

MEMBER ADVOCATES – ANNUAL ACTIVITY REPORT 2023-24

Councillor Jess David – Member Advocate for Green Infrastructure and Nature Recovery

Over the last year my activities have included:

- Attending Climate and Ecological Emergency Team Meetings with officers and Cabinet leads.
- Taking part in policy development meetings including on the development of local nature strategies and locations including Entry Hill Open Space
- Engaged with officers about resourcing in the Parks team in connection with Be Our Best and Council budget discussions - seeking to retain current staffing levels in the parks team.
- Met with Rivers Trust, Wessex water jointly with Member Advocate for Rivers (Cllr Andy Wait).
- Engaged with members of the Bath Allotments Association on space for local growing and sustainable growing practices. Ensured that their feedback also informed the working group on sustainable growing.
- As a ward councillor, set up the Greening Moorlands network to bring together local initiatives focused on enhancing biodiversity.

Cllr Fiona Gourley – Member Advocate for Rural Communities

1) Public Transport, Buses & Westlink

- Worked closely with Sarah Warren, B&NES Bus team, WECA, Somerset Bus Partnership, First Bus, Wiltshire CC, and B&NES parishes to campaign to restore and/or improve rural bus and to enhance Westlink service to serve communities better.
- Aimed to represent all rural residents across B&NES who suffer from lack of public transport, not just those from my own ward, and to work cross-party with other councillors to lobby WECA who hold the funds and are the bus authority.
- Raised issue of impact of lack of rural buses on residents to B&NES Council including speaking at Council, and in local media releases and letters.
- Met with bus campaigners and produced a proposal for a network of buses across NES, with suggestions for saving existing routes, restoring others, improving services including Westlink. Presented this to the WECA Mayor and WECA officers in July 2023.
- Gathered cross-party petition with 1300+ signatures, organised demonstration to Local Authority & WECA leaders in October 2023 and encouraged residents to lobby WECA to ask for more support for rural buses. Regularly updated signatories about progress on bus routes and public transport.

- Campaigned to save 94 bus by securing funding from WECA/B&NES to match Wiltshire CC for Freshford & Monkton residents. Encouraged parish councils and residents to join together to run “use it or lose it” campaign.
- Worked with Chew Valley councillors and bus transition group to support their campaign for better public transport including more Westlink services and funding for their Westlocal service.
- Campaigned with Timsbury and Tunley parish councils and residents to include their villages on route of Paulton 2V Westlocal community bus. Now discussing with Paulton Councillors how to extend route to include Camerton and change timetable to get children to school on time.
- Raised concerns of Hinton, Midford and Claverton residents with their D2, D2x & D1 buses with First Bus. Encouraging parish councils and residents to join together to run “use it or lose it” campaign once issues with timetable and capacity of buses are resolved.
- Liaised with Keynsham councillors and residents to lobby WECA to improve bus services including diversion of 522 and establish /restore buses round estates.

2) Village Agents

- Wrote statement about value of Village Agents which was read to Council prior to my election.
- Advocated for Village Agents scheme to Cabinet during budget process.
- Promoted Villages agents in Focus articles which were shared with other NES Councillors
- Regularly mention the role of Village Agents when meeting residents who might benefit from their service and at Parish Council meetings.

Councillor Kevin Guy – Member Advocate for Armed Forces and Veterans

As a former member of the Royal Navy, it is an extreme honour to be the Council’s advocate for the Armed Forces and Veterans. During the past two years I have met hundreds of veterans and helped with some specific case work around homelessness of a veteran in the B&NES area. This a serious issue that I have raised at a national level and hopefully central government will ensure more resources are focused on the alarming numbers of ex-military homeless people.

On a positive note, after a number of meetings with the Submariners Group Bath, I’m proud to announce that we now have on public display the “Dolphin Bell” in the Guildhall. This magnificent historical artifact was officially installed at the Guildhall on 28th Feb 2023. It can be seen next to the replica of HMS Somerset on the first floor.

I have also officially attended the following events in my capacity as Leader of the Council and advocate.

Remembrance Sunday

Sunday 13/11/22 RVP and Bath Abbey Service

Sunday 12/11/23 RVP and Bath Abbey Service

Armed Forces Day

Monday 20th June 22 flag raising service

Monday 19th June 23 flag raising service

Armed Forces Covenant Meeting with Bertie Williams Armed Forces Champion – Horstman Group

Monday 2nd Oct 2023

Councillor Alan Hale – Member Advocate for Safer Roads

Despite advice given last year re a perceived dangerous crossroads junction near Queen Charlton the situation has not yet changed presumably Highways have possibly not looked into the issue.

From time to time, I receive questions from other councillors.

Charlton Road in Keynsham continues to suffer both excess speed and HGVs breaching the weight limit and is now de facto the missing link of the Avon Ring Road. I have been in correspondence with the police but with little success. It is a matter that really needs a serious consideration from Highways Officers, and I stand ready to assist them in any way I can.

I have continued to work cross party with the other Keynsham councillors to resolve the appalling catalogue of casualties caused by the cycle lane configuration in Keynsham High Street. Last year a Freedom of Information request revealed that in just over a year there had been 59 casualties in High Street due to the cycle lane causing trips and falls resulting in broken bones, lost teeth, serious cuts, bruises, dislocations and facial injuries. Sadly, another year has passed and such casualties have continued. A cheap remedy has recently been put in place, albeit not aesthetically pleasing, we wait to see whether trips and falls continue.

I have remained available to councillors to give support and advice on road safety matters throughout the year. I have also responded to questions from members of the public who had noted my advocacy.

Councillor Ian Halsall – Member Advocate for Engagement with Students

I have regularly attended the Student Community Partnership (SCP) Board where we have discussed matters around student experience, housing (the cost of accommodation and living standards; working with B&NES teams from Waste Management and Housing and for the first time representatives from a local letting agent). We have also discussed matters pertaining to student welfare and safety and how the new residents parking zone 28 has affected the licenced Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) properties within Oldfield Park and Westmoreland and the knock-on effect in adjacent wards.

Student numbers continue to rise, and we are now finding more people living outside the traditional inner wards of southern Bath which has significantly widened the area that the SCP now visits to inform and advise students and full-time residents and monitor any issues that may arise relating to poor waste management or anti-social activities for example.

Together with Cllr Matt McCabe, we have represented the Council at the SCP's Housing Working Group where we have discussed matters of planning policy in respect of Purpose Built Student Accommodation (PBSA's), HMO's and how the impact of student growth and associated developments across the district and on campus could potentially deliver planning gain to all residents (Section 106 / Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)). I keep an interest in the other on the other working groups; Green, Personal Safety and River Safety and attend when time allows.

As well as the Council, the SCP also includes Bath College and Norland College as well as the two Universities and their Students' Unions.

I liaise regularly with the SCP manager and their team, who are based at the University of Bath site at Dartmouth Avenue. This year the SCP completed their successful "Moving-in Campaign" as new students were welcomed to the city and given advice on waste management, security and integrating with their neighbours. The Leader of the Council also wrote a "Welcome to Bath" letter at the beginning of the academic year advising students about what the Council does and promoting its free cultural attractions. The "Moving-out Campaign" is now underway with teams visiting hundreds of homes across the entire city as students prepare to leave at the end of the academic year. Several British Heart Foundation donation bins have recently been placed in areas of known higher concentrations of student homes. In July last year these yielded 2985 bags, equating to almost £42k in revenue for the charity and keeping 24 tonnes of textiles saved from landfill.

The two wardens continue to investigate any reports from permanent residents significantly allaying any issues before they become too problematic and significantly reducing the number of complaints made directly to the Council and hopefully Councillors. Whilst complaints have continued to grow year on year as student

numbers have grown, this recognises the success of the SCP and the fact that there is now much greater awareness. Residents that I have spoken to on the doorstep have expressed how satisfied they are that “town and gown” pressures that can sometimes arise are being successfully addressed.

We have also begun to ascertain how students can better engage in local democracy, investigating auto-enrolment in partnership with the Universities and how Electoral Services could potentially make contact with individual students especially in PBSA’s in order to invite them to register to vote. I would like to encourage the Council to set up a stand during Freshers’ Week to promote its services and encourage students to exercise their right to vote.

The SCP has successfully secured further funding from CIL into the summer of 2025, but work is ongoing to seek to secure a long-term financial funding strategy in conjunction with Cllr Paul May for the SCP including for the Community Wardens, the Universities of which contribute 50%.

Councillor Liz Hardman – Member Advocate for Looked After Children

- Championing children in our care makes me proud. I’m governor at their virtual school, with good progress and attendance, and no permanent exclusions for two years.
- In January, Bath / Keynsham libraries displayed photography by Care Experienced young people. I tried to extend this to Midsomer Norton.
- We won free bus passes for Care Experienced people (18-21) from WECA.
- I proudly seconded the Council motion to make Care Experience a protected characteristic. My Panel’s reviewing progress. One teenager told me, ‘This makes life fairer for us.’

Councillor Saskia Heijltjes – Member Advocate for Active Travel – Bath

- Proposed motion on Vision Zero, which was unanimously passed in full council in November 2023.
- Met up regularly with Bath Green Schools parents group to discuss active travel and School Streets.
- Raised issue with trip hazards due to height of photocell detector posts at city centre security work - these were replaced with 1000mm height posts.

- Met with officers to discuss a range of active travel projects including working with major employers, design of continuous crossings and the Active Travel Masterplan.
- Raised issues around diversions for city centre security works, in particular access issues for disabled cyclists and lack of signage.
- Raised issue with river towpath closure and diversion issues in October 2023 and met with officers on site.
- Invited talk at opening plenary of Low Traffic Future event in Bristol on 11 November 2023.
- Raised issue of EV charging infrastructure potentially impacting on pavement space for pedestrians.
- Requested Bath BID to relocate planter in city centre cycle parking area to allow access for non-standard cycles.
- Advised on cargo bike offering in council's e-bike loan scheme.
- Worked with officer to explore taking part in University of Westminster barriers removal research project, unfortunately we weren't able to identify an eligible route.
- Raised issue of lack of communications around Two Tunnels closures - since then it has been included in weekly council e-comms.
- Requested adjustment of timing for traffic lights at Beckford Rd/Bathwick Street junction to allow cyclists more time to cross.
- Advised officers regarding best diversion for North Parade closure, scheduled for May 2024.
- Met with Cabinet Member for Children's Services to discuss School Streets.
- Suggested a task group on School Streets for Climate Emergency and Sustainability and Children's, Adults, Health and Wellbeing Policy Development and Scrutiny Panels.
- Requested more cycle storage at Bath leisure centre - installed in April 2024.

Councillor John Leach – Member Advocate for Climate Resilience

This is a new area of activity for B&NES. In addition to my self-education and research, I have participated in events organised by WECA; Climate Resilience is, in many cases, a matter best dealt with regionally rather than locally. WECA and

national services such as The Met Office are actively developing practices and tools that will be very helpful for B&NES as it develops its specific plans.

I have contributed to the Local Plan Options consultation. The Local Plan will govern buildings and developments that will be expected to endure well into the next century and by then the climate those developments will be faced with is certain to be very much harsher than the moderate climate we have enjoyed in the past. It is essential the Local Plan ensures that all new developments can withstand and continue to function fully in the climate we should be anticipating decades from now.

