

Placemaking plan - Speaking notes – Planning Scrutiny Panel 5th Jan 16

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. We have contributed to its long development assiduously, meeting with Officers and probably making more comments than any other body. Its importance to Bath residents is obvious: but it is lengthy and complicated. Initially, the Council set the Consultation at seven weeks; but technical difficulties with their website reduced this to about six. This means that normal human beings (who celebrate Xmas and New Year) would therefore have only about four weeks in which to read, assess and respond – not nearly long enough bearing in mind the challenging hurdles put in the way of commenting (such as the tests of legality and soundness, with evidence), and the need for organizations like my own to consult its members. I therefore ask, on behalf of all B&NES citizens, companies and organizations for an extension of at least 3 weeks, to make up this shortfall.

From the start, we wanted a Student Housing Policy. My colleague Chris Beezley is going to speak about this later, but that 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 or jobs here, and placing further pressure on the Green Belt. I wrote about this in the Chronicle on 23rd Dec, and I would remind you that students don't pay any Council Tax.

We also wanted 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.

Lastly, flooding risk: 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. I hope I hardly need to mention Carlisle, York, Rochdale and the Somerset Levels to remind us all of the misery and expense which can be caused by flooding.

Robin Kerr - draft 2 and final - 29 Dec 15