

## **Speech by Annie Kilvington to B&NES Cabinet 19.7.17**

The Bathampton Meadows Alliance is delighted with the decision you are about to take not to proceed to develop the Meadows, and is keen to work with you on initiatives that can make a genuine reduction in congestion and pollution in the City.

Any anticipation we have of a future where transparent, evidence based decision making will prevail has however been seriously undermined by the rationale presented by the Council for the cancellation of the scheme. We are bewildered that there is no mention in the report to cabinet today of:

- the objections of the National Trust, and Bath Preservation Trust, the major stakeholders in the preservation of this City's World Heritage status; or
- the evidence of your consultants and the BMA that the scheme would make no positive contribution to the reduction of congestion or pollution in the City; or
- the absence of any realistic prospect of passing the high threshold tests in your new Placemaking Plan, and national planning legislation, to establish that any benefit would outweigh significant harm.

Instead you would have us believe that you have been broadsided by the safety concerns of the Highways Agency over access to Sites B and F and that reasons beyond your control are at the heart of today's decision. This is a pitiful, deeply misleading attempt to dignify the Council's withdrawal from the scheme.

HE approval has always been a major project risk – it is on the risk register. You've known since the 2013 Halcrow report that the access junction for Site B was likely to require a departure from Highways standards and would require HE approval. Your consultants Motts have been grappling with HE's "operational concerns" since 2016 and by the end of January this year were trying to convince HE to accept "economic benefits" as a trade off against public safety – a scandal in itself.

By 9 February 2017, before the call in of the January Cabinet decision was heard on 23 February, HE had told you they could not approve access to site B. You kept that information from the councillors on the scrutiny panel determining the call in, and you kept it from the public. You kept spending our money, you falsely used purdah to keep everyone in the dark and you waited until now to scrap the scheme.

I can think of only three reasons why the Council can have continued to ignore the historical, empirical evidence of its consultants and major stakeholders. The first is political arrogance, the second is gross incompetence, and the third is corruption – by which I do not necessarily mean financial corruption, but a seam of moral corruption running deep within the council which has sought to steer money away from other public services in favour of a cause promoted for personal or political vanity. Which would you have the public believe it is?