

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

FUTURE FOR BATH VISION

A REVIEW BY THE MAJOR PROJECTS & EXTERNAL BODIES PANEL

PANEL MEMBERS

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Chair's Introduction

This report is the cumulative outcome of four month's work investigating the Bath Vision, separate from the overall B&NES Vision currently evolving, within our initial terms of reference subject to the time scale involved. The report includes many recommendations and directions for further work we consider remains to be undertaken.

Our aim has been to help the understanding of public, member and officer knowledge of the Vision to date, together with views of external organisations, and to provide direction and support to help to progress a Vision whose basic tenets the Panel gives full support. Bath cannot stand still; we have to be prepared to consider new ideas and approaches.

I would like to thank all the panel members for their work and commitment to this piece of work as well as all the officers and members of the public who have contributed to our deliberations especially Bethan Grant and David Stephenson.

Councillor Charles Gerrish

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The Future for Bath is a vision developed to bring future development direction to the City of Bath and to redefine its identity as a world class heritage site. The Vision has been agreed in principle by the Council Executive and a role has been identified for Overview and Scrutiny to assist in developing the strategy in its early stages. The Major Projects and External Bodies O & S Panel formed a steering group with officers in spring 2006 to take forward this review.

The Panel had their first meeting on 4th July 2006 and completed their work in October 2006. Their findings and recommendations were presented to the Executive on 21st November 2006.

The aim of this review is to assist the Council Executive in the process of moving the Vision from a set of aspirations to an implementation plan.

The objectives of the review are to:

- Understand the dynamics of the city's position in the region
- Encourage strong corporate ownership and understanding of the Future for Bath
- Make recommendations concerning the implementation of the Vision
- Comment on the Council's relationship with strategic local partners and key government agencies
- Make recommendations concerning governance arrangements needed to deliver the Vision

APPROACH

The review has been conducted by undertaking a panel briefing, a series of public contributor sessions, consultation with local business and organisations, a panel visit and discussion with the Council Executive. The Panel discussed their conclusions and developed their recommendations at a workshop in October 2006.

FINDINGS

The Panel heard that Bath is facing a number of challenges in terms of housing, retail, jobs, transport and the wider economy. The Panel recognises the challenges that must be addressed and believe that the Vision is vital for securing the future prosperity and well-being of the residents, businesses and those that work in the City. The Panel strongly agree with the assertion highlighted in the Vision that '**Doing nothing is not an option**' and believe that delivery of the Vision will enhance the effectiveness of the Council across the board.

The Panel recognises the scale of the Vision and the work required in order to make this a reality. The strategy encompasses a wide scope of interrelated issues that cannot be addressed in isolation. Similarly, Bath and North East

Somerset Council will not be able to deliver this Vision on its own. Joined-up working across the Council will have to be matched by strong partnership working with key strategic local and regional organisations.

The Panel identified a number of key issues which it believes the Council, the Executive and officers across B&NES will need to focus on if the Vision is to become a reality. Briefly, these are:

- Highest level of corporate commitment and support
- Highest level of political commitment and promotion
- Stronger joint-working across the Council and its Service Teams
- Close working with the Business Community to promote internal growth and inward investment and stimulate the job market
- Work more creatively to harness the potential of the Council's assets
- Promote and effectively communicate the objectives of the Vision to the community

The Panel's individual recommendations are presented throughout the *Findings* section of this report and are brought together in the final chapter of the report along with its conclusions.

INTRODUCTION

CONTEXT

Bath is a city faced with a challenge. Confronted with the fact that it has not kept pace with levels of economic growth and prosperity enjoyed by other similarly sized cities, concerted and decisive steps now have to be taken to stem any further economic atrophy. In recognition of this, the Council has been working to develop a plan or a Vision for the City, which addresses these challenges and builds on opportunities in order to maintain Bath's status as a world class city – a place for people to enjoy visiting, living and working in.

The Council has embarked on a process to establish a vision for the future of the area which focuses on harnessing the potential of the City of Bath ("The Future for Bath"). Building on the historic strengths of the City, the Vision identifies a series of themes which uniquely position the City, both nationally and internationally.

It also establishes a clear role for Bath within the South West region and the West of England sub-region. It provides a basis for securing the long term success of Bath as a key driver for the local economy across Bath & North East Somerset and as a place for local residents to visit, shop, learn, work and enjoy.

Since the project commenced, the Council has progressed Vision work across the rest of the Authority. This wider visioning work may well be the subject of Overview in the future.

WHAT IS THE VISION?

Bath and North East Somerset Council has embarked on a process to establish a long-term vision for the enhancement and development of Bath's city centre. The Future for Bath Vision seeks to build on the historic strengths and distinctiveness of Bath to reinvigorate the identity and future economy of the City for the benefit of residents and visitors alike. It identifies a series of key themes including Health and Wellbeing, Enjoyment and Fun, Creativity, "Smart City" which could shape the economic and spatial expansion of the City centre and uniquely position Bath regionally, nationally and internationally. The Vision was developed by the Development & Major Projects Team during early 2005 and approved by the Council Executive in July 05. The Vision was developed further by the production of two key documents:

- The Business Plan for Bath and;
- A Vision for Bath Spatial Framework

The Business Plan (by Ernst & Young) was undertaken to validate and challenge the original Vision, whilst the analysis set out some strategies for developing the overall economy and regenerating the City for both residents and visitors. The Spatial Framework (by Terence O'Rourke Ltd) translated the findings in the

Business Plan into a spatial interpretation and sought to understand the city by exploring its history and through an analysis of how the city works today. Both the Business Plan and the Spatial Framework are working documents and should be considered part of an ongoing process.