Councillor Ruth Malloy – Member Advocate for Great Spa Towns of Europe and Twinning

The Great Spa Towns of Europe

During this administrative year, the third General Assembly (GA) of the Great Spa Towns of Europe Association (GSTE) took place in Montecatini Terme (Italy) in October 2023. The annual internal audit in Baden-Baden (Germany) was in February 2024, followed by the fourth GSTE GA in Bad Kissingen (Germany) in April 2024. Very successful Site Managers' meetings & Urban Planning workshops also took place in Montecatini Terme and Bad Kissingen. For more detailed information about these two General Assemblies, please visit the GSTE website www.greatspatownsofeurope.eu and then go to - The Great Spa Towns - Press Room - Press Releases.

The Joint City of Bath & GSTE World Heritage Sites Management Plan for the next 6 years is a work in progress, with a stakeholder workshop scheduled for 20th May. The new GSTE Secretary General Chiara Ronchini, in post since February 2023, is closely involved in this process.

Tony Crouch, former City of Bath World Heritage Officer, is now the GSTE Site Manager for Bath and Adrian Neilson is the City of Bath Principal World Heritage Officer, both working in their new roles since autumn 2023.

Professor Barry Gilbertson, former Chair of the City of Bath World Heritage Site Advisory Board, retired at the end of April after 7 years of voluntary service, and is succeeded in the role by Marion Harney, Professor of Building and Landscape Conservation at the University of Bath.

The Bath World Heritage Enhancement Fund continues its support of local conservation work, overseen by the Bath WHS Advisory Board and coordinated by the Bath Preservation Trust. It is now principally funded via the Bath Neighbourhood CIL Fund, rather than directly by B&NES Council as previously; the Bath Preservation Trust also contributes financially.

Twining

Bath/Aix-en-Provence Twining Association (BAenPTA)

As usual, there has been a full programme of events, one per month, often taking place at the BRLSI. A particular highlight was a citizens' trip to Aix-en-Provence in September 2023 to visit several beautiful gardens and art installations in and around the town.

Bath/Alkmaar Twining Association (BATA)

In October 2023 four committee members were invited to Alkmaar for a seminar about City-to-City partnerships, which brought together delegates from Bath, Bergama, Darmstadt, Tata and Troyes. It was an enriching experience to hear how the different towns are facing similar challenges, and their approaches to dealing with them. A 'Tree of Freedom' was planted by senior representatives of each town to commemorate the visit. In February 2024 there was a special BATA-sponsored showing of the film *Occupied City* at the Little Theatre Cinema, and efforts to link up Bath and Alkmaar community growers (among others) continue. The 'Alkmaar Cafés' are a popular monthly social event, to which all are welcome!

Bath/Braunschweig Twining Association (BBTA)

There has been a full programme, including the Münsterchor's visit to Bath in October, when they sang in many of our churches. Bridge exchanges have continued, both online and in-person in Braunschweig, and an online book group with our counterpart twining association in Braunschweig. There was a civic visit to Braunschweig by the Mayor of Bath in August 2023 for the official opening of the Bath Garten, followed by a recent civic visit to Bath by the Lord Mayor of Braunschweig, who was accompanied by a delegation of ten (most of whom were self-funding), in April 2024.

The BBTA has been working with the British German Association to explore how we can make twining more appealing, especially to younger people. This is also one of the key aims of the European Local Partnerships Working Group (affiliated to the European Movement), which the BAenPTA, BATA and BBTA are all involved in. BAenPTA Chair Marian McNeir was instrumental in setting it up.

The BATA, BBTA and BAenPTA once again took turns, over the space of a week, running a Christmas Market chalet at the side of the Guildhall. It was a great opportunity to promote our twining links, as well as sell typical products from the Netherlands, Germany and France.

Bath/Kaposvár Twining Association (BKTA)

There was a memorial service for longstanding member Valerie Inwood in February 2024, which many current and former BKTA members attended, including Alderman

Peter Metcalfe. Sadly, very little progress has been made on reconvening the BKTA, but I'm hopeful this will happen in the near future.

Bath/Beppu Friendship Association (BBFA)

There was a civic visit to Bath by the Mayor of Beppu, Japan in August 2023 (part of a much larger European tour), followed by a special civic visit to Beppu by the Mayor of Bath in April 2024, to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Beppu municipality.

