well, grew up with, played with. I mean, you could actually play in the road in those days. That's another difference. There were very few cars. There were cars, but not very many, and not even a lot driving through it, or parking in it during the day it was, I mean, it was a different era.

C: What did the children play?

N: The children could play football in the road without it being a real worry. I mean, we mainly encouraged them to go into the playground. But again, they would drop down here at the end here, you know, it goes into the park, right? And it wasn't all dark like this. Basically, these trees were about half the height they are today, and you could drop down as it was grass just below there. And they would then walk down to the playground. They'd play, we'd leave them to it, and we'd call them back at lunchtime, or whatever. I mean, again, it was a different world. Nobody nowadays would dream of leaving their children alone like that, but we didn't think twice about it. So, you know, and I mean, maybe we're naive,

but there was very little... I can't remember ever being an incident about a child... And, you know, a problem. It's a different world. But anyway, so that's the road we moved into, and if I give. I mean, from the early 1970s gradually things changed. Two big things changed. One is the number of students in the road increased steadily. The university, when we moved here, the university had plans to buy up this road entirely, demolish it and create a student hall of residence here. That was a plan on the table, literally as we arrived. But equally, within a few weeks of us looking at this house and saying we'd like to live here and talking to solicitors, they said, it's all going to go away, that plan, the council's never, cannot agree to it so you can buy your house fairly safely. In fact, it was probably a bit cheaper than it would otherwise have been, because of what's called Planning blight. People were worried about buying at the time, so we bought it at a good moment, and basically they did abandon the plan, but what they'd done was they'd bought quite a lot of houses in the road prior to this, because they were just buying them up as this as they were able to. So they'd bought about 17 houses in the road at the time that they finally decided not to do it, and they decided instead to let those houses as part of their general property folios - property portfolio, which is quite large. I mean, there were about I think, 130 street properties in in the area of Crooksmoor area, generally Crooksmoor up towards Broomhill, about 130 street properties, each of which would probably have an average of seven people in, six people in something like that. So there's 600 or 700 students, which, in those days was quite a significant number of students. Again, the size of the university has doubled, literally, I mean from, I don't know what it was precisely, and these are very rough ideas, but I mean, it was probably somewhere in the region of 10 or 20,000 and now it's 60,000. Everything has got bigger. The other thing that changed during those years, from the sort of 70s onwards, was an increasing number of cars. Again, this partly reflected the number of students, but not mainly. Initially, very few students had cars, but more and more commuters were using Harcourt Road as a free car park: people who worked in university, people who worked in hospitals, etc. And so it began to be that these are all issues that will come up in describing how the community responded to these in terms of organisation and purpose.

So from about I don't know, certainly from by 1980 the increasing number of students, very evident, more cars, fewer working class people. Basically what was happening was landlords were ridding themselves of tenants who they thought they could replace with students at a great profit. I think it was that simple. And so in some cases, they simply got out of the road and they sold their properties and left, and other people bought them, and they turned them into student rentals. But some of them just changed the sort of rental they were doing, the sort of business. I don't know whether student rentals are a lot more profitable, but I'm guessing that's how it, otherwise why, what would be the motive? Yeah, right, for selling up and or for transferring.

C: But where did those go? You know some of those men or labourers who used to work here, like, where did they go?

N: Yeah, well, I don't think that, what you have to envisage is that if we see the university as a sort of centre of the universe, there's a sort of, there's an attractive force around gravity. Say it's the point of centre of gravity. Say it's like a sun sucking us towards it, as it were. You've got a peripheral lines going out from it with decreasing numbers of students. So by the time you reach Crookes, the number of students in properties, there are some, but they've much, much diminished. Yes, and I think all it did was slightly alter the boundaries of these things. And whereas in the early 1970s the number of students at the University being half what it is today, or roughly that, it wasn't putting that pressure on the community, and it gradually grew and grew, and the students had the, as it were, the buying power to outbid, and

people simply had to shift. So I think it just moved people a bit. So it altered the demographics of the whole area.

I'm sure, if you talk to any community group in the vicinity of the university, which is quite a big vicinity, all the way, you know, through down to Ecclesall Road, and down there, you'll find the same pattern. If you talk to community groups there, they'll talk about this, this transformation that took place. It's not, not confined to us, by any means. So around 1992 we, I'm pretty sure we established a community organisation formally because, because of a number of pressures that were arising from this change. And one of the things that arises from the student population, to an important extent, was we were getting more burglaries in the road. Students tend to be a little bit lax about shutting doors and leaving windows open and things like that, and it encourages burglary. But then the burglars don't care what houses or who's living in them. They just see an open window, they go in it. But we think that that perhaps encouraged the level of burglary that was starting to be in the road. And this is, this is by the early 1990s and that, that's when we actually formally started the group. It was, its trigger was the formation of a sort of street group that would patrol the streets in the evenings to try and deter, we weren't vigilantes in the sense we would go after people. It was much more of a, you know, if we, if we announce this, and we get press publicity about that, it will deter people from, from, from doing it. That was the thought...

(pic. 1)

This is a picture taken local paper (pic. 2), which I made a copy of, 1992 this is, and it talks about it. That's us doing a cleanup, because we combined it very soon with clearing up the road. Because, again, the other thing students bring is more litter. That's, that's a local group of us, particularly.

C: This is the Sheffield Telegraph?

N: Yes, this was, this was a core group. That's Simon Ogden, yeah. That's me. Yeah, I don't know where Penny is. I'm not sure she's in this photo. This is Pat. She lived next door. That's Gordon, her husband. So I mean, this was a tiny core group by this time, 92, from being dominated by working class people and single people and some, very few students, we're now at a point where this is perhaps 75% students in the road. This is a tiny group of families that survived this. And we really are talking, I mean, but this time, I think Simon arrived in 1985, I think he arrived in the road. I mean, this is 20 years after I arrived. If you think about it, a lot, a lot has already happened. A generation has happened as it were. We'll come to that one later...

G: At that time it was the 90s. What kind of student mainly stayed on Harcourt Road, local students or international students?

N: I should think the number of international students at the university was lower than it is now, except I think it's dropping now because of the Tory government with what they've done in last year or two, but, yeah, I'm pretty sure it was basically they'll have been mainly UK students. Yeah, I think so. I

There's another point to that. Actually, you were asking, in the 90s?

G: Yeah, in the nine, 90s, yeah, how or what kind of students, what kinds of students?

N: Well, Oh, I tell you one thing yes, no, this is what I was thinking of, yeah, no, it's the business of first year students, not. No, first year students tended to get priority in residential accommodation of the uni-

versity, okay? And that still to this day, is a pattern. They, they encourage very much the first year to stay in, to stay in, but there's not enough places in residential accommodation within the university's own properties. Admittedly now, of course, there's the complication of very large blocks of flats and so on that have been built by private, private enterprise. But in those days there weren't. It was mainly either student properties or roads like this. So no first year students, virtually. That's not to say none. I mean, I was a first year student when I first moved into this house. You know, the vast majority would have been second and third year students and quite a smattering of PhD students. Perhaps medics, and they can be any year. I mean, we certainly, in recent years, we've had lots of medics and so on. So it's a mixed... a mixture.

So that answered that question, yes.

So street patrols, 1992, trying to deter, I mean, these were things I dug out for the Harcourt Community Group to show them.

Yes, that's a letter inviting us, I think Simon wrote this, but whatever, inviting us to help with the Harcourt Road Watch, displaying a poster, keeping an eye on the street and back gardens, etc, etc, giving the numbers of local police (pic. 3). The, this is a rota of people from eight o'clock to 9.30 to 10, etc. (pic.4) That's at night. So that's that's Hope who you probably know, down at XX, Marilyn, that was Simon's partner at the time, there's me... Robert Brown, Barry, me again, Tony and Sylvie. And so on, I mean, basically this, this is all little bits of crazy history.

C: Really organised. Well organised.

N: Well, I dug these out because they were doing a history. I mean, one of the things, one of the ways in which I've been recorded specifically around this area was they did, when I created those, they were doing work, Anne Daw was doing it, a history of things she, or her children, one of her children filmed me and Penny talking about these years in the same way I'm talking to you now, but ad lib, I used it the other day to sort of check on some of the things, that we tried to give... So street patrols, immediately, also street cleaning and street parties. It all came together, really, once we'd established that there was a little group of us that are willing to work together and to try and do things together, you know, we started to clear the place up, and we started to hold some sort of the street party started, literally, as a sort of a break in the cleaning. You'd be, you'd clean a bit, and then you'd stand around drinking coffee, and eating sarnies for about half an hour, and then you go back to cleaning for another hour and so on. I mean, that's all it was, whereas today there's, it's a whole afternoon of fun, lots of tables. You've seen it yourself several times now, so I don't need to tell you about that, but that that just developed over time, and it took a big step forward at the stage where it changed over to Harcourt Community Group, which we'll get to in the end. There's much to go before that. The things we then moved on to do, I mean, one of the things that happened sort of simultaneously, but is a bit sideways onto this, is we also established a group called the Friends of Crookes Valley and Weston Parks, which nowadays is now friends of Crookesmoor parks, which is more general, but, and it's mainly pretty defunct, it's not really doing a great deal any longer. It was doing a lot in those days, when it was first established. But But nonetheless, I mean, that was, that was sort of a side angle to it, but it influenced some of the things we did within the road as well. For example, we, we used to do plant pots and for the, for the landlords. This may sound mad, but basically, you know how landlords they just they tend to concrete over the front of them. No gardens, nothing. So we started to put some, we bought some planters, and we bought some, the University gave us some money for filling them with compost and so on. And we

started to put these in. And people like Marilyn particularly, went around lots of the landlords' gardens, where they where they still had some soil in them, and she worked and planted stuff. I mean, there's a famous clematis opposite. I think it's Montana, which just cascades down the walls in the spring. It's beautiful. It's been there 30 years now, something like that. And you know that, that was part of ... it was guerilla gardening. That's what we used to call it. Yeah, makes sense?