A report on these studies was considered by the Council Executive in January 2006 and accepted as the basis for the preparation of planning policy guidance and further public consultation. The creation of a focused Vision for Bath is designed to ensure that the Council can plan for the future. Without a vision the Council will find it difficult to deal with planning applications and without a properly adopted Planning framework the Council will not be in a position to maximise contributions from each development towards the investment required in the city centre. The production of a vision will also help to support financial applications to government bodies and agencies.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

See Appendix I for the full Terms of Reference for this Review.

Aim

The Panel fully supports the work being done within the Council and with its partners to address the challenges that lie ahead. The Panel is keen to help move this Vision, currently a set of aspirations to a fully worked up implementation plan that everyone understands and is signed up and ready to deliver.

The aim of this review therefore is to support the Vision work in its early stages, helping to ensure that a shared understanding of the Vision is embedded at the heart of the Council and informs further strategic & policy decision-making.

Objectives

The Review set out to:

- Understand the dynamics of the City's position in the region, in both competitive and interdependent terms, and make a recommendation concerning the time parameters that should be linked to the process of delivering the Future for Bath Vision.
- Encourage strong corporate ownership and understanding of the 'Future for Bath' by raising awareness amongst key services of the role they play in the Vision's delivery, and by aligning competing aspirations within the Council.
- Make recommendations concerning the implementation process of the Vision and the Council's relationship with strategic local partners and key government agencies, commenting on the role of the Local Area Agreement in the delivery of the Vision and the resources required throughout the Council to implement the Vision.

- Make recommendations concerning the governance arrangements that need to be put in place for the delivery of the Vision to ensure that there is a cohesive and accountable process of delegation and reporting.

SCOPE

The Panel looked at the Future for Bath Vision at a strategic level and did not address issues of detail concerning the delivery of the Vision.

The Panel was not able to address issues specifically relating to Climate Change within the scope of this review, but recognise that the Vision should take full account of this agenda and seek to address the emerging challenges that it presents.

The Panel believes this will need to be the subject of further work across the Council.

APPROACH

REVIEW ACTIVITIES

The Panel used a number of investigation methods and sources to inform their work:

Panel Briefing

The panel received a briefing on June 19th 2006 from the Major Projects Team which highlighted:

- Bath's history & current status
- Challenges facing the city
- Opportunities for delivering change
- What Bath could look like in 20 years time

Contributor Sessions

Officers from key service areas at B&NES Council explained what their role would be in supporting delivery of the Vision. These presentations highlighted:

- Their understanding of the Vision
- What role they will have to play to help deliver the Vision
- Resource and capacity implications for their service areas

The Panel invited representatives from key local & strategic organisations and government agencies to offer their views on the Vision. The Panel was keen to hear:

- How well B&NES is progressing the Vision
- What B&NES should do to maximise the benefits of its relationships with these organisations

Questionnaires

A questionnaire was sent to a range of local organisations and businesses. This sought to gauge levels of understanding within the community about what the Vision means to them, specifically asking:

- What was the current level of understanding of the Vision
- How well the Council are communicating with the local community

A modified version of this questionnaire was sent to all Members of B&NES Council to determine the level of understanding that Councillors feel they have about the Vision and what role they feel they have in helping to deliver it.

Panel Visit

Members of the Panel and the Steering Group visited Gloucester on 18 October 2006.

The group met:

- The Chief Executive of Gloucester Heritage Urban Regeneration Company and;
- Officers from Gloucester City and Gloucestershire Council

The purpose of this visit was to learn about another Local Authority's experience of employing a separate delivery mechanism to deliver a long-term regeneration strategy.

Developing Recommendations

The Panel met on 10 October 2006 to consider their findings and begin developing their recommendations.

Reporting

The final report was presented to the Executive after a public panel meeting on November 21st 2006.

FINDINGS

THE CITY OF BATH

Bath is a unique, historical city located in the Avon Valley in a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Home to over 80,000 people and founded on the only naturally occurring thermal spa in the country, Bath has enjoyed a reputation as a thriving tourist destination as well as being a highly desirable place to live.

Steeped in history, Bath has established itself an international reputation for its fine Georgian architecture, renowned educational institutes, creative community, characteristic shops and its enviable quality of life. Its status as a UNESCO World Heritage site serves to underline the strengths of this exceptional city. Bath is also a key driver for prosperity across the sub-region and provides an economic focus for many of the outlying towns and villages in the district.

But despite all this, the City now faces a number of challenges; challenges that it will have to successfully address if it is to maintain its position as a great place to live in and a number one choice for people to visit.

THE DYNAMICS OF THE CITY

The review sought to understand the dynamics of the city, spelling out the aspirations for Bath as laid out in the Vision and identifying the risks and possible outcomes associated with not pursuing a long-term strategy. Using the Vision for Bath Business Plan, the panel briefing, findings from the questionnaire and information presented by key service officers, the review has established a detailed picture of Bath today and the challenges that it will be facing in the future.

This section outlines these findings and summarises the information that the Panel heard to help inform their decision making.

Housing

The Vision seeks to:

- To ensure that Bath has a comprehensive housing offer across the full range of housing supply, addressing both type and tenure
- To ensure that quality, sustainability and distinctiveness are built into housing opportunities.
- To ensure that new housing promotes increased well being and quality of life

Bath and North East Somerset currently has some of the highest house prices outside of the South East of England and prices are rising on a daily basis. In 2004 the average house price in B&NES was £235,000 – 29% higher than the UK

average¹. At the same time the amount of housing being constructed in the district has not kept pace with the rate of development across the rest of the West of England. New dwelling stock in the district has risen by only 6.2% over the period 1991-2002, compared with an 8.9% rise across the rest of the sub-region². The strong demand for housing and the shortfall in new homes has helped to drive prices up to the point where many people that currently live or work in the City have been priced out of the market.

