



**Note of the meeting of the Bathavon North Forum
held on Tuesday, 21st January, 2020
in Bathampton Methodist Church Hall - Holcombe Lane (next to the Village Hall)**

Meeting Attendance

In Attendance
Councillor Hugh Baker
Bathford Parish Council
Anna Beria
Moirá Brennan
Bathampton Parish Council
Batheaston Parish Council
Charlcombe Parish Council
Claverton Parish Council
Dave Dixon
Will Godfrey
Councillor Kevin Guy
Mark Hayward
St Catherine Parish Meeting
Fiona Powell
Residents
Councillor Richard Samuel
Councillor Sarah Warren
Jane Wildblood

Apologies Received from
Richard Clist
Swainswick Parish Council
Rob Kendall
Avon Fire and Rescue
Councillor Dine Romero
Rob Turner

1. Welcome from the new Chair

Councillor Kevin Guy opened the meeting and welcomed everybody to his first meeting as the Chair.

The minutes of the meeting that took place 3rd September 2019 were agreed and seconded as an accurate record.

2. Corporate Strategy and Budget Update

The forum heard from Councillor Richard Samuel, B&NES Council Cabinet Member for Resources and Will Godfrey, B&NES Chief Executive regarding the work that has been taking place on Corporate and Budget Planning. The presentation used is available on the [Bathavon North Forum Website](#).. To view the council's plans and to submit feedback (before 24th January 2020) visit: <https://beta.bathnes.gov.uk/corporate-strategy-2020-2024-survey>

Questions and Comments: -

Q1. With the introduction of the clean air zone later this year, can the income that will be generated be put into dealing with issues such as supporting social housing tenants in making improvements to their heating boilers. There are older 1960's style buildings in Bath that suffer with damp and mould due to not turning heating on because of fuel poverty.

Response to Q1. Most of the social housing in the area is in the control Curo, the council transferred all the council house stock to them many years ago. We have very little influence of Curo, but we can try to influence through energy saving measures that we are promoting to our residents. When new housing stock is built, we will be able to capture energy standards through our planning policy process. New social housing differs greatly from what was being offered 30-40 years ago, there is now a balance, as when higher standards are introduced it impacts on the rents charged or borrowing costs.

The clean air zone income will be used for implementation and running costs if there were to be any revenue remaining this would need to be used to support addition measures that fall within the scheme. The council are not allowed to divert revenue into other service areas.

Park and Ride Services are currently being charged fares that are imbalanced, this will need to be addressed. The current contract is up for renewal and gives us the opportunity to make changes and look at increasing the capacity figures for use.

Q2. The effects of doing business from a local outlying area of Bath has difficulties with the links to the movement points for getting around the City. If we are looking to increase regional economic activity, we need to create ways of being productive in local places. Where there are not local bus services or alternatives near to our homes the ability to function productively is difficult. I am doing my part in looking to make changes to how I do things. Transport needs improvement and I plea to the council to work on this vital infrastructure that is needed to attract business and people to the area.

Response to Q2. First Bus manage most bus services in the local area, the services are under pressure due to the roads being congested and creating unreliable services to bus users. The blockages around the city need to be identified and unlocked to get the services moving.

The Council are not alone in dealing with the economic challenges that face the area, people will need to change behaviours to see productivity increase and by talking to each other this will drive this.

James Freeman, Managing Director for First Bus recently wrote an article regarding the service issues in the City, this can be found through this link - <https://www.somersetlive.co.uk/news/somerset-news/bath-traffic-set-up-fundamentally-3737645>

Q3. The Council Tax increase for B&NES is limited to a maximum 2% increase this coming financial year. Have the residents been asked if they would be willing to pay more if they were provided with better services?

Response to Q3. The Council can ask residents to agree a higher increase than 2% but they must hold a referendum. This is a costly exercise and the absorbs a lot of the extra funding that would be raised. We have not asked the question this year and will need to consider what priorities would be addressed if a higher charge was proposed. It is important to have transparency and clear deliverables to reassure residents that the outcomes promised are carried out. Next year our plan is to start engagement on setting the budget far earlier so we can get ahead with the issues.

