



**Note of the meeting of the Somer Valley Forum  
held on Monday, 30th November, 2015 in Conygre Hall - Timsbury**

**In attendance:**

Lynda Robertson, Midsomer Norton Society (Chair)  
Cllr Karen Walker, B&NES Ward Councillor (Peasedown St John) (Vice Chair)  
Cllr Rosemary Naish, Chair of Clutton Parish Council  
Cllr Mike Hedges, Chair of Farrington Gurney Parish Council  
Teresa Marston, Clerk to Farrington Gurney Parish Council  
Cllr Jonathan Rich, Peasedown St John Parish Council  
Cllr Eleanor Jackson, B&NES Ward Councillor (Westfield)  
Cllr Doug Deacon, B&NES Ward Councillor (Timsbury)  
Mrs Deacon, Local Resident  
Cllr David Collett, Timsbury Parish Council  
Cllr Barry Macrae, B&NES Ward Councillor (Midsomer Norton North)  
Cllr Liz Hardman, B&NES Ward Councillor (Paulton)  
Shirley Steel, Somerset and Dorset Railway Heritage Trust  
Jan Merchant, Local Resident  
Cllr Ray Merchant, Timsbury Parish Council  
Cllr Richard Robertson, Midsomer Norton Town Council  
Roger Tollervey, Welton Valley Group  
Cllr Deirdre Horstmann, B&NES Ward Councillor (Radstock)  
Becky Brooks, Midsomer Norton, Radstock and District Journal  
Cllr Michael Evans, B&NES Ward Councillor (Midsomer Norton North)  
Cllr Hugh Warren, Paulton Parish Council  
Cllr Bob Piper, Paulton Parish Council  
Cllr Rupert Bevan, Radstock Town Council  
Cllr Tom Clifford, Peasedown St John Parish Council  
Peter Barter, Somer Centre  
Terry Taylor, Norton Radstock Regeneration  
Cllr Chris Dando, B&NES Ward Councillor (Radstock)  
Cllr Robin Moss, B&NES Ward Councillor (Westfield)  
Cllr Jane Lewis, Midsomer Norton Town Council  
Emily Merko, Clerk to Hinton Blewett Parish Council and Administrative Assistant to Westfield Parish Council  
Mike Horler, Local Resident  
Cllr Veronica Packham, Chair of Timsbury Parish Council  
Cate Le Grice-Mack, Norton Radstock Regeneration  
Cllr Lesley Mansell, Peasedown St John Parish Council  
Cllr Kathy Thomas, Chair of Peasedown St John Parish Council  
Cllr Sue Langton, Timsbury Parish Council  
Cllr Paul Myers, B&NES Ward Councillor (Midsomer Norton Redfield)  
Cllr Charles Gerrish, Cabinet Member – Resources, B&NES

**Officers:** Mike Bowden, Gary Adams, Cathy McMahon, John Wilkinson, Denise Burton, Richard Baldwin, Jo Lewitt, Dave Dixon, Sara Dixon, Alison Wells, Andrew Pate, Simon De Beer

## 1. B&NES Budget Fair including Question and Answer session

Question 1 – It seems that much of this budget depends on income generation – when can Councillors expect more information on this?

Answer – The information about the Property Company went to Cabinet on Wednesday so Councillors should have received papers relating to this. The Council has made two, very successful property investments in recent years and will be seeking more. The income estimates contained in the presentation are conservative and more may be generated.

Question 2 – How will the Council derive income if it is selling its properties to a private company?

Answer – The Council will be the only shareholder in the Property Company so will be retaining ownership in this way.

Comment 3 – The Government states that Housing Associations need to be compensated for any properties they lose under the ‘Right to Buy’ scheme. There does not seem to be provision for recompensing them. Also, the Government has indicated that Councils should, themselves, sell off their ‘high end’ assets.

Answer – The Council is no longer a housing authority, with flats in the Royal Crescent and Circus for example, which may have been considered ‘high end’.

Comment 4 – It is good to see frontline services such as youth provision being protected. However, there is concern that the Council is withdrawing as a licence holder for the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. This does result in a £20k - £30k saving, with costs passed to schools instead. However, it could lead to this becoming a scheme in which the rich can participate.

Answer – Due to the detailed nature of this question, it was suggested that the enquirer speak with Cllr Michael Evans, Cabinet Member for Children’s Services, following the meeting.

Question 5 – What is happening about the feasibility study relating to the junction between Bath Road, Peasedown St John and the A367? There was another accident on this road last week.

Answer – Ward Councillors for Peasedown St John have brought the issue to Cabinet. It has been raised today, at the previous Somer Valley Forum meeting and at Scrutiny. It is now for the Cabinet Member for Highways to address.