C: Yes, but you mentioned the university offered some funding to help gardening, the compost. That's pretty good.

N: Yeah, I mean, basically we also, that's, again - one of the things is liaison work, liaison with the university, liaison with local landlords, liaison with local housing associations. These are all part of what gradually developed once we had this formal group of Harcourt Road Watch. I mean, the road watch element, in fact, wasn't that important eventually. I mean, we didn't go on keeping those patrols for years and years and years. That didn't happen. Basically, that got over a hump. I don't say burglary stopped. I'm sure it carried on, but I mean, it wasn't so intense. I think maybe students got sensible about it to some extent. The amount of expensive kit they have nowadays, they're less likely to leave the window open so somebody could walk in and grab their laptop or their phone or whatever.

C: But, yeah, but before you, you organised the Harcourt Road Watch, did some of you also, for example, contact the local police, to seek for help from other authorities, because that's really self helping, which is good, but, did...

N: Well, mainly we were devoted to self help, yeah, um, I mean, but we did, no, we did liaison. I mean, I was particularly, I spent a lot of time going to meetings that the university organized with community representatives, where the police were also represented, and the church, perhaps, and I don't know, various other bits and pieces would all be at these meetings. And it's out of that. I mean, then when we, when we needed something that might cost money, like buying some planters and buying some compost, and so we'd talk to them, and with a bit of luck, somebody would say, yeah, we can probably give you some compost, and we, you know, then we'd be able to fill all these planters. And so sometimes I think we even got planters off them. I'm not, I can't remember the detail, to be honest,

C: Did the compost come from their kitchens?

N: No, it'd be garden compost from their estate. Yeah, yeah, no, it wouldn't be from the kitchen. So okay, so I mean, basically there was liaison with the housing associations and landlords - that was very important, because we were trying to influence what went on there. We were concerned sometimes that the landlords, in some cases, the housing associations, in particular, some of them were establishing properties, not for general lettings of families and things, but they some of them were, but some of them were also specialised lettings for people with mental health problems, ex offenders, various other projects that were going on which can give rise to tensions within the community, and indeed, active, active problems. You know, it does happen. And so liaison with them was quite important. And so that was quite important. But as I say, liaison with all these sort of bodies became a significant background to what was going on right through the period.

C: But I'm curious. Like, so before the group established, did any individuals already have liaison activities with these other authorities or institutes or like, how did that... like, how do you get to know who from the university you needed to talk to? That's quite a complicated process.

N: I'm just trying to think back. I mean, you know, it's sort of detailed. You don't really remember very well, just, just how the first... I mean, I'd been in the university. I worked for the University after I was a student, I was the University Research Fellow for several years. So I had contacts around the university.

Precisely how we got to grips with it, I'm not sure...

C: Which department of the university...

N: There was a body which was established, which was called the University Community something or other, which would meet at the university premises. And I don't know whether it predates, but I don't think it does by much. I mean, maybe we were among the first community groups which they got involved with (pic. 5). I think we were. I mean, at the time, I remember, for example, there wasn't one for Crookes itself, although there were quite a few students up there and landlords and so on. Eventually they did. They sent reps to us as well, but, but that was a bit later, so some of the first few meetings I went to, there were only a very small number of us, actually, who were representing the communities. I don't really have a complete answer to that question. There you go. But at that point, they were being, they were being very open and receptive to talking with the community. I have to say, I think they are less so today. I mean, yes, formally that they have all sorts of notions about the way in which they should engage with the community, and they have groups, and they create subcommittees and all sorts but it's become somewhat bureaucratised, but it's basically, I think, I mean, maybe, maybe this is a bit off the record, really, so maybe you won't use this particular bit. But, I mean, I get the impression that whereas then it was a genuine attempt to get to grips with the issues of working with a community which surrounds you as a university, and making sure that engagement was a good one, later on, I think some of this becomes more of an obfuscation that they're trying to, in a sense, go through the motions, but it's just formality, yeah, but it's defensive. It's sort of, you know, we've got to deal with these people. I don't know that's the feeling I get a bit. Certainly, we've had, I mean, there's no, there's no getting away from the fact that there's been breaks at times as a result of quite considerable bust ups with the community. And I don't mean particularly this Harcourt Road Watch or Harcourt Community groups, but there have been literally times when the university has sort of closed everything down. It's just stopped talking. And then a year or two later, they get back to realising they have to engage, and they do, but as I say, it's been a bit tense at times.

Again with landlords, there are some quite good landlords who are certainly prepared to talk with you and engage, but there's quite a few that aren't. Housing associations, again, some of them, South Yorkshire Housing Association, we've had a long engagement with. They have several properties in the road, and for the most part, that's been okay. We've had issues then with them later on. They were selling properties. They decided at a certain point to sell one or two. They've stopped again now. I don't think... it's a while since they sold property, but they did sell off one or two, maybe three or four, I'm not sure. And we were trying to engage with them in the way that we engaged later with the university, which we'll come to, in order to try and make sure that the sales were such that they didn't all get end up in the hands of more landlords, with filling the houses with lots more people, which is what happens, because invariably, the numbers of people living in landlord houses, as opposed to either University houses, or indeed Housing Association houses, is always higher. There's always a higher headcount, invariably. Before we get on to the university sell off, and the housing of that also just, let's talk about the other big thing that went on, which was the parking issues in the road, which became a really important issue in the 90s. And so, not long after Harcourt Road Watch was created, I think almost from

the beginning, from two or three years into it, we realised that parking was something that had to be dealt with, and it was something we could try and fight for, because there were schemes being established in other parts of the city, and indeed, other parts of the suburbs, if you could call it us a suburb, it's so close to the centre it's not a proper suburb. But basically the spread of cars is affecting all of these areas. They're already getting schemes going in Broomhill and schemes going well all round. But we were at that time, not in any scheme. And the Crooksmoor scheme didn't exist either, the one that covers the area from Crookesmoor Road further across that way, that didn't exist as a scheme. That came after ours, even. So what it meant was that we were just a road as it were, at the edge of the Broomhill area. And so we actually had a bit of a business trying to persuade them that they could turn us into a scheme for our road, because we had a particular problem, because two things had happened. One was the increase in the number of cars that were residents, either student residents, which was beginning to become an issue, but it was always made worse by the fact that there was also this vast number of commuters coming in every day. 60 to 80 cars a day were parking in this road from commuters from probably mainly the hospitals and the university staff. That was absolutely clogging the road up. You could go out, or if you dared to leave, take your car out and go shopping, say, down to Tesco or whatever. You'd come back and there'll be nowhere to park. And I mean nowhere. If you sometimes couldn't park in the road, you had to park in another road, which at that time meant further up the hill. I mean, if you've got your shopping, full of groceries in the back of a car, two trolley loads or whatever, not good. And also it's causing problems with people, like, if you had, I don't know, BT, round to fix a phone or, or you had, you know, people around to do something in your garden, any form of delivery, either of a service or a good, would pose a problem, because they'd all want to drive in. I mean, you can see today, just as you were arriving, there are two vans over there today from South Yorkshire Housing.

That's all right, the parking here is seasonal. There is a summer season. There is even a brief winter season when the number of parking goes right down and it's delicious for a few weeks. Makes life easier, but even with the scheme, it's still the problem. But anyway, this campaign started about 1996 I worked out, and by 1998 we decided we weren't getting very far with it.

Anyway, 1996 Yes. We started to work on it as an issue, pestering councillors and council officers and blah, blah, blah. And in 98 we decided the only way to persuade them was to actually count cars. So we started the job of counting cars, and we decided that what we needed to know was, how many cars are coming here from long term residents? How many are from shorter term residents, like students? How many are commuters, coming in daily? Does this pattern change from month to month? Well, from term time to non term time. And of course, all of those factors exist. So we surveyed for about four months, on and off.

C: By just the community?

N: I've got huge spreadsheets...

C: The whole survey was...

N: The whole survey was mainly actually done by my wife, myself and my children. There were other people occasionally helping with that, but I think we did the bulk of it. I mean, it didn't take very long. I mean, you'd walk up the road, and we did it again at different times of day. You know, we do one early morning, one, midday one and evening one. That's the only way you can get to grips with it. It was lot of

work, a big evidential spreadsheet sent to the council with detailed analysis of it, and it worked. In 99 they made the decision to consult on it, and again, I can show you this is what we... this is one of those photos that's there. Yeah, this was a thing we put out.