The Twinning Forum usually meets two or three times a year, but not on a regular basis. I'd like to suggest that the Twinning Forum convenes perhaps only twice a year, but on dates that are fixed well in advance, to aid maximum attendance of all participants. I'd also like to invite Cllr. Kevin Guy to attend these meetings to tell us how the Bath-Oleksandriya Friendship partnership is developing.

For further information about the Twinning/Friendship Associations, please visit www.mayorofbath.co.uk/twinning-associations and www.bathnes.gov.uk/services/tourism-and-heritage/twinning. Please promote our international links and encourage your residents to connect with their counterparts (groups and individuals) in our twin cities!

Councillor Sarah Moore – Member Advocate for Accessibility

This year I have met with several groups and residents to discuss everyday issues they experience across our area. I am currently compiling a member's checklist/guidance sheet to help them identify problems or improvements in their individual wards to help with making our whole area more accessible for all. I have continued to promote the importance of accessibility issues directly with Cabinet members and officers, as well as through the Equalities Advisory Group.

Councillor Michelle O'Doherty – Member Advocate for Homeless People

For the past 12 months, I have helped where I can with a local soup run group, where I speak to some of the most vulnerable members of our society, and I have been able to help advocate for individuals when accessing services to help them. The landscape for this group remains very worrying, with numbers of those at risk of homelessness increasing by 40% over the past year in BANES. The causes of this are largely down to an increase in Section 21 (no fault) evictions in recent years, plus the added pressure of the cost-of-living crisis, meaning that numbers needing temporary accommodation continues to rise each year, which comes at a huge cost: emotionally for those who need to use it, and financial for the local authority.

A new temporary accommodation unit has opened up this year in Oldfield Park, which can house up to 11 households which will help to relieve some of the pressure

on finances as it will mean fewer people being accommodated in hotels (£30pn v £70pn).

I asked for a report on homeless health to come to the Children, Adults, Health & Wellbeing PDS panel, which highlighted the complex health issues which affect this very vulnerable group of people. I was also able to advocate for this group with the Cabinet members for Resources and for the Built Environment about how trying to protect services for the homeless was important in terms of the Council's budget. I know that services providers are working hard with the Council to ensure delivery of the best services at the best value to ensure that support does not fall of a cliff-edge. With rising numbers needing our help, retaining as much support will be ever more vital, and I will continue to challenge for keeping as much as a non-statutory preventative support as possible.

Homelessness is an incredibly complex area, and it's difficult to do justice to it in a short report such as this, but I would be very happy to talk to any Councillor about what they can do to help.

Councillor Shaun Stephenson-McGall – Member Advocate for Active Travel – North East Somerset & LGBTQ+ issues

Active Travel – North East Somerset

I've been working with my colleague, Cllr Saskia Heijltjes (Lambridge Ward, Green) and Member Advocate for Active Travel (Bath) to be a critical friend of the Administration to move quicker and further on Active Travel across North East Somerset and Bath.

We have had various meetings with Cllr Sarah Warren and various B&NES Officers on this topic. I've attended various webinars on this and related topics by organisations like Livings Streets, WeArePossible, and others. I've had regular meetings and email exchanges with representatives of Walk Ride Bath and other active travel advocates. I have requested and received updates on various projects including the LCWIP, Upper Bristol Road, Beckford Road, and of course the Active Travel Master Plan.

Alongside this role, I am the B&NES Council representative on the Joint Local Access Forum where I'm working with others to improve Public Rights of Ways across B&NES, Bristol, and South Gloucestershire.

LGBTQ+ issues

This year I attended the LGA LGBTQ+ Cllrs Weekend at the University of Warwick where we explore some of the critical challenges facing LGBTQ+ elected members given the societal pressures facing LGBTQ+ communities. I participated in very

useful discussions around issues for consideration as a LGBTQ+ elected member including:

- Importance of visibility and role modelling
- How to support LGBTQ+
- Acceptance by colleagues
- Being comfortable in showing their true self
- Dealing with abuse of social media

I met with the other Equalities Champions to input into the Councils annual Communications Plan around Equalities.

