

Submission by James Hurley to Council on 16th January 2014

Chair, Council and Councillors:

My name is James Hurley. I am an independent sustainability consultant, a scientist and a trustee of The River Regeneration Trust which is a B&NES initiative. I have previously worked in Antarctica for the British Antarctic Survey, the Building Research Establishment in London and Hyder Consulting in UK and the Middle East. I wrote the initial Sustainability Strategy for the Olympic Park in London, provided sustainability guidance to Crossrail and developed design advice for Falcon City of Wonders in Dubai. I have represented Central Government on the international stage and am widely published.

The severe flooding in Bath, Keynsham and across B&NES this festive season was the third in two years. Nationally this has been a disaster that has cost UK plc billions of pounds and devastated lives, livelihoods and businesses. For some, it has been the final straw and they have ceased trading which will have major impact on families. This is the personal as well as business dilemma; consider the loss of revenue to Bath alone from the recent flooding?

The severe flooding in Bath, Keynsham and across B&NES is not just a local phenomenon; it is a global response to climate change that is real, which will get worse and will have greater impact now and in the future. It is also a catchment phenomenon; B&NES has a responsibility and a duty of care to play its part in flood risk, prevention, defence and conveyance as much as bordering councils in the Bristol Avon Catchment with over 15,000 properties at risk.

The severe flooding in Bath, Keynsham and across B&NES is an opportunity as well as a threat. We have to protect the World Heritage status of Bath and the revenue that it brings. As the Lead Local Flood Authority, B&NES has to lead other responsible authorities in the management of local flood risk whilst having consideration for other areas. BaNES has to implement their local flood risk management strategy, report on flooding incidents, maintain an asset register, be the SuDS Approved Body and issue consents for works in water courses. B&NES has access to great engineers, hydrologists and ecologists including internationally recognised organisations like Black & Veatch, Atkins, Hyder and AECOM. B&NES has at its disposal a significant number of detailed proposals, strategies, plans and solutions, but are they sufficiently comprehensive or innovative?

This flood risk opportunity in B&NES requires a framework solution and the urgent establishment of a Working Group at the highest level that includes the key authorities and stakeholders, major landholders and property managers. This Working Group will bring forward a coordinated approach to flood risk, prevention, defence and conveyance. Yes there are engineering challenges, but I would say insufficient thought or revenue potential has been considered from ecosystem solutions that integrate leisure and jobs. This would include green jobs, constructed wetlands, marinas, riverside homes, water parks and learning centres.

Although the severe flooding in Bath, Keynsham and across B&NES has been devastating and an array of previous studies has shown what the cost would be for defence and conveyance, we need to maximise the economic, social and environmental value and benefits of water and flood assets. We need to understand what others have done and how that can be applied in B&NES; for example, constructed wetlands that give us flood and drought compensation, riverside homes and houseboats as they do in the Netherlands, water parks for sports and visitor spend, learning centres that teach our schools and universities the value of water and wildlife, manufacturing of homes, houseboats and walkways for these waterside parks and wetlands. This is the Circular Economy. In this way, B&NES will combat climate change and associated flooding whilst constructing income-generating activities to pay off capital costs and maintain assets. This is exactly the path that Wessex Water is promoting, itself scrutinised by Ofwat as a pathfinder for UK water companies.

Chair, Council and Councillors I would say this. Climate Change is our Georgian challenge. We need a Brunel mind-set that speculates to accumulate. You have the capacity and capability at your fingertips through your framework consultants and a willing populous. Together, B&NES and a Working Group of key Stakeholders can make this happen and deliver a worthy solution to preserve a world heritage asset and act as a pathfinder for Bath and UK plc alike. This will be our River Strategy.

Thank you.

Ofwat: The Water Services Regulation Authority) is the economic regulator of the water and sewerage sectors in England and Wales

SuDS: Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems