

**PARISH LIAISON MEETING**

**Minutes of the Meeting held**

Wednesday, 17th July, 2024, 6.30 pm

In attendance:

Cllr Karen Walker – Chair of B&NES Council (Chair)  
Cllr George Ardrey – Bathampton Parish Council  
Cllr Gill Auld – Peasedown Parish Council  
Cllr Elli Bate – Freshford Parish Council  
Cllr Paul Beazley-Long – South Stoke Parish Council  
Mandy Bishop – Chief Operating Officer, B&NES  
Cllr K C Bradley – Timsbury Parish Council (Chair)  
George Blanchard – Planning Officer B&NES  
Cllr Anna Box – B&NES Councillor (Chew Valley)  
Cllr Ian Cannock – Shoscombe Parish Council (Chair)  
Cllr Heather Clewett – Stowey Sutton Parish Council (Vice Chair)  
George Clutton – Radstock Town Council (Clerk)  
Richard Daone – Deputy Head of Planning Policy, B&NES  
Cllr Chris Dando – Radstock Town Council  
Geoff Davis – Clerk to South Stoke Parish Council and Monkton Combe Parish Council  
Dave Dixon – Community Engagement Manager, B&NES Sara Dixon – Locality Manager, B&NES  
Jean Fossaceco – Clerk of Shoscombe Parish Council  
Debbie Freeman – Empty Property Officer, B&NES  
Paula Freeland – Team Manager, Planning and Conservation, B&NES  
Cllr Clive Fricker – Keynsham Town Council  
Cllr Fiona Gourley – B&NES Councillor, Bathavon South  
Chris Griggs-Trevarthen – Team Manager, Development Management, B&NES  
Cllr Phil Harding – Saltford Parish Council  
Mark Hayward – Community Engagement Officer, B&NES  
Cllr Duncan Hounsell – B&NES Councillor (Saltford)  
Neil Howat – Team Manager, Planning and Enforcement, B&NES  
Sarah James – Deputy Head of Planning Development Management, B&NES  
Cllr George Leach – B&NES Councillor (Keynsham North)  
Richard Maccabee – Batheaston Parish Council (Clerk) and B&NES ALCA Chair  
Cllr Natasha Morgan – Chew Magna Parish Council  
Louise Morris – Head of Planning, B&NES  
Jocelyn Nicholls – Priston Parish Council (Clerk)  
Vilakone Pakdimanivong – Transport Development and Policy  
Nick Plumley – Housing Enabling and Development Manager  
Cllr Sam Ross – Farmborough Town Council and B&NES Councillor (Clutton and Farmborough)  
Nick Simons – Principal Engineer, Transport Policy, B&NES  
Lottie Smith-Collins – Saltford Parish Council (Clerk)  
Cllr Andy Wait – Keynsham Town Council and B&NES Councillor (Keynsham East)  
Alison Wells – Community Engagement Officer (B&NES)  
Cllr Des Wighton – Monkton Combe Parish Council (Chair)

## 1 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair of Council, Cllr Karen Walker, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies for absence had been received from:

### **Parish and Town Councils:**

Midsomer Norton Town Council

### **B&NES:**

Cllr Alex Beaumont  
Cllr Eleanor Jackson  
Cllr Hal MacFie

## 2 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

Attendees noted the emergency evacuation procedure.

## 3 UPDATE FROM BATH & NORTH EAST SOMERSET COUNCIL

Mandy Bishop, Chief Operating Officer, Bath and North East Somerset Council advised Parish Council representatives that Bath and North East Somerset Council has agreed to sign up to the “Debate not Hate” campaign to raise public awareness of behaviour towards Councillors.

The full text of the motion can be found on the council’s [democratic services webpages](#).

To find out more about Debate not Hate you can [visit the LGA](#).

There will be a further update at Parish Liaison in September 2024.

Louise Morris, the new Head of Planning introduced herself and welcomed the involvement of Parish/Town Councils in the planning process. She paid tribute to the Planning Team and invited comments/questions during the World Café session to herself and officers from Development Management, Conservation and Planning Policy.

Debbie Freeman, Empty Property Officer, B&NES advised Parish/Town Council representatives that the Council’s [Empty Residential Property procedure and policy](#) is available on the website:

She outlined a case study in a parished community to highlight the complexities of bringing an empty property back into use and advised that there was no standalone legislation in relation to empty properties. She invited comments and questions during the World Café session.

## 4 UPDATE FROM B&NES AVON LOCAL COUNCILS' ASSOCIATION (ALCA)

Richard Maccabee, Chair of BANES Avon Local Councils Association (ALCA) advised representatives about the role of [ALCA](#) in providing advice to Parish/Town Councils as well as a useful networking opportunity for Clerks/Chairs.

