

SPECIAL CABINET MEETING – 1st February 2024

STATEMENTS FROM PUBLIC AND COUNCILLORS

1. Mr and Mrs Flower – Somer Valley Enterprise Zone
2. Angharad Barber – Somer Valley Enterprise Zone
3. Mrs Anne Huckle – Somer Valley Enterprise Zone
4. Margaret Heffernan – Somer Valley Enterprise Zone
5. Andy Jeffery – Somer Valley Enterprise Zone
6. James Wellman (on behalf of Cllr Ann Morgan) – Somer Valley Enterprise Zone
7. Jim Plunkett-Cole – Economic Outlook for Jobs in B&NES
8. Allison Herbert (Bath BID) – Economic Strategy
9. Robbie Bentley – The Local Plan – Risk and Equalities
10. Cllr Shaun Hughes – Local Plan and Economic Strategy
11. Cllr Duncan Hounsell – The Local Plan
12. Cllr Bharat Pankhania – The Local Plan – Combe Down Allotments
13. Dewi Willcox – The Local Plan

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS - COUNCILLORS

M	01	Question from:	Cllr Eleanor Jackson
<p>How much of the Local Plan is honestly deliverable, given the understaffing in the Planning department where consultants and agency staff regularly have to be employed, and given that the planning department's own data suggest an economic downturn is coming?</p>			
Answer from:			Cllr Matt McCabe
<p><i>The Planning service has recently had to keep a small number of posts vacant as part of the Council's strategy to meet in-year budget pressures, however the service has recently successfully recruited to some key posts and hopes to fill the remaining vacant posts soon. The service budget will also benefit from the recent long-awaited increase in nationally set planning application fees.</i></p> <p><i>The Local Plan options document is the latest stage in producing a Local Plan that meets the Council's objectives including delivering growth. The Local Plan sets policies that will apply across various stages of the economic cycle, and it is acknowledged that a suitably resourced Planning service is necessary for the effective delivery of the strategy set out by the Local Plan.</i></p>			
Supplementary Question:			
<p>I would like to compliment Cllr McCabe on successful recruitment to the essential posts in planning and planning policy, not to mention the team most residents care most about in Radstock/Westfield, namely enforcement. Obviously for reasons of confidentiality, this could not be revealed when I submitted my question. However, my first question remains, to what extent has the Local Plan and its delivery, especially with regard to the SVEZ been future proofed with contingency plans B should the predicted economic downturn take place? As I would say if</p> <p>Secondly taken as a whole, are you convinced that provision for the elderly (without smart phones or internet) and the disabled is sufficient?</p>			

Answer: The Local Plan covers a long period of time (20 years) during which there are likely to be both economic downturns and buoyancy. There are regular updates to the Plan and built in timescales for review. The Plan will also be responsive to demand, enabling economic uses to come forward at different times and the options document supports opportunities for reskilling and training as required. The consultation process will involve in-person meetings and paper copies of the options document will be available in libraries. An equality impact assessment will also be undertaken and there will be opportunities to take account of the needs of protected groups. The Plan itself will also address the requirements of an aging population to provide communities in which people can thrive.

M	02	Question from:	Cllr Liz Hardman
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Whilst I welcome the principle of high-quality jobs in our area, I still have some concerns about the SVEZ. Surely the acquisition of the land on which the Enterprise Zone is going to be built is key to the development. So why has the land not been acquired by B&NES! Why have negotiations been almost non-existent with the landowners for the past two years? We now hear that the negotiations have been resumed, but these are being done alongside compulsory order options. Surely this is not the best way forward?

Answer from:	Cllr Paul Roper
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In order to construct the SVEZ Scheme, it is necessary to acquire the land and rights required for the commercial development, together with several small parcels of land outside of the existing highway boundary required for the associated highway improvements (such as cycle and pedestrian path connectivity). Discussions and negotiations for the acquisition of the land and rights needed for the delivery of the SVEZ Scheme have commenced and will continue should the LDO be adopted. To ensure certainty of delivery and timescales for delivery officers are now contemplating the use of additional statutory mechanisms to support land assembly.

Supplementary Question

Whilst I welcome the principle of high-value jobs in the area. Is it true that discussions and negotiations with the landowners have commence as I understand these have not taken place for some time?

Answer: Negotiations first took place back in 2019, all the landowners have property agents and have been taking advice on the matter. Negotiations have gone relatively quiet at this point, so I don't believe there has been very recent communication, but discussions have been

taking place.