Q4. What action can be taken to deal with the empty shops and high business rates that are damaging retail?

Response to Q4. The Council are the landlord for about a third of the shops in our area, St Johns Foundation are considerable landlord and others make up the remainder. The Council properties have a high occupancy rate and revenue that our portfolio generates helps in the funding of other services. The assets we hold as a council are worked hard, the Roman Baths are a great example of how income has been brought in and serviced other council priorities.

Q5. Why so much student accommodation?

Response to Q5. Student properties are not delivering council tax receipts to the council, as students are exempt from having to pay. We are not able to change this ourselves, however we do lobby for change through the Local Government Association.

There is an additional growing issue in our area with Air BnB lettings which is reducing the income from rates that the council could be receiving. There are two types of business models and a number these claim business rate relief, this is allowing them to fall outside the rates system.

Q6. What more can be done to fix potholes and repaint the road markings?

Response to Q6. We look at the priorities for the work that is required in this service area, we get as much work carried out as possible within the budget that we can afford. The statutory duties for adult and social care we must carry out as a council dictate what money remains for other service areas.

3. Climate Emergency

Climate Emergency was the main topic for the meeting and the forum heard presentations from Fiona Meldrum who presented the work that has taken place at Bathampton School which has seen the school awarded the gold standard award for safer routes to school. Councillor Sarah Warren, B&NES Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency and Neighbourhood Services along with Jane Wildblood B&NES Corporate & Community Sustainability Manager presented on the Council work on Climate Emergency and took part in a discussion with the forum. The presentations used are available on the [Bathavon North Forum Website](#).

Several points were raised in the discussions that took place following the presentations:

- The dangerous crossing points on faster road do become a barrier on safe walking routes.
- When bus routes do not join up it makes it much less appealing as an alternative option. For some the car then remains the obvious choice.
- A school's climate change group has been set up, this will be looking into secondary school transport and the scale of the problem. The cost of running buses is high expense, we do however need to find ways to make quick fixes.
- The data that shows where schools pupils are travelling from has been missing. It is a complicated picture that needs to be addressed.

Community organisations across Bath and North East Somerset that are taking action to tackle the climate and nature emergency are being asked to share their activities in a new online survey (closing date 10th February 2020) -

https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/BANES_community-led_climate_change_actions

Some useful links that were discussed at the forum meeting are included below:

[Responding to the Climate Emergency in B&NES](#)

[Parish Councils - resources for responding to the Climate and Nature Emergency](#)

[Plastic Free Communities](#)

[Energy at Home Advice Service](#)

[Neighbourhood Planning in B&NES](#)

4. Environmental Maintenance Staff

Kevin asked the Parish Councils in Bathavon North to consider working together to introduce the role of environmental maintenance staff who would on the needs specific to their area. The idea will require some additional work with Parish Councils and Council Officers to scope out the remit and costings for the scheme.

Several points were raised in the discussion:

- The idea would require a group of parishes that would employ and deploy the member of staff.
- The scheme would operate through the buy in of parish councils by using their precept.
- Parish Rangers were trialled and considered to be a success, due to internal issues in the past the scheme failed to be taken forward.
- The role would see a more visible presence in local areas and quick access when incidents need to be dealt with.
- Wiltshire run similar schemes that appear to run very well.

Once additional work has taken place on the idea, a proposal will be brought back to a future forum meeting.

5. AOB & Future Agenda Topics

The forum will next meet on 17th February 2020, two topics are scheduled for this meeting: Bathampton Meadows - Council Officer, Mark Minkley will be attending to provide an update on the future of Bathampton Meadows and Empty Properties – Council Officer, Debbie Freeman will be attending to provide information on what can be done to bring empty homes back into use. The Bathavon Forum meetings are always open to the public, as always, we encourage information about the meetings to be shared across your networks.