## 5 WORLD CAFÉ SESSION

A 'World Café' style session was held to give Parish/Town Councils the opportunity to meet officers. The topics chosen were issues that ALCA and Parish representatives had requested.

### **Empty Properties and Housing**

Debbie Freeman – Empty Property Officer, B&NES

Nick Plumley – Housing Enabling and Development Manager, B&NES

#### **If residents have issues with rented housing, is there anything B&NES can do?**

We have a [Housing Standards service](#) that those renting, either through a social housing landlord or privately, can use.

**Is there any liaison with Curo and/or a Scrutiny Panel for this?** There is a quarterly meeting between B&NES Housing and Curo.

**It is possible for Parishes to identify which houses are Curo's using Parish Online.**

**Does the Council Tax increase for empty homes?** Yes - 200% Council Tax will be charged on properties that have been empty for between one and five years. 300% Council Tax will be charged on properties that have been empty for five years, and 400% on properties that have been empty for ten years or more.

**What do we do if we are not sure that a house is empty?** Report it to the Empty Property Officer on 01225 39 64 11 or email [empty\\_properties@bathnes.gov.uk](mailto:empty_properties@bathnes.gov.uk) – it can be investigated.

**What if we think that the person who owns the property needs help?** Still report it to the Empty Property Officer – advice and support will be provided.

**How easy is it for you to find the owner of an empty home?** We can find the majority via Council Tax records. There is also Land Registry records and occasionally we use tracing agents.

**How do you find empty homes?** They are reported to us, or we find out via Council Tax data. We send out regular correspondence as well. The Council Tax premium sometimes initiates engagement.

**Do you deal with empty commercial property too?** Not at this time.

**Do you deal with second homes?** No.

**How many cases do you have?** About 280 at any one time.

**Is there a geographic spread or a concentration?** There is a concentration in Bath as you would expect given that it is the most densely populated area. There is then a general spread around the district. Sometimes there is a high concentration in a particular community for no discernible reason.

**Have you used former empty homes to help the homeless?** Yes. We now have our own housing company - [B&NES Homes](#) - with the aim of developing new affordable housing or renovating property (eg space above shops) to create affordable housing. We also encourage those with empty homes to bring them back into use and some have been occupied by Ukrainian refugees as well as former homeless.

**Given the housing crisis, should we be lobbying the new Government on legislation to help bring empty homes back into use?** There is an [Empty Homes Network](#) which does this. The Green Party in Bristol also recently introduced a motion on empty homes.

**Why is so much student accommodation being built in Bath instead of affordable housing?** Brownfield sites are more expensive to develop so developers pursue high density rented developments. They can construct a case whereby there does not need to be any affordable housing. Over time, as students choose where they want to live, a mono-culture can develop. The Council will be developing affordable housing at Western Riverside subject to a receiving a Government grant.

**How many empty homes are there in Bath and North East Somerset?** About 1,200 that have been empty for 6 months or more.

**What do you do if the owner has neglected a property deliberately?** We can take enforcement action if it is having a detrimental impact. We can take owners to court or do the work ourselves and raise a statutory debt. However, we try to work with people first – there are often complex reasons why a house is empty.

**Do you get many squatters?** Very rarely - in the past seven years, we have not had to deal with any.

**If you become aware of an empty house, do you liaise with the relevant Parish Council?** We are constrained due to GDPR but local knowledge can be useful when trying to identify owners. We welcome Parishes alerting us to empty houses.

**How do you enable affordable housing?** Last year, the planning system delivered 35 affordable homes in Bath and North East Somerset. We have good relationships with local housing associations and Homes England and hope to increase the number. Our own company, B&NES Homes, aims to deliver more in the coming years including for young people coming out of care; adults with complex learning disabilities; temporary accommodation for rough sleepers and for those moving on towards tenancy.

**What is happening in rural areas?** The challenge here is land availability. The UK has moved away from social housing estates to affordable homes within a development. We are working with Parishes on exception sites and can provide advice and funding. This needs to be community led.

**The infrastructure eg sewage pipework etc needs to be considered. Our village had 40 homes and now has 90 with no upgrades to the infrastructure.**

**We have development taking place with an affordable housing allocation. How can we make sure it's kept affordable?** If it is using modern methods of construction, we would be interested. It can be done via S106 agreement. Through planning, social housing can be kept in this use in perpetuity. In other cases, Right to Buy will override this.

**Would there still be CIL on affordable housing?** Not if it is 100% affordable. An exemption can be applied for but it does not have to be approved.

**The recently developed affordable housing in our village is on the main road and has noticeably smaller gardens. Is there anything we can do to influence developers on the quality of affordable housing?** Yes but we can't force them – they need to make 20%+ profit on a development before the affordable housing element has to be introduced.