C: Right, okay, like a newsletter...

N: A newsletter, yeah, this was when they were consulted. This is 1990, September 1999 and but they were considered, they'd been persuaded, so they'd come up with a scheme, right, which would just apply to this road only, okay, standalone scheme, and which was what we were quite happy to have at that point. It's not what it is now, but again, I can explain that. But basically we then campaigned for people to respond, because there were some people, not very many, who responded negatively to have parking restrictions. You know, we can't necessarily park outside our own front door. The answer was, well, you can't now, so how's that different? You know, basically what this will allow is that 70 or 80 places in the road which are currently taken by commuters every day, won't be, so you should have a better chance of getting back into the road when you go shopping, etc. So I think we actually quote that figure in here.

C: So the newsletter goes to all the residents on this road?

N: Yes, it goes to residents (pic.6, 7). Yes, the benefits of whether or not you currently use a car. The benefits, yeah, the benefits of a parking scheme, which will keep out the 50 to 80 weekday commuter cars now regularly clogging up the street by treating it as a free all day car park, are obvious. The space that could be used will be used instead by returning residents visiting friends and relatives and by people delivering goods and services. So I mean, anyway, that resulted in a positive response to the consultation, which what we pretty much supposed would happen. And it was, it took, oh God, it took a long time to implement. I think it was 99 it was formally consulted on. Wasn't actually running up until 2001 sometime, it took a couple of years for that to go through. Again, you know, it's long periods of negotiation about things. And so that did change things. And initially, most houses were restricted to one car per house. Later on, after we dropped... What then later happened was they extended the schemes to create the Crookesmoor scheme. They already had the Broomhill scheme. And then they asked us, did we want to be... they were wanting to put us back in a box. They didn't like us being on our own little scheme, so they wanted to put us in a bigger box. So they said, you know, do you want to be in Crookesmoor? Do you want to be in Broomhill? And the difference was, importantly, that the Crookesmoor scheme doesn't apply at weekends, either Saturday or Sunday, so the road would be free for all in those days, whereas Broomhill restrictions apply on Saturdays. Okay, not on Sundays, but there you go. So we went because we wanted the restrictions on Saturdays, because that was equally problematic and people come here just to park it in order to go into the park, you know, and so on. And it gets very busy some summer days can do. So anyway that that was agreed, eventually we joined the Broomhill scheme.

We realized that that was not as good as having our own little scheme, which nobody else could get into our road, but it meant that anybody in Broomhill theoretically could park in the road, and some of them do. I mean, you got people living at the far end of Broomhill who are university lecturers. They drive down here...

C: So they go to school or to work?

N: So they then walk across the park to work. Yeah, I mean, you know that's, that's life, but I mean, basically we weren't gonna, we weren't going to be able to stop it. They were not going to keep us as a single scheme, a little one road scheme was not, not reasonable for us to expect that. Anyway, when that changed, it also changed the terms and conditions, as it were, of the schemes. And one of the things was it then became virtually automatic that you could get up to two permits for a house, a household, that is, not a house, a household, the concept of a household, you can have two households in a single house. So it gets a bit complicated.

C: So how about a student house?

N: A student house is a single household, if it's an HMO standard housing multiple occupation. On the other hand, some of them are actually broken into flats, each of which constitutes an individual household. Theoretically, each of those can have a permit so, for example, next door, they've got, in effect, they've got two. They've got a flat down here, and then there's the flat upstairs, which has six people in it. There's one in the bottom here, sometimes two, but generally one. So they automatically can get two permits. But what there is now, I think Broomhill, in theory, the whole of Broomhill, because of the problems, are only giving out two permits per household. But you know that that can be a big problem, even in a road like this. You actually, if you think of the length of a car, and you think of the width of these houses, I mean, from that brick wall there to about here is the length of a car. So you already use two thirds of the space. You've got 1/3 left to offer to another car, as it were, it doesn't add up once you start. It only adds up because there are the occasional house with no cars or the occasional house with one car and so on and, well, it's better than it was, is all I'm gonna say. I mean, there was a time we had next door. They had six cars. This was pre permit days. Yeah, six cars for students next door. I mean, it was just a nightmare.

C: I get it, I get it.

N: But there you go anyway. So that was the big issue in sort of later part of the 90s scheme in 2001 and then, the university sell off: the business of the university, modifying its property portfolio for students, and they were it was a very large program. It involved many, many changes in terms of the things that they were doing. I think much of it initially was proposed as getting the private sector to come in and take up a lot of the slack in order to reduce the university's requirement for capital. But in time, actually, I think that's changed somewhat, because they then did do a major renovation of many of their ones as well. So although there's been a lot of building, there's also been... so what really changed, though, was that they decided, as part of the management strategy, was to abandon a lot of the street properties. I think they found them expensive to run, problematic in various ways to administer and manage. And so they elected to sell them off. And what we were involved in this group, the Sheffield University Community Council, or whatever it was called, and the first thing we did, and I was quite prominent in that particular thing, was trying to persuade them to put covenants in all their sales, which only - well - precluded the use of the house as a HMO and precluded the use of the house for certainly undergraduate students. Is a little bit more complicated about perhaps graduate students, but basically it took, it was knocking out most of the potential landlords. Most landlords would not be interested in a house which had these exclusions. And that's the way it's proved. There are one or two places where it's not gone quite right. But there's a house down here which was a University House, which a developer got hold of, and anyway, it's ended up with, it's still fairly good, because it's only got about four or five at the most. They're mainly post grads. They're a little closer to normal people. But it's not that I dislike students. I was a student here once. Students are fine, but basically it's the numbers

and so on and so forth. So anyway, they decided to sell off these properties. And of course, that was a big opportunity for us (pic. 8). I mean, by that time, the population of the road was about 85% students, in terms of numbers of people, 85% and and they had 17 houses on the road, and that's, that's a lot of houses, and they didn't have, I mean, there, as it said, that their occupancy level was lower than landlords, so that, typically, they would have one of these houses, and there'd be five in it, whereas landlords, there's seven or even nine or eight or six, whatever. I mean, just, you know, yeah, anyway. So basically, we fought like mad to get these covenants put in, and eventually we won. They agreed to do it, and so eventually, I forget the exact date onwards, but from around 2000...

C: Simon shared this with us. This is the news - you were interviewed. (pic.9)

N: Yeah, 2006 right? 20 houses. He's saying here. I don't think it's currently. I think it's 17. But anyway, here's me 'said, Nic Ralph, yes, who lives in Harcourt Road'. I may be including, actually, this couple of houses on Harcourt Crescent.

C: So when you raised that issue, did you mention only Harcourt Road, or was it really about the larger scheme, and then, yeah, well, and how did the other streets residents respond to or how did they, did they echo to your proposal.

N: I think I wrote it.

C: Oh, you wrote it? So Simon got it from you.

N: That's my that's my writing... These are the house numbers, yeah, 19, involved in the sales. No, not 20, but not 17 either. But I don't know. Maybe they changed it. I don't know. We've always had the figure 17 in my head. I mean, I said Mr. Ralph said, about a quarter of the houses on Harcourt Road were owned by the university, which is broadly, it's a bit of an exaggeration, but not much. Residents who would be working with the University for two or three years on the covenants. Yeah, we talked about the fact that it would bring families back into the road, yeah. So that, that became a really important change for the road. And effectively, by 2007 they're starting to be families established into the road, some of the earliest ones. I think Jon Slate was one of the earliest to be to be here. But gradually it's extended and over, I think probably three or four years it took before they were all sold, something like that, and it absolutely transformed the thing. I mean, that's the second transformation that takes place. You've got starting off as a working class road, then you've got turning into a student road, effectively almost a ghetto and with terrible car problems and all sorts. And then we have this third phase. We've established the parking permit system, which has controlled the car problem to a degree, not perfectly, but better than it was. And then these covenants coming in, and what we're getting is new families, which we'd lost, I mean, over the years, when it was transformed to students, we lost the children effectively. And you know, the children of the residents like mine were still here until they went to university and did their own thing. But I mean, basically there were very, very few new children for a long time when the road was dominated by students, and then this changed it back. And suddenly we, you know, there were half a dozen babies in the road and half a dozen toddlers and so on. And that built up. And I forget... I remember thinking about 30 kids on the road at a certain point. Then again, some of them are now gone to university and fled and disappeared and moved on, but basically it became a more normal road again. It didn't knock the figures back all that much. I suspect, I don't think we got better than 60% figure of number of students, I suspect, it dropped to about 60, it might be not quite even that good. Might have been nearer 70, but it dropped enough. And the important thing was

that there were this influx of new, mainly middle class, it has to be said, people who had quite strong views about how they'd like to do things, and we're interested in becoming a community together. Lots of who work for the University or were allied bodies in various ways. So there's all sorts of cultural commonality, yeah. And so anyway, it was at this point I forget what was the date, yes, 2012-13 I've got down here, was when we basically transformed Harcourt Road Watch into Harcourt Community Action Group (pic. 10). I mean, basically Penny and I, in a sense, both retired by that time. 2012 ish, something like that. Yes. So the houses start being sold 2007 and by about 2011 most of them have been sold in that sort of three or four years.

