

Conclusions of the BetterBath Forum meeting on 3 December 2009

Development needs of outer Bath

The eighth BetterBath meeting discussed the development needs of the outer wards of the city of Bath (ie those other than Abbey and Kingsmead wards in the centre). It was chaired by Sam Holliday, editor of the Bath Chronicle.

David Trigwell (Divisional Director of Planning and Transport, B&NES) gave a brief introduction to the issues relating to outer Bath in the Core Strategy Options consultation document and emphasised how important it was for individual residents as well as organisations to make their views known during the consultation period (which now ends on 15 January 2010). The Council was keen to hear views on issues not covered in the document, as well as on the options which were set out.

Cllr Tim Ball (Twerton) spoke about the importance of local communities and the need for local and accessible shops, reliable and affordable public transport, and clean streets. Peter Andrews (Chair, Transition Bath) highlighted the need to respond to the challenges of peak oil and climate change by radical changes including a more local approach to the use of energy, production of food and disposal of waste.

Conclusions 1-3 and 5-10 are addressed to B&NES Councillor Charles Gerrish. Conclusion 4 is addressed to Jane and Henry Brown of the BetterBath Forum. Conclusion 11 is addressed to the two Vice Chancellors, Professor Glynis Breakwell and Professor Frank Morgan.

Conclusion 1

The Council should take account of the points set out below in considering the responses to the Core Strategy Options Consultation.

Local communities

The key theme which emerged from the discussion was the need to recognise that Bath is a holistic entity consisting of a series of local communities. Over the last 20 years planning policies have not prevented the disappearance of essential community facilities (shops, schools, pubs, post offices and places for young

people). The loss of these facilities has increased car use and aggravated the problems caused by traffic and pollution. It is time to shift the focus back to the local level, particularly to those communities which feel they have been forgotten and neglected.

Conclusion 2

The Core Strategy needs to recognise and promote the distinctive identity of local communities within a comprehensive framework which protects, enhances and where appropriate regenerates the World Heritage Site and its surrounding landscape.

Conclusion 3

Successful local communities are people-centred. They need:

- *High quality urban design, with housing at sufficient density to make local services viable, but not so dense as to exacerbate social problems*
- *Local shops, post offices, schools and other services accessible on foot and by bicycle rather than by car*
- *'shared space' on the roads for pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles, and an overall 20mph speed limit*
- *A range of leisure facilities for all ages*

Conclusion 4

The BetterBath Forum should consider holding some of its meetings in local communities, rather than the city centre.

Housing

There will always be high demand for housing in Bath. However growth needs to meet the real needs of people who live and work in Bath, not the demand for second homes or long-distance commuting. Participants were sceptical about the housing targets set out in the draft Regional Spatial Strategy, and queried the information on affordable housing need set out in the Strategic Housing Market Assessment. Great concern was expressed about the risk that the proposed urban extension in the Green Belt surrounding South/South West Bath would divert developers away from the much more challenging brownfield sites within the city.

Conclusion 5

Before the consultation period closes, the Council should publish a simple explanation of the projected housing need, distinguishing between social rent, intermediate housing and market housing and explaining how much of the projected need results from in-migration. This explanation would help people to respond sensibly to the proposals for housing growth.

Conclusion 6

Robust and effective planning policies are needed to implement the Council's stated objective of regenerating brownfield sites before permitting any urban extension in the Green Belt. The Council should make clear how it intends to achieve this objective.

Conclusion 7

Planning policies need to accommodate alternative sustainable and low-cost means of meeting housing need, for example by expanding the provision of residential mooring facilities where this can be done without adverse impact on the environment.

Transport

There was a strong feeling that public transport in Bath is not meeting people's needs. Buses are expensive and unreliable and some do not meet modern standards of accessibility, comfort and pollution minimisation. The 'hub and spoke' design of the bus routes aggravates congestion in the city centre and encourages people to use private cars rather than buses for cross-town journeys. Many of the issues raised in the discussion will not be addressed by the measures included in the Bath Transport Package.

Conclusion 8

The Council needs to carry out a thorough review of traffic management and parking controls across the city so as to free up the flow of public transport.

Conclusion 9

The Council should work with First Bus and other service providers to review the scope for a circular bus route around the outer areas of the city.

Local Food and Renewable Energy

Participants felt that the consultation document did not give enough weight to the need to improve local resilience, particularly in relation to food supplies and energy production.

Conclusion 10

The proposed levels of growth will lead to huge pressure on the finite supply of land within the District. The Core Strategy will need to set out the criteria for reconciling the tensions between competing demands for land for food production, new housing and employment, and production of energy.

The role of the Universities

The meeting heard that 'studentification' can have an adverse impact on local communities. Bath's two Universities play an important role in the life of the city, but is it appropriate to allow both of them to continue to expand?

Conclusion 11

The two Universities should provide a statement explaining the reasons why they need to expand student numbers, and how adverse effects on local communities will be mitigated.