

**Mr Kelsey says the Council and SEAL should up their game in the Echo on Friday 26.09.2014.**

**This is where SEAL and the Council have got to so far!**

Mr Kelsey, Megan and Mr Cooper are absolutely doing the best they can by working with other residents in the streets where he lives to improve those streets. SEAL, and I am sure, the Council fully support him in his hard work.

The Council and SEAL are 'upping their game' working through the complex issues behind the changing street scene, where the percentage of rental property has grown so much over the last couple of decades. Clearly it is the right time to explain to what is being done, as touched upon in the Echo article of Monday 29.09.2014.

SEAL was set up by the responsible, professionally minded Landlords and Agents, supported by our National Associations, to prevent Selective Licensing being imposed upon the 80% majority of compliant landlords, in order to catch the few criminal landlords. We pointed out that if we all worked together, experienced landlords and agents, with expert council officers and excellent Multi Agencies that already existed, as well as residents, we could arrive at much better solutions. We argued that it would be better to spend the money on repairs for the properties, than on fees for the Council, and that our proposals would cover the whole town, not just the few streets of the SL proposal. This local initiative is being watched with interest by the National Property Associations.

Obviously meetings were held about the issues that the SL was meant to improve, with the relevant experts from Council Officers to the Agencies such as the SMAART Team and Harp. Improved processes were put in place, and we are definitely engaging with some of the worst landlords. Attitudes are evolving due to the exposure in the press, and the streets are looking better. The first practical project was launched this time last year and is bringing in the rewards. SEAL volunteers carried out a questionnaire on 8 streets, including the town end of York Road, followed by a Street Blitz to clear the streets. The Echo and GBN Skips supported the huge effort, attended by 60 + adults and children. The results were analysed, and the residents' issues were listed. Research showed that however much you clean up an area, unless the residents have a local Action Group/Street Group/Neighbourhood Watch group, any improvement is not sustainable. The setting up of these groups immediately became the 4<sup>th</sup> SEAL aim.

So SEAL collected the contact details of the residents in those streets who would be interested in starting an informal group to improve their streets. We are now getting the residents together for their first meetings. We are introducing contacts who are looking for projects for their volunteer teams to do some welcome landscaping in **these streets that SEAL recognises as 'gateway' streets into town for all of us, not just the residents. These Gateway streets deserve attention and special treatment to make use of their potential for the town.** Plans are now afoot for rubbish stores and planters, Heygate Avenue being the first to start the transformation.

The street groups will operate their own intelligence system, informing the council of dumped mattresses and bags. The group will also let SEAL and the Council know about badly managed properties, and the Council will be targeting the owners until they shape up or ship out. This is already happening and several prosecutions are underway particularly to enforce the laws

surrounding the management of HMO's. **Landlords make sure you are not one of those about to be prosecuted.**

Probably Mr Kelsey's Group has got together due to SEAL publishing their findings to all the Councillors and other interested agencies who attended their launch meetings, encouraging Councillors to become more active in their areas. We have noticed : -

- ❑ Related initiatives by Multi Agencies, in the pipeline, probably influenced by SEAL, as well as by the changing times. Watch this space!
- ❑ Major agents and landlords have started to refurbish their front walls and fences, and front garden landscaping, go and look at Whitegate Road.
- ❑ Others are planning sponsorship of street scene work.
- ❑ Councillors and Volunteer Groups are realising the potential of all planning together on projects to improve the streets.
- ❑ The Council has introduced a scale of fines for non-compliance by landlords and agents.
- ❑ The Council has more prosecutions in the pipeline.

So SEAL and the Council working together is having a much wider effect than just a few streets. We are not focussed on communicating how far we have come, we are just trying to get through the huge amount of unpaid effort that this initiative needs...actually we really need some volunteers to help with our communications and media now.

Lately the SEAL Residents' Representative has been building a **Community Website** to support the Groups, and help residents to be informed about the help available. It will show different techniques to deal with the issues of anti-social behaviour, property condition, and street scene(rubbish management), and hints on how to get your group up and running. Contact details for the different agencies who can help will be readily available. The website will support news and provide a network for the different groups, and show ways each group has met with some success. We hope to launch it in the next few weeks. Eventually we hope the website will be run by volunteer residents with support from SEAL.

There are situations which will take longer to unravel, and these are where the freeholder is not active or effective, and the different leaseholders do not work together, cannot be found, are difficult and/or non-compliant, or have no money to improve the property. SEAL will be approaching the owners and trying, one way or the other, to work out solutions.