The market has been squeezed further by the number of properties being bought by people looking for weekend or holiday residences and by the number that have been purchased on a buy-to-let basis, often as Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs). The affordability gap in the property market is now such that young professionals earning modest amounts between £25–£40k are experiencing significant problems in getting onto the housing ladder.

As property becomes more unaffordable for those living in Bath, the likelihood is that first-time buyers will start looking elsewhere to get their feet on the property ladder. This out-migration of residents will not only impact on the vibrancy of the City centre but will also place additional pressures on a stretched transport network as they commute into the City to work. It is also likely that the high prices will deter a great number of people, principally those on lower or middle incomes, from looking for jobs in the City at all.

Larger employers based in the City are already reporting that they are facing difficulties recruiting staff at the right level, and are identifying that it is the steep cost of housing that is deterring potential employees moving to the City. If this problem continues to be an issue, it is not difficult to see that this may also become a deterrent to future employers locating to the City.

The Panel acknowledged that this was not a problem that can be solved easily or quickly. While the Council needs to grapple with the immediate pressing concerns of a lack of affordable housing for low-income workers, they also need to look ahead to see how the needs of middle and higher-income workers will be met in the future.

A large proportion of new development will be accommodated in the Bath Western Riverside site, with an additional 91 units (23 of which are affordable housing) located in the new Southgate development. Further opportunities for sites that are large enough to provide enough housing stock will be limited by a number of heritage and green-belt constraints. The study by Ernst & Young concludes that even if Bath is able to provide the amount of housing laid out in the RSS, there will still be a shortfall in the amount of affordable property. This fact was underlined by the Head of Housing services who estimated that 30% of the City's population will always struggle to earn enough to buy a property in Bath.

¹ p58, Business Plan for Bath, Ernst & Young, 2005

² p63, Business Plan for Bath, Ernst & Young, 2005

Streetscape and the Public Realm

The Vision seeks to:

- Ensure that the streetscape and Public Realm is enhanced in keeping with the World Heritage Status.
- Ensure that public spaces become active places
- Ensure that the public realm is distinctive and inspiring
- Ensure that the City engages with the opportunities the river presents

The decay and neglect of a significant number of buildings and public areas in the City is a key challenge that will need to be addressed if the Vision is to be realised. One of the key draws of the City both as a tourist attraction and a place to live has been the wonderful architectural heritage and public spaces that have contributed to Bath being designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Bath was awarded World Heritage status in 1987 in recognition of its internationally important Roman and Georgian heritage and archaeology, its culture as a Spa, the innovative architecture and town planning and the harmony between the City and the landscape. World Heritage is about understanding the importance of the City and its setting. It is about pride of place and making sure that while the City enjoys what it has today, it can also hand it on to future generations.

However, many parts of the City are failing to meet the standards that would be expected to meet World Heritage site status. In many areas there is a poor relationship between the car and the pedestrian, making it difficult for tourists and residents alike to move around the historic core. Elsewhere, a significant lack of investment in the built environment and an excess of street furniture is starting to have a detrimental effect on the look and feel of the City.

If this is allowed to decline even further and there is a lack of attention and investment directed toward improving and maintaining the public realm, this will almost certainly have an adverse impact on the City as a place that tourists will want to visit and people would want to live and work.

The Panel heard from the Bath Preservation Trust that the Council cannot be complacent about this issue. World Heritage Status could be withdrawn. While this is not an immediate threat, if the current decline is allowed to continue then the Council may have to confront the fact that this could be a reality.

The Council's Public Realm Champion, Cllr Sarah Webb also stressed the importance of investing in and maintaining what is one of the City's greatest assets. In the same way that other towns of significant historical importance, such as Stratford upon Avon have made concerted efforts to preserve and enhance the public realm, so too should Bath be doing much more to address this problem. The Panel heard that while preservation of the public realm has

been officially embedded in the corporate plan as an Improvement Priority, there is as yet no overarching policy or strategy to manage the public realm.

The Planning, Transportation, Economy and Sustainability Overview and Scrutiny Panel produced a detailed report in 2004 on the Urban Public Realm³. This highlighted the need for ownership across the Council of the public realm and the Panel does not believe that the full thrust of this report and its Executive response has yet embedded across service areas.

Retail

The Vision seeks to:

- Ensure that Bath promotes a distinctive shopping experience at the leading edge of retail development
- That Bath is seen as the place for high quality, locally produced goods and foods

Bath has a strong and vibrant retail sector, offering a unique mix of high street chains and smaller independent businesses. Focused on the 'spine' that runs north/south from Milsom Street through to Southgate Shopping Centre, there is a distinctive mix of shops and outlets that has prevented Bath from becoming a 'clone-town' like many similarly sized cities.

The current redevelopment of the Southgate area is likely to have a huge impact on the shopping centre. This redevelopment will take place over the next 4 and half years and will introduce a number of significant improvements to an area currently occupied by an out-dated 1960s precinct. The amount of floor space will be increased, surrounding streets and transport access will be improved and there will also be the addition of a number of residential units.

It will be vital that this redevelopment project is managed effectively and within the timescales that have been outlined. While it is acknowledged that there will be a certain amount of disruption while construction is being carried out, completion of the area by 2010 will be crucial if Bath is to maintain its competitive edge. Elsewhere in the South-West, places like Bristol and Swindon are expanding and developing their retail centres. The development of Broadmead in Bristol in particular is likely to present one of the biggest threats to the retail market in Bath.