C: So before 2012 it was Harcourt Road Watch,

N: Yes, from 1992 and that was formed until about 2000 I'm not sure the exact date to be honest, but I think it was around 2012, it might have been a little bit earlier. No, hang on, they celebrated their 10th anniversary in 2017 didn't they? So it was 2007 formally, they think they came at maybe it was 2007 I don't know, after they moved in. I mean, that's, that's but they weren't all here at that point. I don't think the group, the new group, formed until a bit later than that, but it's not worth arguing about the exact date. I mean, I can look it up. I've got documents. And so basically, I mean, we'd, we'd worked our guts out for 20 - 30 years in trying to protect this community, extend it, develop it, make it the best place to live we could make it (pic. 11). And we were quite tired, in a sense. I mean, we were both retired, pensionable age, etc. And we felt we should try and encourage the new residents to get involved in the community in a formal sense. They were informally involved anyway, because they, you know, they got to know each other fairly quickly. But we wanted to sort of formally transfer and wipe out Harcourt Road Watch and replace it with something which they could identify with. And it's also corresponding to a time when the digital thing was coming in. So fairly soon after that, you know, there's an email group, it was still some years away from a WhatsApp group, but eventually that too. But I mean, you know, that also had its influence. There was never any of that with Harcourt Road Watch. I mean, just, just wasn't that sort of a place. But sometime around the 2010 to 2010 or whatever, 2012 something like that, we went to a meeting. Well, we had a meeting, which I basically went there with a proposal that, you know, we closed down road watch and and I gave them a history of the group as it had been, and what we'd done at the previous 20 years, or whatever. Or the previous 10 years, it's the 1992 to 2012 it's something like that, 10 year period. And then maybe no 20 year period. Oh, true, yeah. 1991, 92 Harcourt Road Watch starts, and by 2012 I'm pretty sure we changed it to Harcourt Community Action Group. So it was a 20 year period. And most of what I've discussed today has been that 20 year period...

C: Great and then the action action group was formed.

N: The Action Group was formed, and, you know, has carried on in many ways, the same sort of activities, the liaison role with the various people, the various institutions at the university, one of the things I haven't touched on much because it was more of a personal thing. I was dealing with loads of planning applications by landlords trying to make their properties even more densely occupied than they were when they started – fighting that sort of change (pic. 12, 13). And there was lots of that sort of activity. And again, some people in the new group, like Anne, particularly, who is a real expert at these things, and she got doing it. And so I was able to breathe a sigh of relief and so I can step away from this now. And we were, both of us, Penny and I were basically saying we wanted to step away from it, step back from it a bit. So, you know, let the new people, they need to get on with it. They need to own it. And we need to slightly step away from it, to let that happen. And I think that was sensible.

C: Do you... Because when I was looking online, I saw I forgot the years, but at some point, there had been regular meetings between the council and the community groups, and then sometimes, somehow, later on, because of the budget issue, I guess it ended like, do you remember with the Council?

N: It was never with the Council as such. The Council were involved.

C: They were involved?

N: The only ones that I, I mean, I don't say we never met with the Council on some particular, okay, yeah, activity, perhaps. But as a general rule of, sort of the regular liaison body that community groups work with have either been something like the university's collective group, university community group, or whatever it's called. And there you would get representatives of the council, various types, various different activities within the council will be represented there. But also you get police represented there. You might get health represented there. You might get retail shop people and so on. The other bodies that, again, we would get involved with would be things like the, there was a Broomhill group, like there is today, a Crookesmoor group. It's Crookesmoor Community Forum, and there's a Crookes forum now, I think as well there's, there's a Broomhill forum, but that's now defunct. As far as I know. That's no longer in existence. It died a while back again. I was trying to think it died at about. We were having, it was about the same sort of time. I may be wrong about this, but I think it's about the same sort of time as we were having a bit of a fight with the with the university about things, and, you know, having some tension in that relationship, as I talked about earlier, but I seem to remember the Broomhill group crashed at a certain point. I was involved in that group in the sense that I regularly attended its meetings, but I was never involved in its management or administration in any way. I was just a rep that turned up, whereas with the university group initially, I had got quite involved with that.

C: And then how about the Be Best neighborhood planning? I know Ann was really involved...

N: Anne is the only person you should talk to about that, I mean, I was involved. I was involved, but only to a limited extent, initially, and I just didn't have time for all the things that were going on. I mean, one thing to mention, I mean, in the middle of all of this, as far as I'm concerned, personally, in the mid 80s, for example, there was the miners' strike, which affected this community quite a lot. Surprisingly, you might think, but actually, quite a few miners lived, lived in this community, not as many, obviously, as the areas near to the coalfield. But there was also steel people who lived in this community. It, it involved me, personally, and a lot of activity. I belonged to another group, which was basically, which is called Police Watch, as opposed to Road Watch

C: Watch the police?

N: We would, we would go and stand on the picket lines in order to record events and try to make sure that, or try, try to provide the evidence about what was actually happening on those picket lines. Because there were big issues. I mean, it was a major and important revolutionary fight, as it were. So that was great. I mean, again, there was loads of money collected here. We ran a small collection system in Broomhill and Crookes Valley. We collected 20,000 pounds over a period of about seven, eight months. So that took a bit of doing. But so these sort of things that intervened, which, which...

C: Well, because, well, at my my knowledge about the mines workers strike mainly comes from the documentary of the bat called the Battle of Orgreave.

N: Yes, I was there.

C: Oh, okay, did you join the reenactment later?

N: I was there as a police watch person, okay to witness, and I took photographs on the day, and I did a witness statement, which, if they ever get the public inquiry going, will undoubtedly be part of their things, because I'm an independent witness, I got quite badly hurt. Policeman threw a large wooden, I think it was, it's either pallet or else it was a sleeper of some sort, it knocked me over down, down a sharpish ravine, onto a railway cutting there. So I was quite badly hurt on the day. But, yeah, no, that was, that was an important event. I think again, I did a film. It was a reconstruction event which I took part in.

C: You also took part? Yeah, we know about that because it's a famous art piece.

N: I think, no, well, I basically, I had pictures of stuff that went off in the village, and. And particularly way up from the field, actually, in the village, I had taken photographs up there which showed policemen doing various things, but basically they were part of the evidence that was presented, which which basically got a lot of well, got virtually everybody off the main charges. There were 10 people charged with various forms of conspiracy to riot and various other things, and we could show that, for example, they weren't arrested by the person they said they'd arrested them. I mean, they basically that there was inconsistencies between their statements and also between their statements and the photographic evidence of where the people were and what so there were various aspects of this, some of which I think my photographs contributed to. So I was involved with the lawyers there and helping them get off the various charges that were made. Because, I mean, the main people who rioted on that day were the police, no question, both on the field, down by the coking plant, and even worse, in the village, where they rode the horses back and forth down the middle of the road. Not good.

I'm sure in Hong Kong you had worse things...

C: But no horses.

N: No horses, only tear gas?

C: And only in a race course do we see horses.

Well, oh, we do want to ask you about your opinion, about what we heard from different neighbors about the proposal to put up a plaque for Penny's crossing. But originally the design, I think we saw the design from Simon's computer, is like a circular plaque.

N: I've never seen the design, but really, no, I mean, basically, I mean, there's been various times Simon in particular. I mean, like he proposed, yeah, there's a meadow down in the park there called Penny's meadow...

C: This is from Simon's computer. We want to ask if you think it's a good idea. If, in this project, we propose to put some put this up outside Beanies, to acknowledge the effort.

N: Applying something on the wall there or something would be sensible. I never could understand quite how you could put it on the crossing itself, because you don't, you wouldn't be allowed, probably,

to put it on the post. The posts that have the buttons on and anyway, you need five or six of them, which would be a nonsense. But I mean, if Beanies would allow a plaque to be put up on the outside wall or something next to it, that would be quite nice. I mean, I'm sorry.

... ..

N: Late 1950s Okay?

C: About anti nuclear?

N: About 60 years ago, years ago.

C: So what was the first thing that really got you into, you know, joining social movements? What was the biggest motive at that time that you...

G: Natural bond? Sorry,

C: Natural bond... social activist, activist, but there must be, like a course...

N: Yes, there is. I think it's complicated. I think it's also somewhat personal. I think my background in terms of family and I mean, I'd been to, I think, five schools by the time I went to Canada as a child in 1955. I was 13 then, and I'd already been to God knows how many schools, and we'd moved... I mean, I was born in Bridgewater in Somerset, moved to Newcastle, Gateshead, moved to Leicester, moved to Liverpool, moved to London, moved to Canada, came back from Canada and so on.