M

03

Question from:

Cllr Liz Hardman

My second question concerns the transport infrastructure around the Thicketmead roundabout at the bottom of Phyllis Hill, Paulton. A kidney shaped roundabout has been planned to manage the extra traffic generated by the Enterprise Zone. Highway modelling (VISSIM) was done some years ago. This is not up to date and does not take into consideration the extra housing developments in the area. How confident can we be that there will not be massive hold ups and extra congestion at this junction?

Answer from:

Cllr Paul Roper

The design of Thicket Mead does take account of the traffic flows at SVEZ and all committed development. Traffic modelling has taken a prudent approach using data agreed with Highways Development Control who have approved the highways mitigations proposed by the project through the Statutory Consultation; therefore, there is confidence that the proposed design is fit for purpose for the SVEZ project and committed development in the area.

Supplementary Question:

When was the traffic modelling data collected? Is it up to date and fit for purpose?

Answer: The traffic modelling was undertaken in November 2021. The Transport Assessment makes an allowance for background traffic growth between the base year of 2021 and the future assessment year of 2027. The Council is confident that a robust assessment has been undertaken through the inclusion of background traffic growth forecasts and the use of sophisticated modelling tools. Highways Development Control have provided no objection to the traffic modelling via the Statutory Consultation.

(The response was provided within five working days of the meeting).

M	04	Question from:	Cllr Saskia Heijltjes
Community green bonds can be a great way to engage with the local community, however, the initiative will take a great deal of officer time to put in place. Is the key aim to build community visibility from these Green Bonds or to raise funds for council initiatives?			
Answer from:			Cllr Paul Roper
<i>By declaring Climate and Ecological Emergencies and setting an ambition for the area to be net zero carbon and nature positive by 2030, our economy must be a green economy. As part of this we have committed to look at how community green bonds could help local residents invest in local projects across our city, town and rural centres. We are the start of scoping this out.</i>			
M	05	Question from:	Cllr Saskia Heijltjes
Regarding my previous question, and the goal of raising community visibility - what outcomes will these bonds achieve for the Climate Emergency across B&NES when community-owned organisations, like “Bath and West Community Energy”, are already successfully implementing Green initiatives and raising funds in ways that align with the Doughnut Economic model advocated in the Local Plan launch document?			
Answer from:			Cllr Paul Roper
<i>The council is starting to scope out the detail of green bonds this exercise will include assessing demand. I am aware of the great work Bath and West Community Energy do and my officials will continue to engage with them.</i>			
M	06	Question from:	Cllr Saskia Heijltjes
What will be the cost to the Council to set up these Green Bonds and has the Council spoken to the councils in Hammersmith, London, and			

West Berkshire where these bonds have been created?			
Answer from:		Cllr Paul Roper	
<i>In assessing the viability of green bonds, we will also consider costs and benefits and engage with other authorities who have looked at implementing them.</i>			
M	07	Question from:	Cllr Joanna Wright
<p>Number 10 of the Economic Strategy ten-point delivery plan says: “Secure connectivity improvements through the development of a Transport Action Plan that provides accessible, affordable and active options for all areas of the district.”</p> <p>Since the University of Bath being a key partner in the Economic Strategy for 2024-2034, will the Transport Action Plan include an active travel route from the city centre to the University’s campus on Claverton Down, enabling more staff and students to travel to campus by walking, wheeling or cycling?</p>			
Answer from:		Cllr Sarah Warren	
<i>The Transport Action Plan (TAP) is currently being developed and will include active and sustainable travel schemes which have been identified as priority schemes to be delivered, based on current available funding. It is not anticipated that the TAP will include any specific schemes relating to improved active travel routes to the Claverton Down campus. However, the Active Travel Masterplan, which is also currently in development, is a longer-term strategy for the delivery of a network of active travel routes across the entirety of B&NES. This will include aspirations for active travel improvements between all major centres of employment and education.</i>			
M	08	Question from:	Cllr Joanna Wright

In 3.18 of the E3497 Local Plan Options consultation and Local Development Scheme

<https://democracy.bathnes.gov.uk/documents/s80251/E3497%20-%20Local%20Plan%20Options%20Consultation%20and%20Local%20Development%20Scheme.pdf>

It states in 3.19 that: *A range of new location or site options is identified in the Options Document that could contribute towards meeting the needs for additional housing and employment space, along with the necessary supporting infrastructure. These location or site options are drawn from sites in the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA), which comprise both those submitted by landowners, developers and communities, as well as those identified by the council for consideration, location options have been identified. The wide Range of HELAA sites has been filtered down to those locations that are considered to be sustainable alternatives or options for potential allocation.*

This process has been underpinned by the Sustainability Appraisal (that will be published as part of the Options document consultation) and based around key principles, including:

- Sustainable transport connectivity - to minimise the need to travel by car and enable the use of public transport and active travel. This will also minimise carbon impact”

As the sustainable transport connectivity is outlined “to minimise the need to travel by car and enable the use of public transport and active travel”, what will be the date that the Council publishes the circulation plan for Bath and for North East Somerset? A transport circulation plan has been promised repeatedly, but with no delivery date in place.