The Vision recognises therefore that Bath needs to play to its strengths and maintain and build upon this unique retail experience. It has to provide a good range of everyday shops so that residents are able to shop locally, whilst ensuring that smaller, independent retailers are present which will attract shoppers to the City in search of more distinctive products. With the Council owning large amounts of retail space in the centre, they are uniquely placed as

³ PTES Report on Urban Public Realm can be found at www.bathnes.gov.uk/scrutiny

landlord to encourage and facilitate the mix of retailers that are needed to maintain this diverse retail offer.

Work

The Vision seeks to:

- Realise the economic benefits that the Universities can bring to the City, releasing its commercial potential as a research facility
- Increase the amount of work accommodation for all types of business use
- Build a stronger private sector employment base, providing roles which can offer 'through career opportunities', adding to the skills base and wealth creation in the city.
- Build on the reputation of Bath in the field of water and healing to develop a distinctive cluster

The job market in Bath is largely dominated by the public sector and the tourism industry. There are few large private sector employers offering high-quality, well-paid jobs. So, while there is near-full employment in the City there is a lack of opportunities for people in the skilled sector who would be attracted by positions offering a structured career development plan.

This lack of a range of job opportunities is severely restricting the ability of aspiring residents and university graduates to develop their careers and move up the ladder while staying in the City. It is also acting as a deterrent to people wishing to move to the City and relocate.

This problem is being exacerbated by a lack of dedicated, modern business and office space, particularly that which is suitable for start up and smaller businesses. The Council is ideally placed in its role as landlord to make strong interventions in this area and work with developers to provide suitable new office space that will help to attract new business to the City.

If these issues are not tackled, there are a number of consequences that will not only see people leaving the City in search of employment elsewhere, but will also impact on the housing market and compound the issue of affordability.

Visit

The Vision seeks to:

- Promotion of Bath as a 'Spa' City
- Provision of a high quality tourist experience where visitor stay is extended
- Enhance the cultural and visitor offering
- Promote the City as a world class venue for sport and recreation

Bath's principal industry is tourism. It is the most visited place outside of London for international visitors and the industry clearly plays a significant role in keeping the local economy buoyant. Visitors come to Bath because of the wide range of heritage attractions and the shopping experience that is unique to the City. However following a sharp decline in the number of visitors over the 2000/01 period the City has failed to regain the number of visitors that it once used to enjoy.

Visitors are key in bringing in large amount of money to the City, generating revenue in shops, attractions and the hotel sector. Research in the Business Plan reveals that while there is an evenly distributed spread of the age of visitors coming to the City, there is a larger percentage of older visitors (55 and above) as compared to visitors in other parts of the country. Typically this older visitor is in search of a high quality experience and will generally have more disposable income that they will be spending in the City – there is a huge market out there to be captured.

If Bath is to drive up visitor numbers, the number of hotel beds will have to keep pace with the demand. Similarly if the City is to capitalise on the lucrative business tourism sector, appropriate accommodation will have to be provided to meet this need.

Transport

The Vision seeks to:

- To redefine the hierarchy of road uses promoting pedestrian usage
- To ensure that the City is fully accessible
- To ensure a high quality public transport system is established

Bath is already facing a number of significant challenges as far as transport is concerned. The majority of trips (more than 80%⁴) in the B&NES area are taken by car, and even though there are a relatively high number of people that walk to work in the City, there is significant congestion in the centre of Bath for much of the working day. Current forecasts estimate that if left unchecked, traffic levels in the City will continue to grow.

As the review's questionnaire revealed, transport is one of the issues that local people feel most strongly about with 80% of respondents saying that this is the area that will be key to supporting a prosperous future for Bath. Respondents believe that levels of congestion are not only slowing down the economic

⁴ A 20 Year Vision for the Principal Transportation Network in Bath & North East Somerset, Chapter 5.2

productivity of the City but are helping to detract from the look and feel of the City by contributing to air pollution and creating obstacles for pedestrians and cyclists.

The council has planned a range of interventions to address these existing issues and to achieve what is laid out in the Vision. A package of measures will focus on increased Park and Ride provision, an improved public transport offer through bus showcase routes and the development of a new bus rapid transit system linking Bath Western Riverside to the City.

The current strategy in transport terms is the Joint Local Transport plan, a five year planning document that looks forward to 2011. Work on this was undertaken jointly with Bristol City Council, South Gloucester and North Somerset, in recognition of the number of cross-boundary issues affecting these four authorities. While the LTP is the formal plan, the Vision looks well beyond 2011 and there is a lot more to be done to achieve its aspirations.

The funding allocated through the LTP process will not however be enough to deliver all of Bath's aspirations and so a separate bid for a major scheme (the Bath Package) has also been submitted for consideration through the Major Schemes funding route. It is this package of measures which will deliver the necessary step-change in the provision of public transport for the area – addressing existing capacity and congestion issues and providing the essential infrastructure for new development in Bath Western Riverside and beyond.

In tandem, work is also being undertaken across the same four local highway authorities on a project looking at innovative solutions to address congestion using pricing and demand management mechanisms. The Transport Innovation Fund has provided pump-prime funding to the four Authorities for a study looking at the options for introducing some form of demand management either through congestion charging or road pricing.

There is no guarantee however, that the Council will be able to secure much of the funding that is needed to support the aspirations in the plan. If money from the Department for Transport does not come through then this will seriously impact on the ability of the Council to deliver the necessary transport solutions. The Panel believes that alternative funding options should continue to be explored.