**The developer of a site in our village is not building the affordable housing allocation. What can you do and how can we stop this happening again?** We are working on this case. They should provide 30% affordable. If they don't, they need to demonstrate why. We may be able to work with a housing association to buy the plots. In future, you can nominate land for new allocation or a housing exception site. We can support you from idea to planning application and then help to identify a suitable developer.

**We don't need more new housing, we just need affordable housing for local young people.**

**Are the homes B&NES is developing new build or a mix?** A mix – some are flats about shops or repurposing of offices.

**We know of a site where the developer has gone bust – can B&NES move it along? It could be an exception site.** We would welcome a discussion with you on this.

**In terms of empty homes, do things ever get to Compulsory Purchase Order stage?** There were two in 2017 but none since. It is a measure of last resort as it can be expensive; time consuming and not always appropriate.

### **Transport Strategy:**

Nick Simons – Principal Engineer, Transport Policy, B&NES  
Vilakone Pakdimanivong – Transport Development and Policy, B&NES

The consultation on Creating Sustainable Communities: Journey to Net Zero and the Active Travel Masterplan is currently open and deadline for comments is the 23 August. This has been extended for Parishes to 5 September. An email has already been sent out.

**ACTION: to resend details and include a hard copy of the consultation form as the online form will be closed.**

Does the Active Travel masterplan mean a straight conversion of main routes to a mixture of cycle and pedestrian routes?

Rural roads are quite dangerous and the speed of traffic is quite fast - reducing the road speeds would help.

Will it allow for foot traffic and improvements for pedestrian crossings where the speed of traffic is fast? If a route needs these improvements, will it be linked into the plan?

A36 is part of the National Highway – does B&NES have influence for improvements to include pedestrian islands? Are we able to add details of locations to the consultation?

I knew about the Active Travel consultation but was not aware of the other consultation.

Our village will be impacted by the forthcoming road closure on the A36. There is a lot of diversions and we are concerned that many people will find their own routes through using smaller side roads. The school bus currently drops off children on the A36 who then walk to the school. We are concerned about rat runs. Is there anything that can be done? Maybe a one-way system? It is a long closure from August to March.

**ACTION – to follow up with Highways regarding their engagement with National Highways.**

Active Travel Masterplan, where is the funding coming from WECA or B&NES?

When are you going to get a proper congestion charge for Bath?

Our village was top of the list for a 5% increase in housing. Why is there no transport mitigation for our area?

Active travel is really useful for the rural areas.

Chew Valley has one bus a day and Westlink. We need a bus service that links to the main routes.

Is there an option for e-scooters in smaller villages? Timsbury and Farmborough would be happy to do a trial.

I live in a holiday destination near the Chew Valley lakes. If you follow the sat nav it takes you down inappropriate, small rural lanes. Is there anything we can do about this?

Does the plan cover the A367 and the A37? What about the A36?

Are we able to circulate the consultation to residents as well or is it just for Parish Councils?

How does it all work with WECA?

How do you link in with operational highways teams?

We have been refused implementation on a speed activated signs. Why are we not able to have them for our village?

The timescales for highways schemes to come forward take a long time. There does not seem to be any checking with Parishes to see if schemes are still relevant when they have been on the list for a long period of time.

How do the plans fit into WECA's priorities and particularly how does it tie into a railway station for Saltford?

Do we incorporate WECA's priorities that relate to BANES to incorporate into our plans?

Bath to Bristol corridor, how does this fit in with the consultation?

There is confusion with WECA plans and BANES Plans.

Have WECA got most of the money?

The bus services have got so much worse since WECA came into place.

The A4 Keynsham and Saltford joint cycle and footpath doesn't work as well as other paths. They are not segregated, there is nothing that says which section pedestrians and cyclists should use. Could we add this to the consultation?

Is it helpful to know about local schemes such as pedestrian island refuges. It would it be helpful to share these ideas?

## **Planning 1 – Planning Policy, Development Management and Conservation**

Louise Morris – Head of Planning, B&NES

Chris Griggs Trevarthen - Team Manager, Development Management, B&NES

Richard Daone - Deputy Head of Planning Policy, B&NES

Paula Freeland – Team Manager, Planning and Conservation, B&NES

**Building projects that took place through Covid appear not to be controlled. We are three years on, planning enforcement has been avoided and we see residential properties with issues such as the wrong style of windows. We have a small team that are dealing with any backlogs.**

**It has been suggested that Bath issues are given priority over other areas. All are treated on merit and not location.**

**We are always being told that there are not enough staff to deal with enforcement issues.**

**We have, at times, been told to stop asking about issues.**

**Honest communication would be welcomed early in the process.**

*It can take time for enforcement issues to be resolved - some cases can be very complex but we have had recent successful prosecutions and the team is actively pursuing issues.*