Answer from:

Cllr Matt McCabe

Emissions from transport are a significant source of carbon within Bath and North East Somerset accounting for 29% of all carbon emissions in the district. Most of these emissions arise from surface transport, particularly cars, taxis, Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs) and vans. Unlike other sectors which have decarbonised in recent years, emissions from transport have remained high. The continued reliance on cars

continues to deteriorate our climate but also impacts the health and wellbeing of our residents, contribute to poor air quality, and continues to exacerbate other societal issues, including equity of access to sustainable transport, and the continued impact of transport on our cultural and natural heritage.

The Local Plan provides an opportunity to join development and transport, ensuring new development is considered in a way that will genuinely reduce the need to travel by locating developments in accessible locations, facilitating the provision of more locally available services and facilities, and providing improved connectivity and access to more sustainable transport modes providing our residents with genuine choice in how they make their journeys, enabling those who can to choose lower carbon options.

The Journey to Net Zero sets out how the Council will seek to achieve a net-zero transport system in Bath. Many other schemes, including through the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) are in development that will help to facilitate low-carbon travel across the rest of Bath and North East Somerset. The Circulation Plan for the city of Bath was highlighted in the Journey to Net Zero to “identify the main roads where arterial bus routes are prioritised and car traffic is expected to remain” and, at the time, was identified as a ‘future’ project. In 2023, B&NES appointed AtkinsRéalis to develop a transport evidence base to identify how the existing transport network in the city was used and to identify opportunities to change this. Work is currently ongoing to develop the Circulation Plan since this date in light of this evidence.

M

09

Question from:

Cllr Joanna Wright

On page 407 of E3497 with reference to Green Spaces see <https://democracy.bathnes.gov.uk/documents/s80252/E3497%20-%20Appendix%201%20-%20Local%20Plan%20Options%20Consultation%20Document.pdf>

It lists only three Proposed Local Green Spaces in Lambridge when ten were submitted including a request for a Green Space at Lambridge Training Ground, where Lidl are proposing delivering a supermarket. Could you clarify why the Lambridge Training ground and other submissions from Lambridge Ward members were not included in this appendix for proposed Local Green Spaces, as outlined in the Council's Corporate Strategy aimed at safeguarding and improving nature by facilitating nature recovery?

Answer from:

Cllr Matt McCabe

The nominated Local Green Spaces have been assessed against the criteria set out in national policy and guidance (National Planning Policy Framework and Planning Practice Guidance). With regards to the Lambridge Ward submissions it is noted that eight nominations have been made. The land listed as the Deadmill Lane Allotments has been nominated twice by Cllrs and community groups. Of the eight sites nominated three have been recommended for inclusion as local green space designations at this stage. Of the nominations not taken forward the following is noted:

- **Bath Rugby Playing Fields / Lambridge Wildlife Haven** - *The land is subject to a planning application currently under consideration. Planning Practice Guidance notes amongst other things that it will rarely be appropriate to designate Local Green Space where the land has planning permission for development. Exceptions could be where the development would be compatible with the reasons for designation or where planning permission is no longer capable of being implemented. Until such time as the planning application has been determined it is not appropriate to designate it as a Local Green Space. Dependent on the outcome of the planning application process this position can be reviewed in preparing the Draft Local Plan which is due to be considered by Council later this year.*
- **Bailbrook Lane** - *The nomination had not provided sufficient information concerning its value to the local community.*
- **Claremont Allotments** – *The nomination is already a local green space designation and will continue to hold such a designation.*
- **Charlcombe Valley** – *The nomination is considered an extensive tract of land contrary to NPPF paragraph 106 c).*
- **Deadmill Lane Allotments site** - *The land is situated to the edge of Bath within the Green Belt and AONB. Over and above the existing designations no further benefit would be secured through designating the land as a Local Green Space.*

Noted that a further site had been nominated by Lambridge Ward Cllrs and Bath community groups however, the nomination is situated within the Charlcombe Parish. This nomination had not been taken forward for the following reasons:

- **Valley View Allotments** - *This land is situated to the edge of Bath within the Green Belt, Cotswold AONB and is already designated allotment land. Over and above the existing designations no further benefit would be secured through designating the land as LGS.*

A supporting assessment further detailing the above, and of all nominated sites will be published alongside the Options document. The

Options document will be subject to consultation giving residents and other stakeholders the opportunity to comment. The comments received will be carefully considered in preparing the Draft Local Plan (later this year) when the Council will make the decision as to which sites to designate as Local Green Space.