DELIVERING THE VISION

On July 4th, the Panel held their first contributor session in public and invited officers from relevant service areas across the Council to talk to the Panel about how they believed that service area would be contributing the delivery of the Vision. A pre-brief had been held, to which service areas were invited, to explain what the Panel would be looking to learn from these presentations. The Panel heard evidence from officers in:

- Housing
- Planning
- Highways & Transportation

- Economic Development
- Property Services
- Environmental Services and;
- Education⁵

Copies of the officer's presentations are attached to this report in Annex VI and recorded in the minutes of the meetings.

The Panel wants to comment specifically on one issue that they believe will be vital to informing future work on the Vision and enabling its delivery:

Transport

The Panel recognises that failure to successfully tackle traffic and congestion in the City will seriously impact on the ability of the Council to deliver the Vision. The Panel supports the aspiration of a car-free city centre within the lifetime of the Vision and supports the role that Park and Ride has to play. The Panel recommends that work is undertaken to contribute to driving down traffic and congestion levels in the historic core:

Recommendation: that work is undertaken to consider the feasibility of introducing low-carbon public transport options and;

Recommendation: that work is undertaken to review the current bus routes that traverse the City centre

In addition to learning more about the issues that Bath faces, the Panel wanted to understand how geared up different areas of the Council are to delivering what is required of the Vision, finding out where pressures might arise and what risks are associated with the aspirations identified in the strategy.

Understanding and Contribution

Officers outlined their current and future workstreams, identifying strategies that would be key to achieving long-term objectives such as:

- The joint Local Transport Plan
- The Local Plan (or Local Development Framework)
- Supplementary Planning Guidance and Supplementary Planning Documents
- Development Plan Documents
- The Economic Strategy

⁵ Because of a lack of time on July 4th, Education Services presented their evidence to the Panel on Sept 4th.

Representatives from the Service Areas were aware of the work that was being undertaken by Major Projects to progress the Vision; however there was scant indication that their own future plans were being influenced by the Vision.

Joint-Working

There are a number of existing mechanisms and meetings that are being used as opportunities to keep different service areas up to speed with developments on the Vision work being carried out by Major Projects. Weekly Monday morning meetings are attended by representation from various service departments with an interest in the built environment. Executive Members Cllr Darracott and Cllr Curran attend on a monthly basis. These allow regular opportunities for key messages to be shared and updates to be received.

In order to specifically tackle the issue of ensuring joined-up working between the services, the Council has established the B&NES Development Group. The Development Group has representation from each service area in the Council and reports to the B&NES Development Board – the project board which is charged with taking forward the Vision.

While there are clear opportunities for joined-up working at a senior level, it is less clear what opportunities there are for more junior and middle ranking members of staff to keep up to date with developments. The level of awareness within directorates at a lower level depends very much on individual managers and senior level staff disseminating these messages to teams. This was highlighted by one service, conceding that some members of staff may not be well-informed enough to see the 'bigger picture'.

The Panel believes it is vital for the aims and objectives of the Vision to be communicated and understood by officers throughout service areas and at all grades. They were concerned that although individual service areas might appear to be clear about what their individual role will be in contributing to the delivery of the Vision, they heard less evidence about how service areas would be working across teams or with their Executive Member – indeed none of the presentations explicitly referred to joint-work being undertaken.

The Panel concluded that there appeared to be an insufficient understanding across the Council of the Vision and how it can be achieved. The Panel are concerned there is evidence that directorates/departments are still working in policy 'silos' and have not yet demonstrated the kind of joined-up thinking that will be necessary to deliver an overarching strategy like the Vision.

The Panel recognises the benefits that have been achieved from having the Vision developed and driven through by one service area – Development and Major Projects – but at the point where ideas have to be translated into an implementation plan, the Panel believes it is vital there is much closer joint-working between service areas, officers and Executive Members covering all areas of the Council.

The Panel believes that it is vital for the aims and objectives of the Vision to be communicated and understood by officers throughout service areas and at all grades. Improving the interface between Service Areas will also be crucial to ensure that work on the Vision is taken forward in a coherent and joined-up fashion. The Panel believes this is as much a culture issue as it is one of communication. The Panel considered the benefits of establishing a 'Futures Team', harnessing the creative thinking of officers across the Council to bring together different perspectives from a range of service areas.

Recommendation: There should be a role for the Cultural Change Programme in promulgating a 'can-do' culture, communicating, educating and instigating the necessary step-change in corporate understanding and commitment across the Council.

Recommendation: To investigate what other mechanisms might be harnessed to disseminate progress on the Vision and maintain momentum.

Recommendation: To consider the establishment (possibly on secondment) of a 'Futures Team' – an officer group to promote creative thinking and cross-departmental working with a reduced focus on risk assessment.

CAPACITY

The Panel heard from each service area how well equipped they thought they are to help support delivery of the Vision. It emerged that at the time there were a number of concerns both about resources in terms of both funding and staffing levels. Specifically there were some concerns raised regarding the appropriate level of officer support following recent reorganisation within the Council. However, it is understood that in the main, these specific pressures have now eased.

CORPORATE COMMITMENT

More generally however, there was a more consistent message coming through from all service areas that if sufficient priority is given at a high enough level to the work that is needed then resource and staff will be found. Officers suggested that making the Vision a Corporate Improvement Priority might be one way of ensuring this happened.

The Panel believes that the Vision is absolutely vital to ensuring the future prosperity of the City and that this can be only be achieved if the full weight of the Council is thrown behind it. The Panel believes the priority given to delivery of the Vision must be formalised at the heart of the Council's business, giving all service areas the driver that is needed to allocate sufficient resources work streams contributing to the Vision.