I had a fairly shattered sort of childhood, I guess. And I think I was probably looking for something to center my life around a bit. It felt all a little bit flimsy, I suspect. It's interesting. I mean, initially I joined quite hard left groups, Trotskyist groups... are you familiar with Trotskyism? It's a variant of Bolshevism, if you like, out of Bolshevism, you get Stalinism, you get Trotskyism, and so on. And when I initially sort of got involved with hard left politics, that was when I went... that was fairly soon I abandoned that and became what I would call a socialist libertarian, rejecting the so called democratic centralism of the Stalinists and embracing a rather more, if you like, anarchist syndicalist sort of mode of operations. Yeah, approach.

So that's what was happening around, let's say, when I was about 18, 19, 16... Four years later, I met Penny, and that changed my life completely.

C: So both of both of you are also like, can I say activist in your lives...

N: Yes, when I met her, she was an activist. She'd already, she'd already been involved. We were also involved very much after the initial business with, as it were, acquiring a socialist sort of perspective and a libertarian perspective. We got very much involved before we... we were both involved before we met in anti nuclear activity, anti nuclear weapon activity, particularly, and so Penny was involved in that in various ways in the north of England. And She then moved south to London at a certain point, at which point I met her. We met, I mean, I, in the podcast I did for the history workshop, I explained that I met, in a sense, in a sense I created my own life, because I was a key person in the Spies for Peace,

and without the Spies for Peace, we would never have met, probably... because we met as a result of planning to go on a, after the Spies for Peace episode had happened, we had a sort of celebration, reunion there, and Penny and I met up by chance. I mean, basically we both had agreed to bring our cars to help people to get out to the bunker, where, where, for the day's events. And we both drove people out, and we drove people back. And in the course of the time we spent at the venues. By the end of that I was knocked over, bowled over by her, and I don't know, we were living together within a couple of months...

C: I can see she's really amazing.

N: We spent the rest of our lives together.

C: It's really lovely. That you two can meet and work like comrades in life.

N: I guess, yeah, yes.

C: That's really amazing...

N: Yes, I mean, she was, I mean, we were very close. And some people say, you know, almost too close. We were almost exclusionary in its impact on our relationship with the outer world and people. We didn't have very large social groups around us. We tended to be fulfilling each other's needs to a huge extent. So it had its bad side, I guess, in some ways.

But although we had that very close thing, the other side of it was that Penny was a very independent woman. She wasn't anybody who was, I mean, I'm quite a noisy and at times sort of dominant sort of person myself, but she was also so and so we, neither of us, batted each other down. We both managed to live together. We were different, and that's why it worked. I think people who are the same as each other don't get on well, it doesn't work, not generally. You have to be different, quite a lot, I think. And, but anyway, we so we, you know, we had, and she would do lots of things that I wasn't involved in, and I would do lots of things she wasn't involved in and that's, that's good. We had an open and fine life together, but we also had a life, not apart, but we had a life beside that.

You can see about how the light goes to the end of the garden eventually, it's now seven minutes past four, it's just reached the bench, really, and by about quarter past five, half past five, it'll disappear from the bench, because that's the way the world works. In winter, of course, these trees don't shield it, but of course, the sun isn't as good in winter, not as strong. The other thing about these trees is they have literally doubled in height since I've been here. I mean, basically they're now taller than the houses. Yeah, and they weren't, I mean, they were about half the size of the house. They were planted, we think around the time of the 1951 Festival of Britain, which I was obviously alive for. I was living in London then. I think that's roughly when they may have been planted. I'm not quite sure about that actually, but they might be, in which case they're, what about 70 or 75, years old now. That looks feasible, feasible. Yeah, there are a couple of trees in Weston park that are definitely older than that. We had to take one or two down when we did...that's the other big thing got involved in. I mean, in the sense it all links together for me. I was one of the key people in the group Friends of Weston Park, particularly because I was retired by the time we were doing the big project. We did a big project. Oh, we got several million pounds to renovate that park, Weston park, just Weston Park, because it's a listed Park. It's a Heritage Park, and it has quite a number of listed heritage bits and pieces in it. And I was retired by the time we

managed to get that money. I mean, started off, we were trying to get that money from about 2001, 2000 I don't know... about that... We started campaigning, and eventually we got the money. I retired 2002 when I was 60, and so I had plenty of time, and I was, well, I was the only person who had plenty of time who was in the group, and Penny was still working. No, no, she wasn't. She'd stopped by then too. No, she'd stop by then because we she went on working for three years longer than she needed to have done and we decided we'd both quit work at the same date, even though she was three years older than me. o we, we both gave up work in 2002. Yeah, I'm 82. I was 82 four days, five days ago, whatever...

C: Happy birthday! You don't look like you're in your eighties at all.

N: I'm still alive, just about...

C: So what about the renovation of Weston Park? What is the most... I mean what did you change...

N: For start off, we did a radical recreation of the lake. We had to do that, that that had been modified over time, and we redid it. We actually drained it completely and we rebuilt parts of it. There was a sort of island in there. There's an island in here, we've also put an island in this one. That's our island. That's something else that Penny and I did.

C: Yeah, that's lovely.

N: In fact I'm more proud of that island than I am of the trussing up here. I mean, that island is great for wildlife. It's changed that end of the park, that end of the lake. But anyway, no, the other lake in the other part, in Weston Park, had to be rebuilt in effect, it was leaking badly. There were all sorts of issues with it. And so they put a new one in. I think originally it had basically a clay base of some sort, and we put in an artificial base in order to prevent the leakage. And there was various works done around that, but mainly it consisted then of also rejuvenating that some of the monuments needed work on them. Some of the groundwork literally needed doing, in the sense that the grass and so on was beginning... it was so much trodden, we had a machine go over that, all of the grasslands digging spikes into it, to loosen it all up for example. There's all sorts of things we do. And we took, took out about 70 or 80 trees that were diseased, they were damaged or problematic in various ways. And we put in more than that. We put 115 back in different places. So there's lots of trees that are there now. Well I guess some of them were planted in about 2005/6/7, something like that. So they're 10 -15 years old now, but they were planted as some of them were quite large standards when they were planted. So they were 10 years old, that kind of planting. So they're now 25 years old, so they're getting to be decent little trees now

C: Now the park is beautiful. It is beautiful.

N: It's much improved. I mean, basically the other thing, I mean, there was a big glass conservatory down towards where the hospital is, which we removed in the end. There's bits of it. We put a few bits of it behind. I'd have to walk it round with you. I mean, there's, there's some plaques which we took from it. It was dedicated to the Festival of Britain.

C: Oh, do you remember... Because I met a lady within this Caribbean diaspora group, I think they are, there are, you know, a number of Caribbean diaspora, diaspora, yeah, around here, yeah around here.

N: There was always one down in, yeah, Burngreave.

C: She remembers a banana tree in Weston Park? Do you recall that?

N: Oh, the one that went through the roof?

C: I don't know.

N: Yes, it went through the roof to the conservatory. Oh, yeah, the conservatory had fallen into disrepair to an extent, and, and, and at a certain point, it's true. Yes, I think I didn't realise, I had forgotten, it was a banana tree, but there was a tree which grew so much it grew right through the roof of the Conservatory, yes. And anyway, we decided the conservatory was a late arrival in the park. It wasn't an original feature, just as the tennis courts were as well. Actually, originally, that area was, according to the Victorians, that was an area restricted for children playing games, and they had a special word for it. Anyway, a very Victorian view of childhood. But yeah, so no, I mean all sorts of transformation. It took several years to do it, and it involved literally everything, from the blades of grass that needed extra help to get back into a decent state, to new trees, to cleaning up memorials, to moving even, I mean, we've moved ... there's a memorial to... the bronze memorial on the left hand side of the main one was moved. It used to be behind, near the road, and it was a very bad place for it, and we moved that and so on. We basically tried to preserve everything that was preservable, which was most of it, but we slightly modified it here and there, and just generally, and it is, and they do look after it still, they're doing quite well despite difficulties. I mean, Thatcherism had affected the parks here, very, very badly. The reduction in public expenditure on Parks during the Thatcher years was tremendous. And so this park, Weston Park, and the Ponderosa and so on. They were all a mess. I mean, none of it was being looked after properly, because it just weren't enough people.

C: Yeah, and not enough resources, not enough resources.

N: But also just physically not enough people. I mean, the number of people you have, it's a very hands on job looking after a park. You don't do it by standing. You can't do it virtually,

C: You've got to go down there. Do the work.

N: Yeah, you got to work.

C: Thank you.

N: Well, it's been nice.

pic 1:

By John Highfield and Martin Dawes
ANGRY opera fans queued for more than an hour in heavy traffic last night to hear the world's most famous tenor sing — for just 30 minutes.

Music lovers who had paid up to £85 to hear Luciano Pavarotti in his only British concert of the summer at Sheffield Arena found themselves stuck in the river of cars and buses which had clogged all roads leading into Attercliffe.

But there was an even bigger shock once the concert did get under way as the Italian superstar brought the long-awaited event to an early close.

Pavarotti — who had complained of a sore throat since arriving in the country on Monday — said he would like to return and give his fans the concert they deserved.

And promoter Harvey Goldsmith said the next event would be cheaper than this year's concert, which had seen tickets go for up to £85.

