

Wera Hobhouse Transport & Pollution Briefing 23rd Feb 18 - Summing up by Robin Kerr (FoBRA Chairman)

A “briefing seminar” was held at BRLSI on 23rd Feb 18, organized and chaired by Mrs Wera Hobhouse, MP for Bath, to gather evidence and data on Transport and Pollution for later conferences, with the intention of reaching a consensus about the way ahead. Robin Kerr, FoBRA Chairman, was asked to sum-up at the end. Here are his words:

Thank you, Wera and your staff for setting up the Briefing. Thanks to all the speakers for researching the data and presenting it: and thanks to all of you for participating.

The aims were, firstly, to discover and provide data which would show us the need for transport now and in the future; and hence inform Bath’s Transport Policy for the next 30 to 40 years. Secondly it was to learn about the pollution we experience daily here, as, in large parts of Bath, it is illegally and dangerously high.

Well, Dine Romero [LibDem Group Leader], on behalf of Jon Poole [Council Officer – unable to attend], certainly told us about the pollution, but what Wera added is that the recent High Court judgement requires us to come up with a solution by 2021! – and that’s tough. What’s important though is that we continue measuring and publishing the data.

The two universities told us how great they are, but not much about their transport problems. However, you only have to stand at the bottom of Bathwick Hill on a term-time morning to see the queues and recognize how crazy the current arrangement is. The RUH has similar problems but did not brief us: and one questioner mentioned the school run, and ways of mitigating its effects on traffic.

David James [CE of Bath Tourism Plus] actually addressed some transport and pollution problems, calling for many day visitors to be replaced by those who stay, as they spend more and cause less pollution. He asked for more train travel, more Park & Ride sites (P&Rs) and more pedestrianisation.

Dine Romero also told us about housing and jobs. She and others said we need more housing in Bath, and this has (a) to be affordable (ie **really** affordable) and (b) not to have its total undermined by Airbnb, party houses, holiday lets, etc; but also we need places to put the jobs which she predicts.

Ian Plain of the Small Business Sector gave us some really interesting facts: the need for less commuting, cheaper housing, better use of the P&Rs, and better freight distribution; but, importantly, what he didn't ask for was more parking or more cars, and **this is significant**.

Harry Tedstone [Bath Independent Group] extolled the importance of the independent sector. He recommended better use of the P&Rs, but queried the logic of allowing the building of hotels in central Bath without any parking. He wanted a new 'movement' to embrace other transport modes.

First Bus told us about their new ticketing systems, aiming towards non-cash payments overall which cut costs and speed up services (80% of passengers already pay this way). They have had over 7% growth for the last three years, the P&R buses representing 22% of their services in Bath. To help reduce pollution they are renewing or converting one third of their fleet to the latest Euro VI standard (presently only 10%). What they would recommend are more: bus lanes, bus gates, traffic lights and bus-only roads.

Great Western and Network Rail gave some interesting statistics about the efficiency and lower pollution of rail travel: and the huge investment taking place, with associated increases in trains and seats available.

Lastly, let's not forget that there is one person who is responsible for implementing much of this, and for coordinating the rest; and that is Cllr Mark Shelford, B&NES Cabinet Member for Transport.

Robin Kerr
FoBRA Chairman, 24th Feb 18