

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET

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

Thursday 23rd October 2025

Present:- **Councillors** Andy Wait, Alex Beaumont, Anna Box, John Leach, Saskia Heijltjes, Karen Walker and Ruth Malloy

Apologies for absence: Councillors: Grant Johnson

157 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

158 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

159 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillor Johnson gave his apologies.

160 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

161 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN

There was none.

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

Ceris Humphreys made a statement to the Panel regarding 'Embedding sustainability into policy making especially on transport and flood risk management'. A copy of the statement is attached to the minutes.

163 MINUTES

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

164 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

The Chair explained that the Cabinet Members were at the meetings to introduce their items and would take questions at each item.

165 LOCAL PLAN

Councillor Matt McCabe, Cabinet Member for Built Environment, Housing and Sustainable Development, introduced the report.

It was noted that points made by members of the Panel at this meeting would be fed into the consultation process. The Cabinet Member explained that responses are considered by officers and points made feed directly into policy making.

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

Councillor Leach stated that it was good to see greater focus on affordable housing at national level and stressed the importance of housing being affordable for essential workers. He stated the need to have an ambitious plan and asked if the plan for 1,000 affordable houses properly acknowledges the need. The Cabinet Member acknowledged the point and explained that it is a market driven system. He stated that there are 6,000 on the waiting list and currently 10 affordable housing units per year.

Councillor Box stated that there are some easy wins in the context of climate. Net Zero could be expanded regarding water; flooding techniques incorporated; partnerships with landowners in terms of biodiversity and more teeth regarding enforcement of tree felling. The Cabinet Member stated that planning policy has to be followed but we can push. He asked that evidence be fed into the process.

Councillor Box stated that many housing estates built in the 1980's and 90's did not prioritise walking. She asked if this could now be prioritised. The Cabinet Member agreed and explained that the Council does not legislate. The officer stated that plans will maximise the need for active travel along with flood risk and biodiversity considerations. Developers also need to make those connections as well.

Councillor Malloy asked if there were any examples of engagement with seldom heard groups. The Cabinet Member explained that there is a Housing Assembly with Curo (we have not had that groups data feedback yet). He stated that there had been contact with 'Aging Well in BANES' regarding accessible housing and that he had spoken to the 'Student Community Partnership'. There have been roadshows across the district which have included schools and university campuses along with engagement with young professionals and parents. The Cabinet Member added that BANES is low in the South West in terms of people setting up businesses.

Councillor Wait stated that the Government increased housing numbers in BANES but the Local Plan sets out plans for 21,000 housing in North East Somerset and 7,000 in Bath yet employment opportunities are greater in Bath. He stated that this goes against Climate Emergency considerations in terms of commuting/congestion. The Cabinet Member stated that he had raised the point with the minister. Bath is unique in terms of being a UNESCO World Heritage Site which means there is a ring around Bath so a different approach is needed. He explained that he has spoken to the Chair of Heritage England. The Government advise speaking to the planning inspector. The Cabinet Member agreed that the weighting is unfair but the Government see us as one authority area.

Councillor Wait stated that there was a stricter set of planning rules for Bath and another set for North East Somerset and that it seems unfair for North East Somerset to bear the brunt of housing that it does not really need. The officer stated that the rules apply equally but the conditions are different. Councillor Wait suggested this sounded like weasel words.

Councillor Heijltjes stated that there are ongoing issues with local transport and asked how the Local Plan is justified in encouraging car use and what steps can we take. The Cabinet Member stated that the Department of Transport have a connectivity calculator. If an area has a low score and housing is put in – WECA (West of England Combined Authority) may then run buses there. WECA view the Somer Valley as an area for growth. There will need to be infrastructure improvements first which unlocks housing. An example is in Wroughtington – with an extra 2,000 houses it will need to be accessible by bus. There has to be an 'infrastructure first' approach.

Councillor Leach asked how the Local Plan addresses the 5 year land supply issue. The officer explained that work is ongoing, we are looking at sites and looking at delivery. The rules state that land has to be available, suitable and deliverable.

Councillor Walker explained that she had asked for the item to be deferred to allow local people to have their say. The Cabinet Member asked that views are fed into the consultation. Councillor Wait explained that this item is on the workplan for a future meeting where the Panel can look at representations. Councillor Walker stated she is happy with the approach.

The Cabinet Member asked Panel members to encourage their residents to feed in local knowledge.

Councillor Wait thanked the Cabinet Member and officers and noted that the item would come back to the Panel in January 2026.

166 MOVEMENT STRATEGY

Councillor Joel Hirst, Cabinet Member for Sustainable Transport Strategy introduced the report and presentation.

Councillor Wait explained that Panel comments would be fed into the consultation process and the item will come back to a future meeting. Councillor Walker stated that she was happy with this approach following her request to defer the item.

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

Councillor Heijltjes stated that the 15 levers could be more 'SMART' and that they are vague. She asked what would be measured in order that we know how we are doing and would KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) be developed. The Cabinet Member explained that Appendix C sets out the levers and key measures of success. The officer stated that this point would be noted as feedback.

Councillor Leach stated that the current Local Plan mentions 'essential traffic only' in the city centre and the Movement Strategy mentions 'reducing traffic' – are we rolling back. The Cabinet Member stated that we are not rolling back and that it was a complex thing to achieve including getting clear through routes and getting freight vehicles out of the city centre.

Councillor Box referred to transport with regard to rural areas and Bath. She suggested the Mi-Permit could do a discount for certain postcodes in the region. A lot of residents complain about the cost of parking. The Cabinet Member stated that this is an interesting idea and explained that one lever is Parking Strategy – we need to create the right incentives and disincentives regarding parking. Councillor Heijltjes stated that the lever on Park and Ride addresses this issue.

Councillor Heijltjes stated that the interactive map has some layers missing (for example roads to Claverton Down). The Cabinet Member asked that areas where more detail is needed be flagged up.

Councillor Walker asked if coaches could drop people off at Park and Ride sites. She also referred to cycling in Amsterdam where there are too many bikes which needs to be managed. The Cabinet Member stated that the Coach Strategy is one of the levers. He stated that the active travel network needs the right infrastructure place so that there is the right amount of separation.

Councillor Leach asked about the process of categorising streets based on the role we want them to play in the vision. He asked how the existing data helps this. The Cabinet Member stated that both the data and the future vision were looked at and there is an element of additional work on the what the map could look like.

Councillor Beaumont asked about improvement works on the cycle path between Bristol and Bath. The Cabinet Member noted the valid point and explained that this is included in current consultation under the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Transport Delivery.

Councillor Heijltjes stated that School Streets is missing from the strategy, lever 15 only mentions school travel plans which is too weak. The Cabinet Member stated that he would look again at lever 15.

Councillor Leach asked about city centre parking. He asked if meters would be taken away so that there is only residents parking. The Cabinet Member stated that he did not have the answer just yet – the Parking Strategy will consider this, it is a balance as business access is needed. We will come back to a future meeting with more detail on the Parking Strategy.

Councillor Walker stated that we should not stop our residents seeing and visiting the city centre. The Cabinet Member shared that ambition.

Councillor Malloy asked if large commercial delivery lorries could decamp outside of the city centre and move into smaller vehicles. The Cabinet Member stated that there is a suggestion regarding a University site. He stated that there are some good examples in Bristol and it is a key piece of work.

Councillor Leach asked why the Movement Strategy would not change any classification of main roads. The officer explained that the A36 and A46 are national highways, the Movement Strategy only looks at roads that BANES owns. The Cabinet Member asked Councillor Leach to send in any specific suggestions.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and officers.

167 CLIMATE ANNUAL REPORT

Councillor Sarah Warren, Cabinet Member for Sustainable Bath and North East Somerset, introduced the report and presentation.

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

Councillor Wait stated that the target of 20% biodiversity net gain in the Local Plan is encouraging, what will this look like. The Cabinet Member explained that an ecological report measures the site before and after the development. There are many ways sites can improve biodiversity. The officer added that developers can also make biodiversity improvements on registered areas off site too which would enhance the district.

Councillor Wait stated that there had been a lot of building in Keynsham and a lot of biodiversity net gain has been off site. Is this more likely when it is raised to 20%. The Cabinet Member stated that generally wildlife and humans don't mix well. He shared the concern that it can be difficult for people to see the benefits. We will test the 20% target. Developers will ask the priority – biodiversity and retrofit or affordable housing.

