

Review of delivery to the forum's aims

Introduction

The review considered the aims, how well these are being delivered and how they may be better achieved. Inputs to the review were taken both by email and in person on the 9th July. The following document contains this overview of the review as well as a complete list of all the items raised during the process.

Overview

In summary, it is clear both that there are number of areas in which the Forum is seen to have been successful this is balanced by a general feeling that more could be achieved.

To look into the suggestions on how to achieve this I sorted all the items into common themes, the ones with the most responses follow in order. This isn't an exact science; however, my reading is that some items come through clearly.

Longer term perspective

The first suggestion is that that the Forum should be taking a longer-term view when undertaking its work. With suggestions being to consider in the order of 10 years in the future. The forum could then use this longer-term view to structure its work. Related to this general desire to take a longer view there are a number of comments that the Forum is not able to engage early enough with projects occurring in Bath to have an influence, partly because it isn't looking out for them in advance.

Summary: The forum should consider the long-term vision for Bath.

Meeting structure

The next most common area is around suggestions for altering the approach of how the forum itself is run. Within this are a number of items. The first is that the current meeting format is not appropriate for delivering the aims, alternatives to debate such as working through items in small groups and more action oriented approaches are suggested. There is a concern that currently the relationship between councillors and co-opted members is not even. With a number of suggestions to alter the ratio of councillors to co-opted members favouring co-opted more. However due to the event I ran clashing with other meetings the number of councillors was low at the meeting and other comments do reflect the need for balance. The last comments in this area are around the occupancy of the chair. Suggestions include rotating the chair more frequently and removing the current restrictions on the role.

Summary: There is a strong desire to alter the format of forum meetings. A first step may be moving away from the debate driven model outlined in the TOR and to a more collaborative approach.

Engagement

The last common area of comment is around engagement. The theme here is that the forum is not engaging with as many stakeholders as it could do. The comments reflect on ways in which the forum could engage with as many communities as possible. There are a number of possible suggestions in this area. These include specific outreach to named groups. The creation of a directory of different community organisations and engaging them by email. The balance to this was a concern that the forum did not attempt to spread itself to thinly.

Summary: The forum should consider how it engages with the wider communities of Bath

All items

All the individual items of feedback are captured below. I've made some edits for length and I wasn't always able to read some notes from the 9th. My intention has not been to change the meaning being expressed. My apologies if I have inadvertently misrepresented any items.

Aims

BATH CITY FORUM AIM	How well is the forum currently meeting this aim?	What prevents the forum from furthering this aim?	How could the forum address this aim differently?
3.1 The aim of the Bath City Forum is to provide a mechanism for collaboration between communities and public bodies in the City to improve local engagement, join-up services and help local people receive better outcomes. It will do this by:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Beginning to make a difference to local people lives via BCF allocation of CIL & CEF monies to particular projects ◆ Not withstanding the Council's Connecting Communities vision to be "A listening Council with active citizens that reaches every community and culture" ◆ Forum meetings in 2016-17, and in some extent in 2018 used more for information dissemination than collaboration ◆ Many communities inadequately represented on the Forum, and of those that are represented, the interests of the more powerful or better networked stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Lack of clarity or understanding as to who Bath stakeholders and communities are ◆ Connecting Communities aim that Area Forums "streamline and simplify local engagement" is increasingly unrealistic given the complexity of issues concerning Bath's stakeholders, and online communication channels enabling formation of communities of interest to address such complexity. ◆ Information and procedural power disparities between elected & co-opted members ◆ Resulting in short term perspectives (i.e. more 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Good news that many of these obstacles are surmountable, and indeed steps are already being taken to address some of them e.g. ◆ Resisting pressure to replicate discussions on topics already subject to detailed cross-party scrutiny or public consultation elsewhere ◆ Better management of speaking slots at BCF meetings so as to ensure that airtime allowed to co-opted members is broadly equivalent to that given to councillors ◆ Varying the style and format of BCF meetings so as to encourage more interaction, brainstorming, problem solving, 2 way communication, community engagement