A spokesman for Mr Goldsmith's organisation came on stage to confirm there would be another concert.

The Star Says: P2

But despite the ovation that the shortened concert received, some fans said they would not be coming back for more.

Mick Allsop, of Eckington, had bought wife Wendy tickets as a wedding anniversary gift.

"We missed the first song completely because of the traffic and then, when we did get into the Arena, we had to sit on the steps for his second number because there was nobody to show us to our seats," he said.

■ Thin night with the Fat Man: see Relax



Simon Ogden and fellow members of the Crookes street patrol gather in Harcourt Road

● Photograph by Mike Waistell

The vigilantes

By Bob Westerdale

BELEAGUERED neighbours in burglar-hit streets across South Yorkshire are forming their own private 'police forces' to combat crime.

Twenty-eight men and women now take turns to patrol the pavement for four hours every night in Crookes, Sheffield.

Hard-pressed police cannot do the job for them — and they say they are suffering up to two break-ins a week.

Residents on street patrol

Meanwhile, in Barnsley, vigilantes armed with table legs are roaming the streets after rocketing vandalism, violence and thefts.

Today police advised people against taking the law into their own hands. But they described the Crookes project as "regret-

table understandable."

Town Hall planner Simon Ogden, one of the patrolmen on Harcourt Road, said: "We said enough is enough, we were not going to be forced to move from an area we love by crime."

"The thefts were becoming so brazen with doors being kicked down and sash

windows forced open. Old folk were too sleeping at night. People were crawling around here in cars and taking things at will. Somebody walked off with a cast-iron bath

"We are not vigilantes walking around with baseball bats. But the crime was so blatant here it had to be challenged" said Simon, aged 39.

Det Insp Roger Vickers said: "I regret they feel the need to do this but we haven't the manpower to patrol their street four hours every night."

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pic 2:

TELEGRAPH NEWS

Sheffield Telegraph, Friday, June 26, 1992



Residents cleaning up on Harcourt Road: 'Our street should be high priority for sweeping'

Community spirit takes to the street

RESIDENTS of Harcourt Road in Crookes have taken the initiative to patrol the area after a recent wave of break-ins. There were at least seven burglaries in one month which left residents feeling anger and fear.

"Every kind of resident from students to pensioners has been affected. Women and older people in particular are becoming terrorised in their own homes," according to a newsletter distributed to residents on the road.

"These break-ins are destroying people's peace of mind," says Simon Ogden, who has lived in the area for seven years and who was one of the victims of a burglary recently.

The Ogdens got together with five other Harcourt Road households to establish the Harcourt Road Streetwatch, which aims to increase security in the area, deter burglars and gather any evidence for the local police.

Much interest has been generated by the group and there are now 28 people taking part in patrolling the area and many households have joined in displaying a Streetwatch poster to ward off burglars.

Local police have been involved but have had difficulty helping

With the deputy council leader Peter Price recommending residents to cut communal grass verges outside their homes themselves and with a general reduction in services as Sheffield battles to balance departmental budgets, there is a growing anger among many Sheffield people about the state of the city. Add in growing crime statistics — particularly house burglaries — in some areas and the frustration is leading to groups of residents taking direct action. **Kari Bodnarchuk** describes how a group of residents in Harcourt Road, Crookes, are determined to clean up their area and take a direct and positive approach to the wellbeing of their community

residents because of the nature of the crimes, which have involved the loss of televisions, video equipment and musical instruments. And because the information offered is often circumstantial.

However, community police, who are responsible for crime prevention, have been in contact with the group to offer advice.

The Group's second priority is to eliminate the "filth on the street", according to Simon Ogden.

Several residents have com-

plained to the council about dirty streets and there has been little improvement. The area is not getting the attention it needs and deserves, according to residents.

The street used to be swept regularly. "Our street should be high priority for sweeping," claims Mr Ogden. What they claim as the deteriorating quality of bin collection has also added to the filth along the road.

"The collectors drop lots of litter, dump the bins in front of houses, instead of putting them

back where they used to go and are less interested in providing a service anymore," they claim.

Neglect is also apparent by the blocked-up drains along the road, which they say have not been cleared recently.

The council has been approached about the issue many times in the past, but say there are "too many cars" parked along the road to clean the drains.

Frustrated residents rallied together recently to stage a clean-up in response to what they claim to be the council's lack of effort.

The Streetwatch Group told the Town Hall they wanted to demonstrate that "since we're organised enough to clean the street, we're organised enough to move our cars so that they can clean," says Mr Ogden.

Once the Streetwatch Group has succeeded in making the road a safer and cleaner one, their next priority is to alleviate the traffic problem along Harcourt Road with a view to greater safety.

Members of the Harcourt Road group have been angered that some areas of the media have portrayed as vigilantes.

"We are not vigilantes," they say. "But people trying to be good neighbours in the face of a crime wave."

pic 3:

Dear Penny & Nic,

Thanks for offering to help with HARCOURT ROAD WATCH. We will now be organising regular residents patrols every evening. They will be keeping watch on the street but everyone can help:

- by displaying a poster
- by keeping an eye on the street & back gardens near you
- by sharing any information on suspicious or anti-social activity with the Harcourt Road Watch and the police.

The number of our local police station is 852211 (Hammerton Road), and below are some numbers of Harcourt Road Watch members. If you are scared by people in or near your home, feel free to call on your neighbours.

We are also organising a mass write-in to the Council Cleansing Department, over the lack of street cleaning, mess left by the bin men, and the fact that almost all the street drains are blocked.

Write to:

Director of Cleansing
Attn Ms E Lenthall
Town Hall
SHEFFIELD
S122HH

If they don't respond, we intend to have a street spring clean on SATURDAY MAY 30th and present some of the rubbish at the Town Hall - watch out for more details!



pic 4:

	MON.	TUE.	WED.	THUR.	FRI	SAT	SUN
8:30-9:30	SID 53 685712	JOHN 67 684796	PAUL 47E -	BJORN 103 -	HOPE 19 666544		Marilyn Aliso- 43 664125
9:30-10:30	NIC 31 668970	ROBERT 101 662169	BRIAN 49B 671826	BARRY 47D -		NIC 31 668970	TONY + SYLV. 662656
10:30-11:30	IAN 35 665298	MARY + CATH 110 -	IAN 35 665298	KAREN + FIONA 110 -	STEVE + DEBI 120 FLAT 2	RONNIE + TERRY 62B -	BARRY 47D -
11:30-12:30	GORDON 33 667603		GORDON 33 667603		GORDON 33 667603	GORDON 33 667603	GORDON 33 667603

pic 5:

ARE YOU A STUDENT LIVING ON HARCOURT RD?

- **Free planters/flowers**
- **Help with an overgrown garden**



'Love Where You Live' one-off event

on Harcourt Rd – 12-4pm, SAT 3 MARCH

Brighten up your front garden & get to know your
neighbours! caroline.toogood@shef.ac.uk / 222 8613

REGISTER INTEREST BY : WED 28 FEB

pic 6:

why we need a residents parking scheme



Produced by Harcourt RoadWatch - your local resident's group September 1999

Whether or not you currently use a car

the benefits of a parking scheme which will keep out the 50 - 80 weekday commuter cars which now regularly clog up our street by treating it as a free, all-day car park are obvious. The space they now use could be used instead by returning residents, visiting friends and relatives and by people delivering goods and services to the road - all activities which have become more and more difficult to arrange, particularly over the last two years when the area has been seriously affected by new parking restrictions and schemes in nearby areas like Marlborough Road and Crookes Valley Road.

A parking scheme in Harcourt Road will be of special help to elderly people, people with disabilities and families with young children - all people who suffer greater problems than most when they cannot find a place to park reasonably close to their home.

continues on page two



HARCOURT ROADWATCH,

a residents' group formed in 1993 to improve the quality of life for everyone living in Harcourt Road, welcomes the Council's consultation about a parking scheme for this area.

We have been campaigning actively for such a scheme for over three years. Stopping the daily invasion of commuter cars has always been one of our key goals - alongside reducing crime, keeping the street clean and encouraging people to look after their gardens and houses so that the street remains an attractive place to live in.



ANGRY? FRUSTRATED?

Did the engineer fail to turn up and fix your central heating or BT fail to fix your phone or did the replacement fridge not arrive - all because commuters stopped them finding a place to park? Perhaps you just had to park 100 yards from home when you got back from Safeways with a car full of groceries!

