

Batheaston Parish Council Speech for Scrutiny

Good afternoon Scrutiny panel and the audience, I am George Riley, Chairman of Batheaston Parish Council. I welcome this opportunity to speak on behalf of our community and to explain as clearly as possible why we do not and have never supported a Park and Ride on the Bathampton Meadows. I am not holding back in (on) what I will say today, its my duty to represent the passionately held views of the vast majority of our parishioners.

Back in September when we were first alerted that there would be a Park and Ride with three sites identified in the Chronicle we visited each of them and immediately realised what an impact this development would have.

Although the Halcrow report states that only 500 households would be able to see this eye sore, this is a vast underestimation and misrepresentation of the truth. Batheaston, Bathampton, Bathford as well as Kingsdown, Camden and Claverton will overlook it. When we asked the council for evidence why this was needed and why these particular sites had been identified, the response to our frequent repeated requests have not been satisfied to this day.

However, when an FOI asked why these three sites were chosen – we found that there was no report of any meeting having taken place to discuss them or any minutes. It started to look like manipulation to satisfy the Transport Strategy – yes voted by the council but based on responses from just 208 questionnaires of which stakeholders and London residents took part.

The council started the deeply flawed consultation process with three exhibitions and we asked officers why we needed a P&R. Peter Dawson stated it is because central car parks were being closed, and an Enterprise Area was to be built for 9000 IT workers.

When the same officer was asked if this would help congestion and pollution on the London Rd – several Parish Councillors and Batheaston residents were told “No”.

These statements were heard by many people who will happily attest to it, and yet this was later denied in a council Q&A document.

In simple terms if you take approximately 4% of cars off the London Rd when up to 23,000 cars travel to Bath from this route – what difference will it really make?

A quick glance at the publicly available occupancy rates and we all know that the other P&Rs very rarely hit 100% capacity (perhaps for a few hours in the lead up to Christmas) so it is a lie to assume the Bathampton Meadows P&R will.

HGVs, LGVs, diesel buses and the school run will not use your P&R and will continue to amble on the slow London Rd – it's slow because the council makes it slow, by traffic calming obstacles and traffic lights which are so badly synchronised they are part of the problem.

Let us address the consultation:

- There were multiple opportunities to amend the questionnaire in order to make it valid by linking it to the electoral role and yet the council allowed the results to be used even after no amendments had been implemented. Every opportunity was ignored. Votes through Twitter e.g. were not linked to IPD address checks leading to severe distortion.

After the deeply flawed and misleading consultation, the public was for instance not told that 1/3 of site F would be used for access when turning site B into a car park, we still had no evidence and the frustrated residents formed the Meadows Alliance – they have been forced to supply evidence which we all know you have been unwilling to share. Why?

When looking scientifically at traffic flow, the behaviour of Bath commuters, the actual use of our 3 P&Rs, car parks and pollution levels in Batheaston we do not need a P&R. This has been unequivocally show-cased earlier today. Yet this council has budgeted £10 million pounds to build one. You have heard the Meadows Alliance arguments already so I will not repeat this but I will also take this opportunity to talk about how on several occasions the administration has said it will consult with Parish Councils.

Well, this has happened only once – three parish councils Batheaston, Bathampton and Bathford met in February with Tim Warren, Louise Fradd and Tony Clarke. Many parish councillors re-arranged work commitments to attend – and the level of discussion was quite minimal leaving everybody underwhelmed.

Amazingly Mr Warren turned up and asked if he had been sent the agenda and was observed doodling, and then went on to explain to us the meaning of information purdah!

Ms Fradd and Mr Clarke, when they did engage, told us nothing new and rather arrogantly said, they knew all about any alternatives suggested already. Ms Fradd was asked what the 2015 NO2 levels were for Batheaston High Street, data which was published the week before and denied knowing the answer.

When asked what the objective of the P&R was Ms Fradd told us , and I quote:> “its for shoppers”

We of course asked for evidence again and were told to refer to the Hill report. Having spent many an evening trying to understand this document we conclude that this is not evidence a P&R will solve congestion problems, on the contrary traffic will remain the same when the Enterprise Area is built, in fact get worse to the west. If this is engaging with Parish Councils – then shame on them. This was a tick box exercise nothing more and nothing less.

Part 2

Although we are always told not to involve emotions, since the outset of the Park and Ride issue, people have had very strong feelings about this. The utter dehumanisation of site B, not letting the farmer know his land would be compulsory purchased, the flawed consultation, the fact that Ben Howlett wants to use somebody else’s, Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg’s constituency for the park and ride, something Jacob Rees Mogg, MP for Bath and North East Somerset strongly opposes, are only a few reasons for the strong reactions.

In September last year Susanne Hagen started a petition on-line on change.org and this petition now also exists in hard copy. Over the past few months we have been petitioning in the centre of Bath and are now also spreading it across the city.

To date just over 12 thousand have signed it and it is constantly going up. We have so far received 113 pages of comments with reactions from people and Bath residents are very unhappy. They have been through this before and the time has come to shut this down once and for all.

Let us have a look at some figures and also some of many comments we have received:

