

Placemaking Plan Adoption

FoBRA speaking notes for Council meeting 13 July 17, with Q&A

I am the Chairman of the Federation of Bath Residents' Associations, with 34 members across Bath, including both Students' Unions. We have been contributing to this Placemaking Plan since it first appeared, 4 years ago, particularly in the areas of student housing and transport, about which I need to speak to you tonight, not because we think adoption should be delayed any longer – 4 years is quite enough! – but to remind ourselves of some important unfinished business.

Student Housing:

Housing, particularly affordable housing, is in crisis here, and student housing forms a large part of that problem, particularly as our universities refuse to offer campus accommodation to more than a fifth of their students, and hence the vast majority have to find beds in the city (and I remind you that students now form over a quarter of Bath's population – a higher proportion than almost any other university town). For years, we have been pressing our Council to take it seriously and introduce a student housing policy, but to no avail. Meanwhile, the problem gets worse. I therefore find it incredible, that the Inspector decided to kick the student housing issue into the long grass, and that this fact is not even mentioned in the summary list of modifications. She proposes deletion of whole swathes of draft text and reversion to the out of date wording of the Core Strategy. This effectively sets back the cause of getting to grips with Bath's acknowledged student housing problems by years.

Transport:

Now to Transport, which is FoBRA members' top priority: hence our support for the Bath Transport Strategy, which you approved, overwhelmingly, in November 2014. The Placemaking Plan calls for a city centre free of all but essential traffic, which is great, but do you have any intention of doing this? What is the point of it all, if the Council doesn't actually implement its policies - for example, the Core Strategy policy is to have a car-free city centre, so why isn't there yet any plan to reduce the traffic? Moreover, during the Placemaking Plan Public Hearings last Autumn, Council Officers denied that there was any intention to prepare such a plan, thus fatally undermining an important aspect of the Strategy, an Eastern P&R, so is it, like so many Council Policies, just empty words?

Secondly, the reference to Parking Standards in the Placemaking Plan is utterly opaque. Does it mean they will be flexed up, down or a bit of both? What is the aim? What does it hope to achieve? Is it in accordance with the Bath Transport Strategy, where the concept is laid down of using parking control to free the city centre of traffic, unhealthy pollution and congestion; and of moving people onto other transport modes? There are plenty of examples of historic cities elsewhere in Europe which have shown how to do it. However, the newly published document:

“Our Plan to Get Bath Moving” is not one of them, as it promises **more** short term parking, and hence **more** traffic, not less.

Bath deserves better. Please do your duty.

Questions of Factual Accuracy:

1. (By unidentified Conservative member) Do you agree with the measures being taken to reduce the proportion of future HMO¹ approval from 25% to 10% by Article 4 direction?

FoBRA Answer: I do agree, as this was FoBRA’s recommendation, based on the advice of the National HMO lobby, but this does nothing to control PBSAs², which FoBRA recommended during the consultation. The real way to deal with the student housing problem is by having a student housing policy which, inter alia, can curtail the Universities’ growth.

2. (By Cllr Tim Ball, LibDem) With all the criticisms you have made, do you really think the Placemaking Plan should be adopted tonight?

FoBRA Answer: It certainly must be adopted, as four years is far too long for its gestation anyway, but a Core Strategy Review must urgently be brought forward to pick up on all these points.

Final, with Q&A dated 15 July 17

¹ Houses in Multiple Occupation

² Purpose Built Student Accommodation