

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET

MINUTES OF CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND SUSTAINABILITY POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL MEETING

Monday, 6th March, 2023

Present:- **Councillors** Karen Walker, Joel Hirst, Shelley Bromley, Grant Johnson, Ruth Malloy, Lisa O'Brien and Dr Kumar

Apologies for absence: Councillors: Paul Crossley and Ryan Wills

69 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

70 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

71 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillors Paul Crossley and Ryan Wills sent their apologies.

72 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

73 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN

There was none.

74 ITEMS FROM THE PUBLIC OR COUNCILLORS - TO RECEIVE STATEMENTS, PETITIONS OR QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE BUSINESS OF THIS MEETING

Bob Goodman made a statement to the Panel regarding the Fashion Museum.

75 MINUTES

The Panel confirmed the minutes of the previous meeting as a true record and they were duly signed by the Chair.

The Chair asked the Democratic Services officer to follow up a question from Councillor Bromley to Councillor Manda Rigby at the January meeting.

76 HERITAGE SERVICES BUSINESS PLAN 2023-2027

The Chair invited Robert Campbell, Head of Heritage Services, to introduce the item. The Council Leader, Councillor Kevin Guy was also in attendance and answered questions.

Panel members made the following points and asked the following questions:

Councillor Johnson stated that the Victoria Art Gallery (VAG) has been one of the hardest hit sites in terms of visitor numbers post covid. There has been a stark decline in projected visitor numbers since previous business plans. The action areas on this do not help us to understand who the future audiences could be. We should be looking at an action plan for this asset. The officer explained that the numbers of visitors to the VAG have declined due to visitor behaviour, they have not returned post covid. He assured the Panel that staff and the Council are committed to the VAG and investment is planned. There will be a focus on attracting families.

Councillor O'Brien commented that there were two very successful exhibitions in the VAG – these were relatable and attractive. Some other exhibitions have been niche and abstract so maybe it is a case of looking at the type of exhibition in terms of visitor numbers and appealing to younger demographic. The money that has been invested and future investments call for more of a broad appeal to benefit residents and visitors. The officer explained that there is not a development plan in this report as a new curator has just been appointed so this is a chance to make some changes with a focus on local rate payers. He acknowledged the comment about the niche exhibitions but noted that this is subjective.

Councillor O'Brien stated that she shares the reservation of the member of the public who made a statement (Bob Goodman) regarding losing use of the Assembly Rooms and purchase of the old Post Office building. She stated that the levelling up funding bid was not successful and in the meantime, there is a loss of income, storage costs and a building that will need significant revamp. She asked if the reopening date achievable. The officer explained that there will be a bid to Heritage Lottery Funding, the full funding plan is not set out in the report. He explained that the authority has a very successful Heritage Services area and that he is confident in delivering this project for which there is funding in place for the next 18 months.

Councillor Hirst noted the three assets – Roman Baths, Victoria Art Gallery and Fashion Museum – but asked that other monuments around the area also be considered and maintained. He stated that the Wansdyke monument has gradually degraded. The officer stated that he agreed and that a wider cultural strategy is being considered but this report was focused on the visitor facing assets. He stated that he would refer the concerns on the Wansdyke monument to the Corporate Property Team. Councillor Kevin Guy stated that there are a number of assets in the property portfolio, and he could look at the remit of Heritage Services.

Councillor Bromley asked what the advantages will be of the new location for the Fashion Museum and asked about the implication of World Heritage Management moving to the planning service. The officer stated that the new location would be transformational, the new site has multiple floors and many opportunities for commercial optimisation. He explained that the central location means it will be more accessible to both the heritage core of the city and the railway station. It will also be a gateway to the Milsom Quarter. Regarding moving to the planning service, the officer stated that this would make the World Heritage Management more visible across the Council.

Councillor Malloy asked if the Ralph Allen town house could be developed. Councillor Kevin Guy stated that he is happy to meet with the relevant person regarding the Ralph Allen town house.

Councillor Malloy stated that she hoped there could be some collaboration with the great spa towns of Europe to enhance the wellbeing of residents. Councillor Guy stated that working with the spa towns is a 15/20-year project and the ambition of the administration was that Bath be transformed into a fashion centre with the fashion quarter and museum and be the best in Europe, this is also a 15/20 year project aspiration.

Councillor Walker asked about the reference to attracting those not 'traditionally welcome' to assets. The officer explained that 23,000 discovery cards had been issued to residents since May but the majority are from areas of higher socio economic backgrounds. We want to focus therefore on attracting people in those other areas and take down the barriers so that people want to visit.

Councillor Walker asked if there was feedback on why the two levelling up bids had not been successful. The officer explained that he does have written feedback but has sought further detail on this and is happy to feedback to the Panel on that detail when he receives it. Councillor Walker asked that the Annual Report to the Heritage Advisory Board be shared with this Panel in the future – the officer agreed.

Councillor Malloy asked if it would be possible to invite the National Trust manager of the Assembly Rooms to a meeting of the Panel in the future. The officer agreed to extend this invitation.

The Chair thanked the officer and Council Leader.

77 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

There was no Cabinet Member update.

The Chair thanked the Panel members for their contributions over the last 4 years. Councillor O'Brien and Councillor Dr Kumar thanked the Chair for her work with the Panel. Panel members agreed.

The meeting ended at 4.41 pm

Chair(person)

Date Confirmed and Signed

Prepared by Democratic Services