	<p>dominate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Identifying, understanding and addressing the full complexity of issues of long term importance to Bath and its stakeholders 	<p>driven by being seen to do something than solving problems collaboratively and delivering lasting value) and party political positions on delivery of key services & budgetary priorities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Lack of appropriate officer support. Though not party political, officers can suffer from job focussed tunnel vision (evident for example in Dec2016 BCF presentation on JSP and JTS), and risk averse and not Bath focussed (e.g. March2018 parishing presentation), or insufficiently senior and/or to deferent to Cabinet (e.g. forthcoming July2018 presentation on consultation.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ but more could be done, for example, to improve the inclusivity and effectiveness of engagement with Bath stakeholders and communities recognising the multiplicity of stakes in an issue and forms of community allegiance, and recognising the significant disparities in power and influence in addressing them. ◆ Forum must be given some sort of power to be most effective “It must do”
<p>i) Acting as a “Champion” on behalf of the City</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ low visibility and non-member attendance at BCF meetings ◆ some bad publicity e.g. after February 2017 meeting (attended by the then Bath MP) ◆ Influential response of BCF to LGBC on ward boundary proposals for Bath ◆ Invitation from high profile Bath projects for BCF representation e.g. Bathscape Board invitation ◆ What does this mean ? PR role ? Who / what is “the city” Surely it’s the residents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Lack of funding or decision-making powers ◆ Key obstacles. The key obstacle of lack of funding or decision making powers. By playing a leading role in evaluating potential benefits or parishing Bath. ◆ Yes! We should be the lead organisation – however we need to gain authority to be so ◆ Bureaucracy ◆ We aren’t currently representing the different communities with Bath effectively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Important than BCF leads the debate surrounding the increasingly significant Bath governance deficit and constructively explores parishing of Bath as a way of addressing this ◆ In addition to the disproportionate reduction in number of Bath relative to North East Somerset councillors, such central government powers and resources that are directed to localities are going to regional or large authority areas. (Note in this regard the talk of a Somerset super-unitary authority,

			<p>and the threat this might pose to Bath).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ To be visionary we could look 10 – 20 years ahead. Also long focus stops too much Politics ◆ Make an impact on WECA for greater Bath benefit from Transport funding ◆ Long term vision is vital if we are to become champions on anything ◆ Make it (the forum) a statutory consultee ◆ Unless we become champions of local residents through improved working methods, this should be dropped. BCF should not be expected to have a marketing / PR role. ◆ A principle should be around a solution focussed approach ◆ Address information and procedural power disparities between elected and co opted members, by ensuring broad equilibrium and airtime between co opted and councillors
<p>ii) Improving the engagement of Bath & North East Somerset Council and its partners with local communities to better address City issues and priorities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ meeting content and format is often not appropriate or easily accessed by communities seeking to engage with Bath issues (often seems to be more dictated by current policy & decision-making agenda of B&NES Council as a whole e.g. February 2017 BCF briefing on moving Bath library) ◆ Forum has progressed a long way since 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Lack of transparency & community involvement in BCF agenda setting ◆ Style of regular meetings is not participative ◆ Big events such as Bath City Conference held at bad times e.g. for students or for working people ◆ Insufficient frequency of meetings to inform, develop and agree BCF response 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Make sure newly co-opted members and those not in agenda-setting working group know what issues are being planned and can input into the planning process ◆ Varying the style and format of BCF meetings so as to encourage more interaction, brainstorming, problem solving, 2 way communication, community engagement ◆ Make BCF meetings more participative e.g.