**NOW, AT LAST, THERE COULD BE
AN ANSWER TO THESE PROBLEMS.**

pic 7:

continued from page one Harcourt RoadWatch believes that a curb on commuter parking will reduce: • the number of driver confrontations which now regularly occur when congestion forces drivers to stop and wait for other vehicles loading or unloading or just disgorging passengers; • the number of drivers who use excessive speed to reach the few gaps left which allow cars to pass and the consequent risks to pedestrians, particularly children; • the air pollution which on calm days now peaks noticeably each morning and evening as commuters use our road to park or as a rat run to avoid the traffic controls on Crookesmoor Road.	Harcourt RoadWatch wants all residents to respond to the Council's consultation with a clear call for the introduction of a scheme. <i>But it must be one suited to the local situation.</i> We will want to make sure that detailed discussions with the Council mould the design of the scheme to meet local needs. Aspects like the number and location of visitor bays and non-controlled areas and the hours during which the scheme applies are not just boring details. Getting these things right will be vital to the success of a scheme. Making special arrangements for people visiting the park or using the local garage will also be essential. Without this detailed consideration no-one can be sure that a scheme really will make things better.
a price well worth paying The Council says it hasn't made up its mind about charging, but indicates that, if charges have to be made, they will likely amount to less than 50p a week — less than the cost of getting to town once on the 95 bus!	<i>But we will only get a chance to negotiate on these issues if we give a clear go-ahead at this stage.</i> If, later, the Council doesn't come up with a scheme that puts residents' needs first, then their proposals can still be rejected at the formal consultation stage in a few months time.
next meeting A meeting of Harcourt RoadWatch to discuss the Council's proposals for a parking scheme will take place at 11am Saturday 16th October at 43 Harcourt Road. ALL WELCOME	Harcourt RoadWatch has surveyed the parking needs of residents many times and intends fighting hard to make sure a scheme suited to all residents' needs becomes a reality. But we will be grateful for the support of everyone who lives in the road - whether you're a newcomer or have lived here all your life. Whether you use a car, a bike, a bus or a tram or mainly walk, a scheme will affect you and could make the street a better place to live in. So please help us by returning the recently circulated consultation form — and telling the Council you support the introduction of a scheme in principle. Please remember to return the form within the next two weeks! Published by Harcourt RoadWatch, care of 31 and 43 Harcourt Road, Sheffield S10 1DH.

pic 8:



KIDS SEEK KIDS

A message from families on Harcourt Road

Children and families living in Harcourt Road, Crookesmoor, a street long associated with student living, are looking forward to the arrival over the next couple of years of many new children to play with. The University of Sheffield will be selling off around 20 family houses, formerly used for student accommodation, in this road next to Crookes Valley Park. Covenants will prevent the houses being used for student lets or multiple occupation. We expect an influx of families, probably with children, to occupy the large and adaptable terraced houses. A dozen houses are now on the market, providing many choices and opportunities, and several are already under offer. However we doubt whether enough people realize what a great chance this is, so we are sending out this message on behalf of the families already living in Harcourt Road.

We know that living in Harcourt Road has many advantages:

- The roomy four-storey houses make excellent family homes and are easily adapted to a variety of family circumstances
- A frequent bus service, taking you to the City Centre in five minutes, is available at one end of the road and the University tram stop is only a ten minute walk away
- Two minutes walk brings you to Beanies, the best wholefood and vegetable shop in Sheffield, on Crookes Valley Road; other local food and non-food shops as well as pubs, restaurants, a medical centre and a pharmacy, on Barber Road, provide for a wide variety of daily needs
- Many of the houses in Harcourt Road enjoy one of the best views in Sheffield, over Crookes Valley Park and its lake; Weston Park and the Ponderosa are also in easy walking distance, collectively providing a wide range of formal and informal recreational opportunities
- Equally accessible on foot are the recently reopened Weston Park Museum, the Children's Hospital, and most University buildings
- For the past five years we have benefited from an effective residents parking scheme, brought in as a result of vigorous campaigning by Harcourt Road Watch, the local residents and tenants association
- New residents will find many friendly faces on Harcourt Road – over the years we have organized street parties, bonfires, clean-ups, gardening projects – and we will be happy to talk to prospective residents about the street.

For further information please contact Nic Ralph on Sheffield 2668970

PRESS STATEMENT – HARCOURT ROADWATCH – 23RD OCTOBER 2006

pic 9:

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6-10-2006

GRAPH NEWS 15

University homes go back to families

TWENTY houses on a Sheffield road are being sold – with a condition that they don't go to students.

The properties in Harcourt Road at Crookesmoor belong to Sheffield University, which has placed a covenant on the sales that prevents them being used again for multiple occupation.

The strategy was welcomed this week by local residents, who want to see more families back on the road.

"This is the best opportunity to get some balance back into the community, which over the last ten to 15 years has shifted towards students," said Nic Ralph, who lives in Harcourt Road.

Local children were looking forward to the arrival of more children to play with, he said.

Sheffield University is selling houses in the suburbs in line with its policy of offering modern purpose-built student accommodation, including its own student village around Endcliffe and Ranmoor.

'This is the best opportunity to get some balance back into the community'

It follows criticism from some long-standing residents of traditional communities such as Crookes and Broomhill that too many properties have been turned into student bedsits, sometimes causing problems with noise and other disturbance.

Carrie Warr, programme director for the university's student residences strategy, said: "The programme of property disposals by the university started in late 2004 and the latest release is predominantly focused around the Broomhill and Crookesmoor areas.

"We are selling 20 ex-student houses on Harcourt Road, ranging from terraces to large six bedroom detached properties.

We anticipate that families will be interested these properties, as they will be sold with covenants preventing their use in future as houses of multiple occupancy."

Mr Ralph said about a quarter of the houses on Harcourt Road were owned by the university and residents had been working with the university for two or three years on the covenants.

"We expect an influx of families to occupy the large houses. There are now a dozen on the market and several are under offer."

Mr Ralph said it was a good place for families to live – opposite Crookes Valley Park and near Weston Park and The Ponderosa, with good bus services and a vibrant local shopping centre.

There was also a strong community spirit, exemplified through community clean-ups, bonfire parties and garden projects.

The houses are being sold through Merlin Estates.



FLORIDA SPAIN FRANCE PORTUGAL BULGARIA CYPRUS

pic 10:



Harcourt Road Watch – A Short History

Harcourt Road Watch was created in 1992 as some sort of cross between a residents' association and a neighbourhood watch group. It was dedicated to reducing crime, keeping the street clean, bringing residents together and encouraging people to look after their houses and gardens so that the street stayed an attractive place to live.

Recent events in the road prompted this brief review. It starts with a rash of "brazen burglaries" early in 1992 that led to the organisation of regular street patrols. Over two dozen residents volunteered and they were out on the street again in the summer of 1993 during another "spate of break-ins to cars and houses". But residents weren't just concerned with crime: June 1993 saw our first Picnic in the Park with a water slide, barbecue, etc and in the same month we also held our third Street Clean Up event. Later that same year we organised our first community Bonfire Night party. At group meetings concern was being expressed at the dangerous speed of some vehicles travelling through the road – and a survey into residents' attitudes to traffic calming measures like speed bumps was undertaken. The new fangled wheelie bins were also a source of frustration as they were clearly too big and heavy for many residents on the north-west side of the street to bring down their steep steps and the bin men had not yet learnt how to empty them without leaving a trail of litter.

This pattern of activities has endured: a mixture of direct action, surveys, putting pressure on and negotiating with local officials, housing association managers and councillors to resist changes or achieve improvements. We have tackled many issues: flooding and blocked drains, repairs to road and pavements, housing conditions for students in some of the many, then frequently unregistered, Houses in Multiple Occupation, hostel and housing association management, the proliferation of semi-permanent advertising on landlord properties and a seemingly endless list of planning applications to redevelop individual houses as well as the much larger sites at each end of the road. Although often unable to prevent developments ratcheting up the population density in the street, Harcourt Road Watch has certainly influenced the pace and the character of the developments that have been approved.

And we have had some considerable successes. By the mid 1990's the increasing numbers of residents' cars coupled with a steadily growing daily influx of university and hospital commuters' cars, had made parking very difficult for residents returning from the shops, for people delivering goods and services and for visiting friends and relatives. Initial responses to our campaign were disappointing, so from March to July 1998 we regularly surveyed the road by day and by night to establish the facts about the number of residents' cars and the impact of commuters. The survey data provided very convincing evidence of the severe problems we were experiencing and was instrumental in persuading officers and councillors that the road was indeed a special case and deserved priority action. By the spring of 2001 our local scheme was up and running, seven years before similar action was taken in surrounding streets!

An important part of the role of Harcourt Road Watch has been representation of residents and not just to the local council. For many years we have engaged, alongside other residents' associations, in a dialogue with the university at local forums and Area Panel meetings and at the university's own Community Forum. This engagement has helped the university develop its policy of partnership and to take some very practical and helpful steps. Its decision to attach covenants to the many street properties being sold-off as part of its residential accommodation strategy was certainly influenced by the representations of Harcourt Road Watch as well as other residents' associations. This policy enabled more than a dozen families to join, and in many ways to rejuvenate, our local community.

In recent years the improvements in council street cleaning and rubbish collection have reduced the need for resident clean ups, though this continued as one element within the activity days we organised in 2007 with the students union's volunteering organisation. The last such occasion brought together nearly eighty residents, including over fifty students, to tidy up gardens and alleyways and to emblazon in paint their ownership of wheelie bins. These "Love Where You Live" projects followed and extended the long tradition we have had of welcoming each year's crop of new students with leaflets and doorstep chats – a regular reaffirmation of the importance we have attached to making and keeping good neighbours.

Nic

pic 11:



Harcourt Road Watch – The Present, and the Future?