Councillor Malloy asked if there is a geographical limit to off site biodiversity net gain work. The officer explained that there are offsite habitats within BANES so it would be in the area.

Councillor Box thanked the officers for a good report. She stated that places such as Stanton Drew use oil – Government subsidies could address this which would be an easy win.

Councillor Heijltjes stated that she would like to see more data and predictions in the reports and that it is hard to find KPIs (Key Performance Indicators). On issues such as transport, how can members understand how we are doing. The Cabinet Member referred to the Corporate Performance report. The officer added that they are currently working on a transition plan.

Councillor Leach stated that it is good that the Council is reducing its own emissions which can be used to help encourage other organisations such as Wessex Water. The Cabinet Member explained that there is a 'Future Ambitions' Board including local organisations with a Climate Emergency subgroup. We also need to get the message out to residents. The officer added that there is a Climate and Nature Network Forum in November.

Councillor Heijltjes asked when the new Climate and Nature Strategy Draft would be coming to this Panel. The Cabinet Member stated that this could be programmed in as a piece of policy development work.

Councillor Walker asked about longer contracts for WECA (West of England Combined Authority) buses. She mentioned the A37 junction (Radstock/Peasedown St John) and the changes to allow buses to move more freely. The Cabinet Member agreed with the comment regarding longer contracts, bus contracts are commercial and also agreed that infrastructure was important. The Chair thanked the Cabinet Members and officers.

168 PANEL WORKPLAN

The Panel noted the future workplan and the following suggestions for future items:

- Flood Risk Management and Climate Adaption
- Active Travel Masterplan prioritization

The meeting ended at 12.14 pm

Chair(person)

Date Confirmed and Signed

Prepared by Democratic Services

Statement to Climate and Sustainability Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel – 23 Oct 2025

Today you have items on the Local Plan, Movement Strategy and Climate and Nature Progress report. So sustainability is central.

I spoke at your March meeting on flood awareness and emergency planning.

Though not minuted, in reply to a question I noted B&NES's Flood Risk Management Strategy runs from 2015 to 25 so expires in two months. This is a statutory requirement under the Flood & Water Management Act so I'm surprised to have seen no reference to a new one.

2015 is long ago in thinking on climate change, flood risk and climate adaptation.

Today's Climate & Nature report refers often to climate adaptation – almost only with reference to energy.

When it refers to flooding, the report speaks largely about nature-based solutions but these would have small-scale impact and no immediate relevance to areas at risk from flooding now.

Where is the plan for areas at significant risk of flooding that need adaptation now?

Why does this matter? We have a ten year old policy requiring openness, raising awareness and community emergency planning. Yet at the same time, as an unparished community at risk, we've had to fight for key information on flood risk and planning in our area: we've been excluded from knowing how our own evacuation will be impacted by a mass evacuation from a large new venue on our doorstep, whilst an uncorrected Flood Risk Assessment for it consistently understates flood incidents in the last 25 years– including routes that are not just access to the venue but routes kids walk to school, students walk at night to accommodation and many more. So how can we plan properly?

Flood Risk and Emergency Planning needs to be given much more weight than it is in the report AND the wider policies it's supposed to support.

Turning to sustainable transport, there are many points of concern in the Movement Strategy but I'll stick to one. The Strategy's limited to Bath – or rather in reality to residents who live in Bath. A few examples:

- The Strategy says on business travel plans: “by working closely with businesses, we have the opportunity to reduce car dependency for commuting and business journeys.” This is not new but not working!
 - B&NES recently indicated acceptability of a major venue Travel Plan that fails B&NES transport policies in numerous ways.
 - One of the city's Unis has just consulted on a draft TP that's opposed in key respects to Uni access proposals in B&NES MS consultation and falls way short of what one would expect based on the Transport SPD.
 - How is it possible that we have a new NHS orthopaedic Centre of Excellence with no bus route passing it and buses from areas the centre serves 5 to 15 mins walk away for fit individuals?
- And yet again there is little aspiration in the MS to drive up use of existing Park & Ride sites by the numerous drivers who drive right past these sites into central Bath.

B&NES Net Zero targets on transport are not capable of being met by a relatively small cohort of people with some of the lowest car ownership levels in B&NES. If we want to achieve the targets we need to if, we need policies strong enough to apply to all, not just the easy targets.

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