	inception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Avoid been “used” as a consulting place – we should influence ◆ Engagement from both officers and councillors is key without these nothing will get done. ◆ BCF structure and working methods don’t provide the framework to do this. ◆ Meetings are dominated by councillors for whom the BCF is just another council meeting with the same institutional flavour. 	<p>break out sessions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Councillors and officers essential but reduce numbers (1/3 Councillors) ◆ It still does not approach the popularity and “bite” of the better Bath forum ◆ By clarifying our aims and revising the way the BCF functions to meet those aims. ◆ More time, space and agency needs to be given to /claimed by community representatives other than councillors. ◆ Make BCF agenda setting more transparent and accessible to all members and interested citizens ◆ Lack of 2 way communication Lack of clarity or understanding as to who Bath stakeholders & committees are.
iii) Involving City and non-City residents and organisations, seeking their views and encouraging them to participate in projects which improve the City	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ a few good examples including the anti-idling initiative as advocated at May 2018 meeting in context of air pollution item ◆ Don’t the other forums represent non-city residents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Not involving stakeholders early enough in the definition of improvement activities e.g. February 2017 BCF briefing on moving Bath library ◆ BCF structure and working methods don’t provide the framework to do this 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Better and more structured consultation with communities – a key outcome at which the July 2018 BCF discussion of consultation approaches is aimed at. ◆ Hold BCF meetings in different venues around the city ◆ Put up posters on community noticeboards ◆ Create a list of community organisations and email them notifications of meetings / agendas and opportunities to participate ◆ Debate is a 2-way process and iterative ◆ Open the door and engage others .. especially when topics are relevant. ◆ Participation is key – No play should mean no voice – If you do not take

			<p>part – Your influence should be limited.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Involve public early before decisions are nearly made ◆ Feedback essential if people are to engage ◆ Offer more radical proposals to the public so that they will see it is innovative and worthwhile ◆ University – city relations
iv) Identifying and addressing common issues of concern across the City	<p>Well wrt identifying environment economic devt issues e.g. RK air pollution & “Flooding risk upstream of Churchill Bridge“ & “relationship between our Universities and the City “,</p> <p>Cllrs PAJ re impact of decline in high st retail & JB on architectural choices we are making for new buildings along the River Avon and the centre of Bath because the planning official are not following the place-making plan policies’) subgroups & increasingly transport but not so good at addressing them e.g MH not “fully engaged at the programme/project phase with the many major initiatives taking place throughout the city (South Quays, Stadium for Bath, major housing developments, transport etc)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Politicisation of issues e.g. P&R East ◆ Dominance of meeting by ward councillors. Lack of space made for co-opted members to speak ◆ Ignorance of the agenda setting system ◆ Transport debate is example of how long these things take ◆ Can sub groups be sustainable ◆ Meeting format not conducive to address issues of concern ◆ We all know 90% of the City issues – we just need to find some common ground to do something about them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Get BCF representation on key projects, eg Milk St hotel, JS “might be helpful to engage more deeply at a programmatic level with large initiatives taking place” ◆ Introduce 30 minute community sessions which are part of the BCF TOR ◆ Engage more deeply and input into key issues as a forum e.g. on the type of development we want in Bath especially riverside ones. ◆ Better agenda setting ◆ What are the concerns we needs to reach and find out ◆ Possible Parishing main game in town ◆ Campaign to revamp the consultation process in B&NES so it is not just lip service ◆ Vision on issues influencing not reacting should be a goal ◆ To much talking not enough action ◆ Reduce the number of Councillors on the forum
v) Agreeing how	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Understanding where voluntary activities can be 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Lack of clarity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Don’t overdo “Representatives” too

<p>organisations will work most effectively together to respond to the City's priorities and take action where appropriate</p>	<p>leveraged</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Who decides what the "City's" priorities are ? Official e.g. core strategy? <p>Does this mean organisations, then surely that's a council issue not a BCF responsibility " to take action" though we may provide advice.</p>		<p>many vested interests + ignores minority groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Longer term agenda planning to achieve on issues and feedback ◆ Engage more with the business community ◆ Having as many stakeholders around the table is key – as long as they are prepared to "Do" not just talk ◆ Elected councillors are important for legitimacy ◆ Better "Agenda setting" ◆ Reduce political representatives ◆ Fewer long – winded presentations ◆ (more) engagement of council staff ◆ Annual change of chair ◆ Altering format of meeting. More interactive smaller groups working on problems ◆ Rotation of the chair ◆ More representation from community groups ◆ Remove restriction on chair been a councillor ◆ Revise how BCF works ◆ Involve stakeholders much earlier on in the definition of improvement activities
<p>vi) Influencing wider policy developments</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Individual members do this as relevant to their interests, expertise & influence ◆ LGBC submission as good example of doing so corporately ◆ The BCF submission to the Local government boundary commission was a good example of this. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Forum lacks teeth political agendas interfere with making decisions / suggestions ◆ TOR3.2 says BCF has an advisory and consultative, even though it has no funding or decision making powers ◆ BCF seems to have limited it's vision to advising on CIL. The TOR doesn't limit the BCF in this way. The 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Mechanisms for feedback to council to other key stakeholders ◆ Better information and better presentations and boarder participation in discussion could lead to valuable outputs in terms of advice to the Council, greater communication with the wider community etc. This should lead to greater credibility for the BCF and the possibility of influencing policy. ◆ Rock the boat ◆ Long term vision can be