Recommendation: That the Vision is endorsed and supported at the highest corporate level.

Recommendation: That the Corporate Plan is amended to reflect the priority that is vital to making the Vision a reality, with complementary revision to the Financial Plan.

REGIONAL CONTEXT

With its close proximity to Bristol, Bath has to establish itself a clear and distinct identity if it is to prosper and avoid becoming a 'satellite' town of its larger neighbour. Recent regeneration and investment in Bristol has seen the City's economy grow to the point where it now has the second highest GDP of any English city after London. And Bristol is continuing to expand. Development of the Broadmead Shopping Centre, Bristol Arena and Temple Quay quarter will see its retail and business sectors grow. If Bath is unable to provide an alternative live/work package that offers something different to businesses, jobseekers & homebuyers, it is in danger of being left behind Bristol and other towns in the sub-region.

The Vision asserts that Bath should not seek to 'compete' with its larger neighbours, but instead must build on its own unique features and characteristics. The Vision has done a huge amount of work to get underneath the skin of the City and has presented detailed research which has helped to define the issues that are particular to Bath. The Panel believes that more could be usefully embarked upon to consider how similarly placed cities in the UK are safeguarding their futures and determine effectively what the 'competition' is in terms of other towns and cities in the sub-region and its impact on Bath.

Recommendation: That work is undertaken to determine what our 'type' of city is, and to find out what cities and towns with similar characteristics are doing to stimulate economic development and growth.

Recommendation: That work is undertaken to determine the impacts on Bath of regional competitors in terms of retail and business markets

Recommendation: That research is undertaken to understand what kind of business and employers the City should be looking to attract and what their needs are.

Recommendation: That Major Projects and Economic Development proactively seek the views of the business community about what the Council needs to do to encourage inward investment and businesses to relocate to the area.

WORKING WITH PARTNERS

The Panel recognises the scale of the Vision and the work required in order to make it a reality. B&NES will not be able to deliver the Vision in isolation and the council will have to pursue stronger working relationships than they have done in the past with key strategic and regional organisations for example the South West Regional Development Agency and the West of England Partnership.

It is clear that the adoption of the Vision has been welcomed by these bodies as the right way forward and that continued close working relationships will be key to achieving the City's aspirations. There is however a need to refine the Council's ambitions and objectives as well as making maximum use of its resources to enable B&NES to attract further support and investment from a variety of public and private sector sources. While these partner organisations can offer a strong facilitator role, they cannot do the work for B&NES and ownership, leadership and direction needs to come from the Authority itself in one form or another.

GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

ALTERNATIVE DELIVERY MECHANISMS

To date, work on the Vision has been undertaken in-house at B&NES with the Development and Major Projects Team leading on its development and delivery. The review wanted to investigate the roles of alternative delivery mechanisms for leading the kind of long-term regeneration programmes such as the Vision.

As a case study, the review focused on Urban Regeneration Companies and the role they can play. Urban Regeneration Companies (URCs) are independent companies limited by guarantee and established by the local authority and Regional Development Agency, as well as English Partnerships, the private sector and other key partners.

The primary role of a URC is to address significant latent development opportunities by developing and managing implementation of a plan, agreed by the key stakeholders following public consultation, to build business confidence and realise an agreed vision for the future of the area. Their primary aim is to engage the private sector in a sustainable regeneration strategy, working within the context of a wider Strategic Regeneration Framework or masterplan which takes full account of the problems and opportunities for the whole area.

URCs can provide the necessary leadership and direction in areas where there is a need for a sustained and long-term regeneration programme. URCs can help to promote shared ownership between a diverse range of stakeholders and can help to secure long-term commitment and lever in additional funding and resources.

To date 23 URCs have been established in England, one in Wales and one in Northern Ireland. Examples of these include Blackpool; Bradford; Camborne; Pool & Redruth; Corby; Derby; Gloucester; Hull; Leicester; Liverpool; Manchester;

Peterborough; Salford; Sandwell; Sheffield; Southend; Sunderland; Swindon; Tees Valley; Walsall; and West Cumbria and Furness.

Among the existing URCs, there are very few cities that share many characteristics with Bath, particularly in respect of its unique historic and heritage status. Of the 25, Gloucester Heritage probably offers the best example in terms of shared characteristics and similarities in scale.

Gloucester is the youngest of the region's URCs, having been set up in February 2004 and focuses on the City's unique heritage. The idea behind the URC is to bring life back to the historic areas and reflect their special character while creating a new and prosperous urban centre, encouraging investment into the area and improving housing, shopping and leisure facilities. The challenge for the company is to combine new development with the City's existing heritage.

On 18th October Panel Members and officers visited Gloucester to meet the Chief Executive of Gloucester Heritage and officers from both the City and County Councils. The group heard presentations about the specific challenges that are being faced in Gloucester and why the route of a URC had been adopted and the benefits it was hoping to deliver.

Key findings arising from this visit were:

- The URC route was chosen after recognition that the two Local Authorities would not be able to secure the necessary investment to drive needed regeneration
- The URC is a powerful driver for securing investment from central government and its agencies
- The URC is hoping to use £150m of public sector funding to lever in £1bn of private investment
- The URC is helping to build confidence amongst the Private Sector about the ability of their Vision to be delivered
- A broad spectrum of people are involved in groups and for a established under the URC umbrella including local company directors as Board Members, renowned architects sit on a Design Review Panel and the editor of the local paper heads up the Marketing and Communications Board.
- Council Members retain the power of veto over decisions of the URC board.
- The URC has developed a 'brand' for the regeneration programme, giving the work a public identity

Given the range of private/public sector arrangements that can be used to deliver strategies such as the Vision, the Panel will not be making any prescriptive recommendations about pursuing specific models or mechanisms.