I've have had meetings together with B&NES Officers with the organisers of Bath Pride which is planned for Sunday 18th August later this year.

I have been liaising with the Director of Public Health to ensure B&NES Council contributes to the South West network of local authority sexual health public health team on a response on the state of HIV & Sexual Health services in the UK to the recent request by the APPG on HIV, AIDS & Sexual Health. Associated work is ongoing with Officers around the general health needs of this community including work to reduce the higher late diagnosis of HIV rates we have in B&NES.

Recently I have also initiated discussions with Officers around the housing needs of the LBGT+ community within B&NES.

Councillor Sam Ross - Member Advocate for Rural Housing & Community Buildings

Rural Housing

Affordable housing is an ongoing challenge. Homes are being built out of the reach of people in terms of affordability, forcing people out of their local communities. In rural areas, this is exacerbated by movement out of urban areas, creating rural commuter belts and raising prices further. In addition, across the country, 1 million people are on council house waiting lists and the demographic is changing to more young professionals and families.

After speaking with key officers, I can report that there is an ongoing programme of work in the council to work with parishes looking to meet housing needs within their community. There are also several projects across the district in varying stages of progress, including, Clutton, Corston, Radstock and Timsbury.

Key challenges are:

- Getting buy-in from local parish councils to start the process – they are required to drive the process, acknowledge the local need, carry out community surveys and create/update Neighbourhood Plans alongside the new Local Plan.
- Acquiring land - rural exception sites are needed outside housing boundaries to ring-fence homes for local people. In addition, Community Land Trusts are required to keep homes available for local people in perpetuity.
- Managing objections within the community – keeping parish councillors on board through negative encounters.
- Providing different types of homes for different life stages – affordable housing providers require a mixed and balanced community.

Notable points:

- Affordable housing and social housing are being built to higher standards, and energy efficiency than most market-rate homes within B&NES, which is to be supported and commended.
- The West of England Rural Network (WERN) is appointing a Rural Housing Enabler, who will work with housing officers, policy officers, parish councils, affordable housing providers, landowners, cabinet members etc. to make more progress.
- There was a request from officers to get all interested parties together more often to discuss the way forward and I will endeavour to do this, as advocate, in the coming year.

Community Buildings

Community buildings are all a vital part of rural life including, shops, pubs, and village halls. The existence (or lack thereof) of these buildings is often high on the list for people considering moving to a particular area.

Through the LDF Steering Group, and talking with officers, I have suggested that more than just schools should be considered when providing large-scale housing development. Improvements to existing infrastructure and the development of new buildings are equally important and need to be included in S106 funding agreements, even for moderate or small developments, which are more common in rural areas.

Councillor George Tomlin – Member Advocate for Social Housing Tenants

- Engaged with the Cabinet Member and Cabinet Project Lead over the role B&NES can play in promoting higher standards and a greater voice for social housing tenants in our area.
- Met with representatives from several housing associations who operate in our authority to push for better treatment of their tenants.
- Supported the newly launched Social Housing Damp and Mould charter and lobbied those registered providers operating in B&NES who are yet to sign up to do so.
- However, there is much more to be done to advocate for social housing tenants, and to push for more accountability for the service provided by registered providers in B&NES.

Councillor Andy Wait – Member Advocate for Rivers and Waterways

In my first year I have learned about the complexities of the organisations with responsibilities for maintaining our rivers and indeed the complexities of the river systems themselves.

Our rivers are under stress from years of neglect and pollution. They are in a very poor state. Improving them will require cooperation between several agencies and vast amounts of cash.

Some of these organisations are underfunded like the Environment Agency whilst others, for example, the water companies see rivers as a dumping ground for their mismanagement.

The solution is firm Government legislation, generous funding and reorganisation of those nationally and locally responsible for safeguarding our rivers.