		<p>way BCF meetings are run mitigates us fulfilling this aim.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ There's no workplan, we are not given information to prepare for the meetings, the presentations are of poor quality. ◆ Feedback to cabinet / council is too limited ◆ Why no PR on successes i.e CIL money results ◆ Bring partisan issues early enough for meaningful consultation or not at all eg. Budget Waste Libraries etc Networking Organisation 	<p>controversial but can be the norm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Take the long view ◆ Forum to have power and influence ◆ Forum to become a statutory consultation group ◆ Forum needs to look ahead and initiate discussion early and follow progression ◆ On the architectural choices, we are making for new buildings along the River Avon and the centre of Bath because the planning official are not following the place-making plan policies. We are getting exactly the same architectural designs as any other city in Britain and indeed the world . That is not what we set out to do. This along with urban design in general this is one of the few areas of policy where we enjoy some measure of independent power to determine our environment and the prosperity of future generations.
<p>vii) Linking with relevant bodies, partnerships and projects in the City</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Increasingly via CIL & CEF allocations ◆ This is not really happening business council officers residents should all be engaged ◆ Currently not co-working with other city stakeholders –should cross pollenate more ◆ Good starting point in terms of providing link 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Lack of profile and credibility ◆ Involved too late for any meaningful consultation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Communities in places such as Twerton, Foxhill etc. I would like these communities invited to represent their positive achievements ◆ Connect with transition Bath and Transition Larkhall ◆ Engage with the business community including Bid

	<p>between communities and public bodies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Apart from police and fire service, other issues tend to be those raised tend to be of narrow focus. Issues affecting different sections of the community and the outer wards are not addressed and not sought 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Engage more deeply with large initiatives repeat visits ◆ Participation, expression of issues affecting the city focus on joint problem solving ◆ Bath City Football Club development could offer opportunities to the community ◆ If involved earlier stage – to return so feedback to those consulted given ◆ Forum not engaged at early stages of major initiatives ◆ Better information for improved communication with community.
--	---	--	---

Additional Items

All comments were welcomed and some items raised not linked to a specific aim. These are as follows.

Some specific topics were recommended for debate, I've reflected some above these are the complete list

- ◆ On the general decline in high street retail business. Whilst Bath is fairly well insulated against the adverse trading climate, the advantages we enjoy could lead to complacency. In addition, the pace of digital change and online shopping appears to be accelerating. We need to keep an eye on this to be prepared for the future by acknowledging the changes taking place and how we think Bath should respond to the challenge.
- ◆ On the architectural choices, we are making for new buildings along the River Avon and the centre of Bath because the planning official are not following the place-making plan policies. We are getting exactly the same architectural designs as any other city in Britain and indeed the world . That is not what we set out to do. This along with urban design in general this is one of the few areas of policy where we enjoy some measure of independent power to determine our environment and the prosperity of future generations.
- ◆ The relationship between our Universities and the City.
- ◆ Flooding risk upstream of Churchill Bridge.

Some procedural concerns around attendance and the recording of this were raised

- ◆ Accuracy of attendance records in meeting minutes

- ◆ Attendance should be recorded – some people < 3 meetings per year

One general point.

- ◆ TOR mentions the Forum should create an “Area profile” ..?

During my reading up in preparation for this review I'd found this here
<http://www.bathnes.gov.uk/services/your-council-and-democracy/local-research-and-statistics/wiki/bath-forum-area>