**Understanding why objectives have not been successful would be helpful.** *The summary reports should be indicating what is happening at planning meetings.*

**We would be grateful for help with better communication especially where issues are time limited.**

**Residents are interested in what will be next for the Local Plan.** *The draft plan will be taken to Full Council on 26 January 2025. Public consultation will take place from February to March 2025. The comments will be reviewed and the plan submission date will be 26 March 2025.*

**What is expected from the new Government with regard to planning?** *As details emerge local authorities will need to work out any changes and how to move forward.*

**What about the requirements for affordable housing?** *The numbers may have to change. The quality, type, mix and affordability need to be right. Work is taking place locally and nationally on finding ways to increase the delivery of affordable housing.*

**What about planning for new towns?** *New towns have not happened for a long time. National policy dictates the sites and if they are deliverable.*

**What will new national planning policy bring with it?** *Investment in additional solar and windfarm projects is expected.*

**How does housing need sit alongside infrastructure? People have to be able to get to and from their place of work.** *The work on the Local Plan should put us in a good position and we welcome conversations with Parishes on locations for housing.*

**Why are solar panels not added to all new buildings?** *The last government did start to make this easier to address and hopefully the new government will continue so that more schemes start to come through.*

**How do we get solar panels onto existing properties?** *There is [guidance on the Council's website](#). Also, information on the local [Green Heritage Homes](#) initiative. See also [Bath and West Community Energy's website](#) for opportunities relating to larger buildings.*

**Electric car charging is not easy because of the ways properties are set out.**



**Issues with footpath diversions can be a problem ie they can get moved if a bigger development comes along.** *There are separate policies in place for footpaths. These can at times sit side by side with another planning decision.*

**It is perceived that there is a Bath v North East Somerset approach ie 'it wouldn't happen in Bath'.**

**In the past Peter Duppa-Miller was known for providing clear to follow explanations around planning issues. This proved helpful to both Parish Councils and Ward Councillors. Is there a way of finding a mechanism that communicates 'how planning works' in plain English?** *Avon Local Council Association (ALCA) offers training titled [Planning in Plain English](#)*

## **Planning 2 Enforcement and Development Management:**

Neil Howat – Team Manager, Planning and Enforcement, B&NES  
Sarah James – Deputy Head of Planning Development Management, B&NES  
George Blanchard – Planning Officer, B&NES

There were a number of specific questions about enforcement issues, Neil Howat undertook to report back to the individuals who raised the questions.

### **Is the Enforcement Team now fully staffed? Is it worth reporting new cases?**

Yes, the team is now fully staffed and working through the backlog of cases. Any new cases reported will be investigated in accordance with the criteria.

**Is the Planning Authority now granting consent for extensions that look like separate dwellings?** It is difficult to make a general response without knowing the specific details - each application is considered on its merits.

**Is the Planning Authority removing permitted development rights more often than previously? Is B&NES in line with other Authorities in relation to this issue?** Local Authorities are not encouraged to do this and it can be appealed. B&NES is in line with other councils as this is national legislation.

### **Is it worth a Parish/Town Council pursuing a Neighbourhood Plan? What would the relationship be between a Neighbourhood Plan and the Local Plan?**

The most recent plan would take priority and so Parish/Town Councils may look to review Neighbourhood Plans at the same time or after the adoption of the Local Plan. Officers would still be mindful of the contents of a Neighbourhood Plan adopted before the Local Plan. It was noted that there is a lot of work involved in developing a Neighbourhood Plan.

**Could parking be included as part of a Neighbourhood Plan?** Further advice is needed on this as the Council has supplementary planning guidance in relation to parking spaces. The policy is Council led rather than national as B&NES have declared a Climate Emergency.

**Our Parish Council's Neighbourhood Plan has clear policies around lighting due to its location as a corridor for bats, but this isn't always reflected in**

**decisions made by the Planning Authority.** The Planning Team managers would always look to ensure that the comments of Parish/Town Councils are addressed in reports.

**Will the change in Government have an impact on the Local Plan process?** It is too early to say what the impact will be but the work already carried out will not be wasted.

**How is the need for housing measured?** By a housing needs assessment.

**Is the Planning Authority seeking to change housing development boundaries?** There were some changes in the recent Local Plan Partial Update.

**Which villages would be suitable for development?** Consideration is given to those in the most sustainable location with facilities such as public transport, a school and shop but this is balanced with other considerations for example location in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

## **6 CHAIR'S CLOSING REMARKS**

The Chair of the Council closed the meeting and thanked everyone for attending.

## **7 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

Wednesday 18 September, 6.30pm, Keynsham Community Space  
The theme is Community Safety

The meeting ended at 8.30 pm

Chair(person) .....

Date Confirmed and Signed .....

**Prepared by Democratic Services**