The Panel acknowledges the further work that the Major Projects Team are undertaking to research the full range of partnership models that are possible. In light of their visit to Gloucester, the Panel believes they are well placed to make

informed comment on this subject and that it would be appropriate for them to contribute to this work.

ENGAGING MEMBERS

The Panel recognises that strong political leadership as well as organisational and logistical planning will be needed to drive the Vision. There is clear role for the Council Executive to promote, champion and support the Vision, but there is also a role for other council members in their role as community leaders to communicate how the Vision will benefit local business and residents.

The Vision is a twenty-year strategy and momentum will have to be maintained throughout the long-term if all its objectives are to be delivered. It will be vital that this momentum in the early stages is not lost during the period leading up to and directly after the impending Council Elections in May 2007. Depending on the outcome of the election, there is the possibility that there could be a change of administration, Executive Members and general members of the Council. A questionnaire that was sent to current members revealed that a significant number did not feel they fully understood the objectives of the Vision. This has highlighted the importance of exploring a variety of strategies for seeking to inform members about the Vision.

Following the elections in May 07, the Panel feels that if momentum behind the Vision is to be maintained, then there must be some form of briefing programme in place to brief new members and reinvigorate returning members about the Future for Bath.

Recommendation: That the Council Executive recognise they have a lead role in working together to inspire commitment and to advocate delivery of the Vision.

Recommendation: That briefing sessions are arranged for new and returning Council Members after elections in May 07, detailing the thinking behind the Vision, the progress that will have been made to date and the challenges that remain.

Recommendation: That further alternative strategies are adopted to ensure that members have a full understanding of the Vision

ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY

At the time of writing this report the Major Projects team have given over 50 presentations to various interest groups across the City explaining the purpose behind the Vision. The purpose of these focussed presentations has been to raise awareness with key decision makers of the work that the Council is undertaking in the early stages – introducing the concept of the Vision and outlining the key aims and objectives.

While there has been quite a focussed programme of engagement with a selection of organisations, messages about the Vision have filtered through to the wider community, having been the topic of discussion at several public meetings and having been referred to in the local media. The questionnaire that was sent to local businesses and organisations revealed that although 33% of respondents had heard of the Vision, they had only a partial or vague understanding of what it is about.

As outlined above, communication with stakeholders has thus far concentrated on a targeted selection of key stakeholders and organisations in the City. Major Projects recognise that there is more work to be done in this area. A wider public engagement exercise will be undertaken shortly to communicate the objectives of the Vision and capture views of the Community. In addition, the Panel welcomes moves being made to engage young people in the Vision through joint working with the Democratic Action for B&NES Youth group, (DAFBY).

Many of the contributors who attended the Panel's public meetings clearly identified some of the key challenges that are facing the City, yet many of their detailed comments focussed on specific projects such as Bath Western Riverside and Southgate, where there is much more information in the public domain. The Panel believes that until there is a more clearly defined 'story' for the Council to tell, it may well be difficult to engage fully with the wider community. Without a coherent 'narrative', it will be difficult to offer a clear explanation that the community can understand, engage with and, hopefully, sign up to.

Similarly it will be easier for the local media to report on and communicate the Vision if there is a 'story' that it can work from. The questionnaire revealed that the majority of respondents (53%) said they currently found out about Council-related initiatives through the local media – this clearly shows the importance of the role that the media will be able to play. Contributors at the Panel's public meetings confirmed the view that it will be vital to get the media such as the local paper engaged with the Vision. This will be more than just getting publicity about meetings, reports and strategies, but will need to be about presenting the Vision as a future that people can buy into and take ownership of.

Recommendation: That a 'narrative' is drafted which tells the 'story of Bath', clearly articulating the journey the City must embark upon to ensure the future vitality, success and well-being of the city and its residents.

Recommendation: That as soon as is practicable, the Vision needs to be available for the public in an easily digestible, accessible format.

The questionnaire also revealed that a large number of respondents indicated that they would like to receive information about Council initiatives electronically, either via email or through the B&NES Council website. Unlike other projects that have already been mentioned such as BWR and Southgate, there is no web presence for the Bath Vision and consequently there is no where for people to be

able to find out clear and up to date information that can be considered reliable and accurate.

Recommendation: The Panel recommends the creation of a dedicated on-line area, either within the B&NES website or linked to it, which clearly outlines what the Vision is aiming to achieve.

THE ROLE FOR OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

The Panel recognises the scale of the work that the Council is aiming to achieve through the Vision. It has become apparent that such a large undertaking raises many more issues than can be dealt with during the period allocated for this review. The Panel strongly believes there is a longer-term role for Overview and Scrutiny in helping to move the Vision to a fully-worked up implementation plan.

The Panel believes it is necessary for the Council and the Executive to take collective responsibility for enabling delivery of the Vision. Accordingly it should not just fall to one O & S Panel to oversee and scrutinise the strategy as it develops.

Recommendation: That delivery of the Vision should be included as an objective within 08/09 Service Plans which are coming to O & S Panels as a regular agenda item in the future; that the Vision be appropriately included in the Corporate Plan, and that the necessary links between the Corporate Plan, the Financial Plan and service plans be identified.

Recommendation: Following elections next May, the appropriate Overview and Scrutiny Panel should consider taking forward the lessons learnt from this exercise and continue to support developing the Council's approach to implementing the Vision.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Panel heard that Bath is facing a number of challenges in terms of housing, retail, jobs, transport and the wider economy. The Panel recognises the challenges that must be addressed and believe that the Vision is vital for securing the future prosperity and well-being of the residents, businesses and those that work in the City. The Panel strongly agree with the assertion highlighted in the Vision that 'Doing nothing is not an option'.

