

Statement to Climate Emergency & Sustainability Policy, Development & Scrutiny Panel

regarding the B&NES Council's plans to commercialise the High Common

In July 2020, this Council declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency.

In a few weeks' time, the Council will commence a process to commercialise the High Common which will potentially breach this declaration and undermine the Council's commitment to tackle the climate emergency.

Since golf ceased two years ago, this **iconic** green space in the heart of Bath has been free of **toxic** chemicals and mains water irrigation, and the park's **wildlife** and **habitats** have flourished in their natural state.

At a Cabinet meeting in early 2021, the Council listed **six** toxic chemicals used on the High Common to maintain it for golf. Any plans to reintroduce chemicals would be deeply concerning to residents who live nearby and to those who use this park daily for all manner of activities.

Furthermore, for the past 2 years it has not been necessary to irrigate the land with **mains water** which is treated at **significant cost** to make it safe for drinking. In the current climate and nature emergency, it is wasteful and unacceptable to use this scarce and precious natural resource for the sole purpose of a game of golf.

Golf courses use fertilisers, pesticides, and water to keep them in a playable condition, weed freed and looking unnaturally green. **But** just because they are green does not make them environmentally friendly. Golf courses have been described by scientists as a “biodiversity desert”, taking up a huge amount of land and resources for the benefit of a small number of people, a **luxury** our planet can **no longer afford**.

We have therefore asked the Council for a **clear** and **unambiguous** commitment that no chemicals, including mains water, be used on the High Common under **any** circumstances. We now ask this Panel to support this request.

But more than that, the decision to commercialise the High Common with golf is a **backwards** step, **reversing** the biodiversity gains, and a poor use of this valuable asset. It is being justified on what has happened in the past, rather than considering the current policies, priorities and circumstances.

It ignores how this green space has now been re-discovered by residents and visitors who use it regularly for all purposes, without fear of being hit by a golf ball or harm from chemicals.

Furthermore, there has never been any consultation on the High Common and the decision is due to be made by a single Cabinet member, a process lacking in **transparency** and **governance**, and is **inconsistent** with this Council’s commitment to listen to and act for local residents.

For **all** these reasons, we ask this Panel to **urgently** call in and **scrutinize** these proposals and **declare** them **inconsistent** with the Council's climate declarations and its policy to promote the interests of local residents.

And **finally** I would like to read you a tweet that BANES has sent just today...

“Creating habitats for bees, butterflies and other wildlife not only helps us tackle the ecological emergency, it makes our neighbourhoods more varied and colourful. Lets get buzzing”.

I ask this panel, how does that tweet, and this proposal to reinstate golf on the High Common align? In the climate and nature emergency that we face, this **entire** proposal is wrong. BANES Council needs to **live up** to its climate declarations and start **practicing** what it preaches.

Thank you