If you are interested in improving your street, try to collect the details of a few neighbours who are like minded, send them to SEAL and we will forward them to your Councillors, the Multi Agencies and the SEAL Members who we will encourage to help you get up and running as a Street Group, determined to improve your street.

Information from [www.southeastalliance.org](http://www.southeastalliance.org) or email Tina on [info@southeastalliance.org](mailto:info@southeastalliance.org)

## **What are the SEAL main recommendations so far :-**

**Residents** start up an informal Street Group asap, and attend the Police meetings for help, get support from SEAL with meetings, recommendations and communications and funding.

### **Landlords and Owner Occupiers-**

make sure the front of your property looks smart and cared for, and that you have well managed, rubbish storage per tenancy, so that vermin cannot get at the rubbish.

Landlords join SEAL and bring your property up to maximum profitability through top condition and presentation, make contacts, learn techniques and gain confidence to help better manage your tenancies, and protect your business.

### **The Council and Multi Agencies-**

pursue the existing laws more vigorously by chasing the bad landlords, who you know very well because you are paying them benefit money every few weeks. Support the vulnerable people who you place with landlords not just 9-5 but through the 24 hours that they need the help. Don't leave it to the terrified neighbours and horrified landlords to be social workers and psychiatrists until the next day. The terms conflict of interest and duty of care come to mind here.

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## SEAL Time Line

- July 2011 Selective Licensing Consultation Questionnaire went out to the public and to Landlords and Agents. Landlords, Agents and their National Associations argued the statistics were not correct and that the result would be loss of housing and ruin for the accidental landlords, and small landlords( who we later have learned make up a large proportion of the market). The bad landlords would just relocate to the next streets not covered by SL.
- Winter 2011/12 Landlords and Agents held meetings, and asked questions at Council meetings and eventually the proposal was shelved.
- The 3 aims of the Selective Licensing proposal were adopted as the aims of SEAL.
- ▣ To reduce anti-social behaviour,
  - ▣ to raise the condition of rental properties,
  - ▣ to improve the street scene.
- 2012 Writing of the SEAL Code of Conduct and Constitution
- Development of name and brand, writing of leaflet, application form, designs for each
- Echo started to support SEAL through airing bad housing issues vigorously through their own campaign
- Meetings with experts to decide on how to reduce Anti-Social Behaviour, raise the standard of rental properties and improve the street scene, followed by the production of the proposals through the Membership documentation and explanation of :-
- ▣ Tenant Information Pack
  - ▣ the Tenant Declaration defining ASB and the consequences
  - ▣ the Section 21 Procedure
  - ▣ Property Inspection - 6 monthly Maintenance check format
- Presentations to the Landlords' Forum
- Awarding of funding for part time, starting to handle complaints about Members properties and general assistance to enquirers
- 2013 Development of Complaints Procedure
- Development of the Property Inspection requirements
- Responding to complaints and queries, Monitoring, recording, administration

	Setting up SEAL website for use by public and so Members can access SEAL documentation
	Reporting to the Scrutiny Committee
	Various presentations and Members meetings explaining documentation
September 2013	SEAL launched the Street Blitz idea, their first practical project
January 2014	SEAL held a public meeting to further the project
Spring 2014	Planning of the Street Blitz 8 streets to compare with SL Proposal
	Gained added support from new Echo Executive and Editor Colin Channon writing the questionnaire to match an area of the SL Proposal, through the press learned Resident Activists wanted a Community website researching fund raising, appointing 2 SEAL Members to concentrate on this applying and achieving funding for Community based work sponsorship from major SEAL Landlord researching and obtaining volunteers through SAVs adoption of the 4 <sup>th</sup> aim of Seal, to help set up the street groups in order to sustain and continue improvements
3-5.06.2014	Talking to residents from Herbert Grove to Whitegate Rd and filling in the questionnaire
8.06.2014	Carried out the Street Blitz, supported by Echo coverage and 6 Skips and handling equipment from GBN Skips.
July and August	recover from huge effort of Blitz, SEAL and Council collate info and reports. Start on SEAL Community website, learning as we go.
28.08.2014	First Heygate Group meeting at CAB Office
24.09.2014	Proposal of planters and rubbish store, checking and reporting rubbish etc. to residents and their approval to go ahead starting early November. Ward Councillors starting to support whole area improvement. SEAL to support with small funding as necessary.
Autumn 2014	start of Portland Group and the Whitegate Group underway

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