- **Recommendation:** That the Vision is endorsed and supported at the highest corporate level.
- **Recommendation:** That the Corporate Plan is amended to reflect the priority that is vital to making the Vision a reality, with complementary revisions to the Financial Plan.
- **Recommendation:** That the Council Executive recognise they have a lead role in working together to inspire commitment and to advocate delivery of the Vision.
- **Recommendation:** That briefing sessions are arranged for new and returning Council Members after elections in May 07, detailing the thinking behind the Vision, the progress that will have been made to date and the challenges that remain.
- **Recommendation:** That further alternative strategies are adopted to ensure that members have a full understanding of the Vision.

The Panel considered Bath's position in relation to other sub-regional centres such as Bristol and Swindon. The Vision asserts that Bath should not seek to 'compete' with its larger neighbours, but instead must bring a different offer to the table.

- **Recommendation:** That work is undertaken to determine what our 'type' of city is, and to find out what cities with similar characteristics are doing to stimulate economic development and growth.
- **Recommendation:** That work is undertaken to determine the impacts on Bath of regional competitors in terms of retail and business markets.
- **Recommendation:** That research is undertaken to understand what kind of business and employers the City should be looking to attract and what their needs are.
- **Recommendation:** That Major Projects and Economic Development proactively seek the views of the business community about what the Council needs to do to encourage inward investment and businesses to relocate to the area.

The Panel recognises that failure to successfully tackle traffic and congestion in the City will seriously impact on the ability of the Council to deliver the Vision. The Panel supports the aspiration of a car-free city centre within the lifetime of the Vision and recommends that work is undertaken to contribute to driving down traffic and congestion levels in the historic core:

- **Recommendation:** that work is undertaken to consider the feasibility of introducing low-carbon public transport options and;
- **Recommendation:** that work is undertaken to review the current bus routes that traverse the City centre.

The Panel heard presentations from senior officers across most of the key service areas in the Council. Officers were asked to comment on their understanding of the Vision and how they believed their service area would contribute to its delivery. Officers were also asked to consider what capacity and resource implications this work might carry for their areas.

The Panel concluded that there appeared to be an insufficient understanding across the Council of the Vision and how it can be achieved. The Panel are concerned there is evidence that directorates/departments are still working in policy 'silos' and have not yet demonstrated the kind of joined-up thinking that will be necessary to deliver an overarching strategy like the Vision.

The Panel believes that it is vital for the aims and objectives of the Vision to be communicated and understood by officers throughout service areas and at all grades. Improving the interface between Service Areas will also be crucial to ensure that work on the Vision is taken forward in a coherent and joined-up fashion. The Panel believes this is as much a culture issue as it is one of communication.

- **Recommendation:** There should be a role for the Cultural Change Programme in promulgating a 'can-do' culture, communicating, educating and instigating the necessary step-change in corporate understanding and commitment across the Council.
- **Recommendation:** To investigate what other mechanisms might be harnessed to disseminate progress on the Vision and maintain momentum.
- **Recommendation:** To consider the establishment (possibly on secondment) of a 'Futures Team' – an officer group to promote creative thinking and cross-departmental working with a reduced focus on risk assessment.

The Panel believes that the Council must work more creatively in order to harness the full potential of its own extensive assets, both its corporate and commercial estates. By demonstrating that it can manage its own estates, regional funding partners and the business community will be able to have confidence in the Council as a credible body to do business with.

- **Recommendation:** That serious consideration is given to how best the Council can maximise the use of its assets over a 20-year period, perhaps through the establishment of a 'Property Board' or similar mechanism.

The Panel heard that significant challenges lie ahead in communicating the objectives of the Vision to the wider business community and residents of Bath. The Vision is a high-level concept which currently lacks a 'brand' or definable narrative. This is making it difficult for the community to identify with and understand what the Council is trying to achieve.

- **Recommendation:** That a 'narrative' is drafted which tells the 'story of Bath', clearly articulating the journey the City must embark upon to ensure the future vitality, success and well-being of the City and its residents.
- **Recommendation:** That as soon as is practicable, the Vision needs to be available for the public in an easily digestible, accessible format.
- **Recommendation:** The creation of a dedicated on-line area, either within the B&NES website or linked to it, which clearly outlines what the Vision is aiming to achieve.

The Panel recognises the scale of the work that the Council is aiming to achieve through the Vision. It has become apparent that such a large undertaking raises many more issues than can be dealt with during the period allocated for the review. The Panel strongly believes there is a longer-term role for Overview and Scrutiny in helping to move the Vision to a fully-worked up implementation plan.

- **Recommendation:** That delivery of the Vision should be included as an objective within 08/09 Service Plans which are coming to O & S Panels as a regular agenda item in the future; that the Vision be appropriately included in the Corporate Plan, and that the necessary links between the Corporate Plan, the Financial Plan and Service Plans be identified.
- **Recommendation:** Following elections next May, the appropriate Overview and Scrutiny Panel should consider taking forward the lessons learnt from this exercise and continue to support developing the Council's approach to implementing the Vision.

Annexes

- I. Terms of Reference
- II. Presentation used at Panel Briefing
- III. Ernst & Young Business Plan
- IV. Spatial Framework
- V. Minutes of Panel Meetings
- VI. Copies of Presentations given at Panel Meetings
- VII. Results of Questionnaires

Copies of these Annexes can be obtained from Bethan Grant in
Overview and Scrutiny on 01225 396 053