

Placemaking plan - Speaking notes – Cabinet

I am Robin Kerr, Chairman of the Federation of Bath Residents' Associations, which is the main representative voice for residents' groups in Bath, with currently 25 full member associations, across all wards in Bath, and six affiliates, including both students' unions.

FoBRA has been tracking the Placemaking Plan for some years, as we did the Core Strategy. Its importance to Bath residents is obvious: we have studied its various versions assiduously, probably making more comments on it than any other body. Moreover, we sought meetings with the Officers drafting it, and had useful dialogue. I think some good changes and additions were incorporated, and, in return, our expectations were modified. Our most recent exchange took place last month, when we made practical comment on the version which you are discussing today.

From the start, we wanted a Student Housing Policy. My colleague Chris Beezley is going to speak about that later, but this duty cannot be shirked. Other university towns and cities have them - Loughborough, Leeds and Leicester to mention but three: and if you want to know what can happen if you don't have one, go and look at Leamington Spa, which is close to Warwick. The seemingly unstoppable expansion of our two universities, however desirable, is a ticking time-bomb threatening our citizens' ability to find homes here.

We also wanted development of brownfield before greenfield sites, and introduction of space standards for market housing. About half of English Authorities impose minimum space standards on new commercial housing, but not B&NES, with the result that many of our new-build houses are cramped, often with less space than social housing (where standards still exist). This is not worthy. Government has recently introduced a scheme to rectify this, and we commend its imposition here.

As the Plan developed, we saw the need for Central Bath to be treated as a "Place" in its own right. The most important existing asset in B&NES is the historic core of the Bath World Heritage Site and this aspect is now well treated, but with too narrow a definition of the Central Area. We urge you to expand this to stretch from Julian Road to the river: and from Bathwick Street, in the east, to Charlotte Street; in this way including nearly all the Key Elements of the World Heritage Site, as inscribed.

The Bath Transport Strategy is a key part of co-ordinated B&NES strategy and policy, and this is now recognized in the text, though, given Transport's importance, it surely should be included in the 'Vision for the City', with words such as:

"Measures will be adopted to promote sustainable transport and reduce the intrusion of vehicles, particularly in the historic core, in line with the Bath Transport Strategy."

Lastly, flooding risk: I see that you are to discuss the Local Flood Risk Management strategy later, but, to be practical, surface water and river water flooding precautions come to the same thing, as they often occur simultaneously. There is much in the Plan about mitigation of this risk in the Enterprise areas, which is understandable as otherwise no development would take place in them. However, there is a considerable likelihood of flooding some 2000 existing homes upstream, many of them Listed, and of great importance to World Heritage; yet this is hardly mentioned, and no practical measures are proposed to deal with it. Moreover, in the sections on development sites, in Central Riverside and Manvers Street, mitigation is planned for the development parts, but, scandalously, nothing for the existing properties close by, thereby condemning them to damage. In all fairness, this has to be rectified, and money found to carry out necessary work.

Robin Kerr - draft 4 and final - 2 Dec 15