My recent article prompted someone to ask “How do you join Harcourt Road Watch?” – a question I at first found difficult to answer; the group

has never had a formal membership, nor collected any subscriptions. Eventually I said that people become part of Harcourt Road Watch by living in the road and taking part in the groups’ activities. For example, coming out to paint wheelie bins or tidy up gardens during the “Love Where You Live” projects or attending the meetings we held in 2007-8 about proposed changes to our residents’ parking scheme.

However I think the question raises wider issues. Since its inception, meetings of the group tend to have been held infrequently and irregularly, always prompted by events or proposals. By the early noughties, the number of non-student residents in the road had reached an all-time low and the group held very few, if any, meetings between 2001 and 2006; chance conversations plus a few phone calls often sufficed to establish how people felt about a particular issue. Using such informal procedures I have tried to represent residents’ views and interests at meetings of local forums like the Broomhill Forum and the University’s Community Forum as well as statutory bodies like the Area Panels and the Planning and Highways Boards.

Clearly the arrival over the past couple of years of so many new people has made such informal procedures both impractical and unsatisfactory. In response we have started to hold meetings again - so far usually arranged by Sarah, Hope and myself, but anyone with an issue should feel free to call a meeting. Although irregular and infrequent meetings may still leave a considerable democratic deficit, they are, I believe, preferable to regular

scheduled meetings whose formal agendas and likely lack of clear purpose or proposals would lead first to bureaucracy and eventually to dwindling attendance.

In this context people may want to consider how, if at all, to link in with and perhaps influence the new Community Assemblies that will soon replace the Area Panels as the Council’s primary means of interacting directly with the population it serves. Penny and I recently met with Broomhill Councillor Paul Scriven to press the case for urgent repair of the former Crookes Valley Methodist Church and took the opportunity to impress upon him also the continuing loss to Crookesmoor of buildings and services available to support the community and its activities. The closed Community Centre (formerly Crookesmoor Infants School), the empty Vestry Hall (now proposed as yet another overcrowded student hostel) and recently shut post office all got a mention. In response, we were told about a “neighbourhood planning” process that is to be launched as part of the way in which the new Community Assemblies will seek to engage with their population on issues of local concern.

Penny and I will be holding a preliminary meeting with Rebecca Maddox, a local representative of the relevant Community Assembly, in early May to consider whether and how this initiative might address some of the issues we discussed with Paul Scriven. I have already suggested to Rebecca that the next step should be to hold a wider discussion at a Harcourt Road Watch residents’ meeting later in the month or, more likely, in June. If you would like to join Penny and me at the preliminary meeting with Rebecca, please get in touch.

Nic
31 Harcourt Road – Tel: 2668970

pic 12:



NEWS

21ST JANUARY 2010

Neighbourhood Improvement and the Central Community Assembly

At the last formal meeting of the group (in July 2009) residents discussed ways of making our neighbourhood a better place to live in with Rebecca Maddox, the then recently appointed Community Assembly Manager for the Central area of Sheffield. One of the issues raised at that time was the installation of a controlled crossing with a pedestrian phase at the Barber Road lights. You'll be pleased to learn that the Assembly has now prioritised this scheme and given the go-ahead for design work this year with the aim of construction in 2010/11.

Lots of other issues and ideas were put forward at the group meeting: speed bumps, a 20 mph speed limit, re-opening the Post Office, more playground equipment, Ranger events in the parks, a bus route along the ring road, community facilities in Crookesmoor, broken pavements, blocked drains, recycling, tree planting etc, etc. All these appeared to have dropped into a black hole.

Not so. Resources have now been allocated by the Assembly to create an Action Plan for the Broomhill Ward and Rebecca has just sent us an invitation for a couple of reps from Harcourt Road to join reps from Broomhill and Ecclesall communities to map out process and parameters. The Plan must be completed by June 2010 and she has offered two potential dates for an initial meeting: Tuesday 2nd February or Monday 8th February – both from 4.30 to 6.00 at St Mark's Broomhill.

We have been trying to represent residents' views and interests at council and local forums of various kinds for over fifteen years and we feel strongly that the start of this new process would be a good moment for some different faces in the road to take over from us. If you are interested, and willing and able to make either date, please get in touch and we will pass your name on to Rebecca.

NIC AND PENNY RALPH
31 HARCOURT ROAD

2668970

The University Community Forum and Local Residents' Groups

Since the summer of 2008 the local residents' groups represented regularly at meetings of the University Community Forum have held wide-ranging discussions with the University about community consultations, governance and corporate social responsibilities, and the role of the Forum. The backdrop for this, of course, has been the substantial growth of the University in recent years, the large-scale redevelopment of its estate, and many other consequential impacts on the surrounding residential and business communities.

There has been conflict over planning and licensing decisions, with private landlords and developers, with public houses and fast food outlets and with the University itself. There has been a growing feeling among the community representatives that the Forum is no longer working as it once did, is becoming less responsive, its meetings less fruitful and that our concerns are no longer receiving a proper hearing. Accordingly, in December, all but two of the currently serving community representatives decided to withdraw from further attendance at the Forum at least until such time as a new framework for engagement can be developed and agreed. Although several of the issues which have animated colleagues from the core Broomhill and Ecclesall areas are not of comparable significance to Harcourt Road residents, I supported their decision to withdraw. The considerable time and effort demanded by an increasingly unresponsive process is hard to justify and, in any case, I have other pressing matters which need my attention. I hope and expect that new terms of engagement can be agreed with the University, but I have decided that Harcourt Road Watch will need to find someone else to represent it when the Forum reconvenes.

It may be difficult to find new people willing to represent the views of Harcourt Road residents at the University Community Forum or the Broomhill Action Plan meetings. We hope not, but if it is, so be it. Perhaps it is time, after eighteen years, to call time on Harcourt Road Watch, an organisation created to deal with issues that for the most part have now gone away, been resolved or mitigated. Of course, if people do come forward, we will be happy to go on contributing to the work of the group.

In either eventuality, we will continue, for a while at least, to attend meetings of the Central Community Assembly as its agenda links also to our work with the Friends of Crookesmoor Parks.

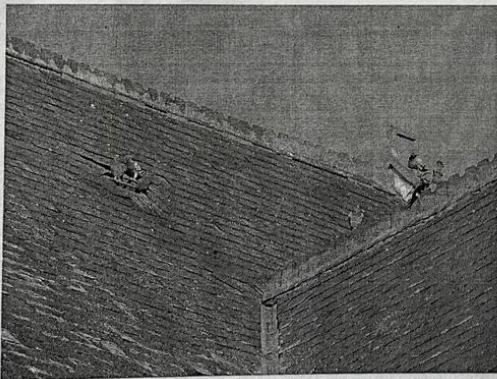
Update on Major Residential Developments in Crookesmoor

The Vestry Hall, Crookesmoor Road

The Council's Planning Board turned down the developer's proposals for a conversion to student accommodation last May, but they lodged an appeal with the national Planning Inspectorate in Bristol in August. Their decision is expected in February. The temporary roofing cover on the Vestry Hall has slipped and the holes in this roof are once again exposed to the elements.

Crookes Valley Methodist Church and Sunday School

The owners of this building have planning permission for a conversion to student accommodation for 63 people, but have said that a start cannot be made in the current financial climate. It is now seven years since the site was first acquired by developers; no conversion work has ever started and the buildings have simply been allowed steadily to deteriorate. Vandalism, raves and temporary occupations have severely damaged the interior.



After much pressure the Council has recently managed to persuade the owners to organise some repair work on the Sunday School roof, but not, so far, on the Church roof, which has two significant holes. It is likely that an order seeking additional action within 28 days will be issued shortly.

We will continue to press the Council for more and better remedial action on both of these Grade II Listed buildings.

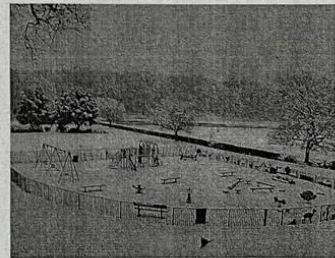
The British Glass Technology Site



The owners of this site have planning permission for a large three-winged block of 76 flats for "young professionals", but work started before pre-commencement planning conditions had been met and a Stop Order was used to bring the work to a halt.

There were fears that the proximity of the deep excavations might undermine the surrounding footpaths, trees and roads and the Health and Safety Executive served a prohibition notice preventing further excavation. The developers subsequently stated that work was unlikely to resume in the foreseeable future and withdrew from their arrangements with the owner.

There seems to be little concern about the trashed landscape left by the developers. HSE seem satisfied that the site is stable and safe and have no powers to intervene now that work has ceased. For their part the planners are satisfied with the security of the site offered by the site fencing.



This issue of a "Harcourt Road Watch News" is a one-off. It has not been issued in competition with the regular Harcourt News we all know and love! If the timing had been right we would have offered this copy to the Harcourt News editors. Unfortunately, information from the Central Community Assembly about the Broomhill Ward Action Plan came too late for inclusion in the January Harcourt News and requires a response before the February edition will come out.