Question 6 – How is the new Somer Valley Enterprise Zone being defined? Is it just Midsomer Norton, or Peasedown St John as well?

Answer – Officers are still working on the Enterprise Zone – it is focussing on sites already allocated for employment, such as Old Mills but more can be allocated going forward.

*Andrew Pate commented that the Forum may wish to look at this in more detail at a future meeting as this was an area that they identified as a priority issue in their Action Plan.*

Question 7 – If the Council is buying properties to sell, how will this help with housing waiting lists?

Answer – The Council is intending to bring forward properties that already exist but

are not habitable, such as those above shops. It is an accounting process. It can also borrow at a low rate to invest. It is not disposing of properties to raise short term funds.

Question 8 – it is noted that a Metro Mayor may be able to increase business rates. Would this be a Mayor for the greater Bristol area?

Answer – it would be a Mayor covering the four West of England authorities (Bristol; Bath and North East Somerset; North Somerset and South Gloucestershire). The Government are pushing for Metro Mayors but no decision has been made as yet.

Question 9 – Would a Metro Mayor diminish the power of Local Authorities?

Answer – No – the aim is to attract funds to address big issues.

Question 10 – This presentation has been very clear and easy to understand – how do we help get this information across to young people?

Answer – this is a good point and we could look to extend the sessions to the Youth Parliament and do more engagement with young people in future years.

Question 11 – The £174k for the bridge in Radstock detailed on the presentation is a direct contribution from the developer, so not Council spend. Are other figures like this included?

Answer – Developer contributions have always been part of the Council's budget presentation and included in the overall capital programme.

Question 12 – How much CIL money does the Council expect to receive from the Bath Quays Development?

Answer – CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) only came into force in April 2015, therefore, the level is not high in this financial year but it will be rolled into next year, when more funds will become available. It will be a substantial contribution.

Question 13 – The Chancellor indicated that a 2% rise in Council Tax could be spent specifically on Adult Social Care – is this something that B&NES would consider?

Answer – It is too early to answer as this announcement only came last week. The detail is not yet available. The impact of the Government's settlement will influence what happens next. The Government is talking about two things – being able to increase Council Tax without referendum and a 'precept' for Adult Social Care.

Question 14 – If the Council owns no social housing and the majority is with Curo, who will reimburse them through properties lost under the right to buy and will this lead to a reduction in social housing?

Answer – as far as we understand it, the Government will reimburse them.

## **2. West of England Joint Spatial Plan including Question and Answer session**

Question 1 – We are concerned about over development and out commuting in the Somer Valley. Bristol needs the housing, why does B&NES have to take their quota?

Response – We have a duty to co-operate and B&NES is part of Bristol's housing market needs. The option of development in the Somer Valley does not have the transport infrastructure to support it.

Question 2 – The Somer Valley has huge problems with traffic congestion. To travel from Radstock to Bath during peak times can take you over an hour. We need to look at initiatives like the Radstock to Frome Railway to enable people to get to work. These initiatives should be supported by the Council.

Response – There maybe scope for a railway if it can be demonstrated that it is viable. The Council is undertaking a joint transport plan for the Somer Valley and Chew Valley which is being led by Peter Dawson. Peter is also involved in the West of England joint transportation plan. Transport infrastructure needs to be planed early as it takes a significant amount of time to implement.

Question 3 – Will the Transport Study be linked to funding?

Response – There is a cap on the level of growth if the infrastructure is not supported. The Government devolution plans, eg Metro Mayor, could enable more funding to be released for infrastructure.

Comment 4 – We have always played catch up, we need to ensure we plan in reasonable time.

Response – There is a lot of scope in the Somer Valley to improve the infrastructure. The trigger is sustainable growth.

Comment 5 – There has been a lot of housing development around Keynsham and Bristol which has increased congestion. Travelling into Bristol can take over two hours from the Somer Valley. We need to think about attracting employment outside of Bristol and Bath. The situation is not going to get better unless the infrastructure is improved. Public Transport routes on non-profitable routes are poor. We should consider a railway from Radstock to Bristol not to Frome, we need to think more radically, it is not impossible to consider a tunnel from Radstock to Bristol as an alternative.

Comment 6 – We need to ensure we have genuine affordable housing schemes within these plans.

Response – The number of affordable homes will be around 30,000. The housing crisis is a national problem and needs to national attention to address this.

Comment 7 – Villages around the World Heritage Site and AONB are empty most of the time as the area attracts people from London who wish to buy second homes.

Comment 8 – The cost of the Radstock to Frome Railway was £43 million. The Radstock to Bristol and Radstock to Bath routes are good for cycling and walking. We

need to invest up front infrastructure and public transport. We need to do something really radical. If all the people in B&NES travelled into Bath at the same time we would need to double-deck our road systems.