

Statement by Paul Crossley

Community Strategy

On behalf of the Liberal Democrat group we welcome this productive refresh of the Community Strategy commenced in 2002. The Community Strategy plays an important part in modern local governance bringing as it does a number of public service providers, residents and the Council together in a shared objective for our area. Our staff are to be complimented on the work to date and its progress and implementation. For me the key word in the title is SUSTAINABLE. This must really underpin all the work we do. I particularly welcome the fact that addressing climate change is emphasised as a cross-cutting theme throughout the strategy and the LSP.

However, I note that the children and young people chapter doesn't have anything in the box for "how does this help address the causes and effects of climate change", which does seem a little odd. Renewable energy, Healthy Schools and improvements under building schools for the future all have an impact in addressing climate change.

It is good that the LSP will be looking to provide community leadership on carbon reduction - good to be looking beyond 'putting our own house in order',.

The Liberal Democrats believe that this Council should be looking to be a beacon for environmental policies. The Council has been innovative in the past e.g. first to adopt zero waste, farmers' market and our local residents are very keen on environmental issues e.g. transition movements, keen on recycling. The Council shouldn't be afraid to aim to be in the vanguard of introducing innovative policies.

On a general point I would like to see more goals and targets in addition to aspirations. It is only by setting challenges that we can measure against that we will truly be able to judge value for money in the work we do. And value for money is one of the main concerns of many residents in these difficult financial times. There's also the issue of the language of the report - some sections are quite full of jargon and bullet points with no explanations.

For me a key determinant on whether we have made our area a better place by 2026 is whether or not we have "closed the gap" or in terms that everyone understands have we delivered a community where the life chances at birth for all our residents are fair and equitable - in life expectancy, in educational opportunity, in the ability to live here and work here.

In developing our communities in the future one thing is for certain - more of our residents are better informed and want to be included in the decision and policy making process. This citizen engagement is not only being driven by the internet in all its forms but also by resident groups and forums who want their say and want to be heard.

On a cautionary note I would advise against the aspiration to be one of Europe's fastest growing economies. This takes us down the boom'n'bust road and raises expectations and fuels inflation. We should be aiming for a diverse economy with a range of employment opportunities and an economy that builds on the strengths that two universities and two colleges bring. Is it good that the economic section of this report is based on the growth projections from the RSS? Especially as in other areas we challenge these growth targets as unrealistic.

Can I again commend to you the work that the Re:Generate Trust are doing in the Whiteway Community as mentioned twice in this report.. You will recall that three summers ago when we were having a number of issues in the community we agreed as an LSP to look for a new way of working and that following a tender process Re:Generate was selected. At the time there was some doubt as to what could be achieved but nine months on we are starting to see some fantastic outcomes in the community from the model of work that Re:Generate use. I think this is a model of community building and empowerment that we could well use in several other communities across our authority area - from Radstock to Keynsham to Foxhill.

With those broad comments I welcome this paper..