M

10

Question from:

Cllr Sam Ross

In a climate and nature emergency, why are we still considering building a business park away from where people live on green belt agricultural land that is currently used to provide local food, especially when industrial units and brownfield sites previously earmarked for employment have been sold or given permission for more housing and shops and industrial sites stand empty across Midsomer Norton and Radstock?

Answer from:

Cllr Paul Roper

The site is adjacent to a substantial local population of circa 30,000. The delivery of the green commercial park at Old Mills is a long-held objective to support the sustainable economy of the district and Somer Valley; helping to reduce out-commuting through the walking and cycling infrastructure proposed. Brownfield sites within the Somer Valley are also allocated and alongside the Old Mills site will assist in providing jobs locally that will help support the local economy, including the local high streets. These brownfield sites are not in their own right of sufficient scale to secure the number of jobs that the project is seeking to deliver.

Supplementary Question:

The quality of this land is very rare in B&NES and should be protected for our future food security. Have any considerations been given to the fact that the plot is prime Grade 1 agricultural land that grows high-quality produce for the local area and is also Potentially Irreplaceable Priority Grassland Habitat (BRERC)? As once it's gone, it's gone forever.

Answer: Records held indicate that the information held by the BRERC, which date back to 1995 and 2000, is inaccurate. They had indicated that some of the fields within the SVEZ had the potential to be prime Grade 1 agricultural land. The Council has undertaken further survey work confirming that the fields are modified grassland in poor condition, habitats that are not a priority or irreplaceable. The maps

have now been updated to provide clarity. The provisional maps show a large swathe of Grade 1 grassland running through the West of the Somer Valley and Natural England, as a statutory consultee, have not objected to the LDO proposal subject to conditions set out in the statement of reasons.

M

11

Question from:

Cllr Sam Ross

What data is there to support access to the Somer Valley Enterprise Zone (SVEZ) will only be via foot, bicycle and public transport, when there is currently poor provision along the A362 and the plans to improve connectivity rely on WECA for financial input, which cannot be assured?

Answer from:

Cllr Paul Roper

Access to the SVEZ by walking and cycling routes is a key objective of the proposal and will be put in place before initial occupations of accommodation. Ensuring the infrastructure is in place at day one will provide people the choice to walk or cycle and enable habits to be changed. The Combined Authority has approved the business case to allow the walking and cycling route from Farrington Gurney to be progressed. The business case for SVEZ will enable the delivery of the route from Old Mills to the Norton Radstock Greenway, providing access to the Somer Valley network of walking and cycling routes.

Supplementary Question:

While providing choice is a good thing, there appears to be little incentive for anyone to do so. How does the limited provision from Old Mills to the Norton Radstock Greenway benefit residents who live in the farther areas of the Somer Valley such as Farmborough?

Answer: I would refer you to the response to question M07 from Cllr Warren regarding the active travel network. The Authority is committed to developing active travel. If the SVEZ site is brought forward the Council will be looking at additional active travel routes and will investigate further CRSTS funding. We will promote active travel and look at extending cycle routes in the area.

M	12	Question from:	Cllr Sam Ross
<p>The data used for jobs provision in the Somer Valley and wider BANES area is currently based on an out-of-date evidence base for labour supply. Would it not be prudent to wait for the Local Plan evidence base before making a decision as to whether the Somer Valle Enterprise Zone (SVEZ) is required in this area?</p>			
Answer from:			Cllr Paul Roper
<p><i>The evidence base that underpins the new Economic Strategy reinforces the economic importance of delivering the Somer Valley Enterprise Zone. This evidence is also being used to support the new Local Plan.</i></p>			

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS - PUBLIC

P	01	Question from:	Nicolette Boater
<p>Whilst some 100 named individuals from anchor organisations actively contributed ideas to a number of events and conversations informing the ‘Ambitious Together for a Fair, Green, Creative and Connected City Region’, members of the public, were only digitally engaged, and none of the contributions of the 74 reported as engaging in this way were attributed. How can assembling a vision for the future on the basis of such an exclusive set of views and perspectives be a solid foundation for “create pathways to a fairer future”, “a connected city region” or “enabling all to be Ambitious Together”?</p>			
Answer from:			Cllr Paul Roper

We are proud of our work with partner organisations to create our One Shared Vision for Bath with North East Somerset. This Vision was one element of work to shape the future of our region. Our engagement work is an ongoing process which has continued since the publication of our Vision, and our conversations with stakeholders, communities and members of the public will continue to shape our work in the months and years to come.

P

02

Question from:

Nicolette Boater

Whilst the Future Ambition Board seems to have dismissed Kate Rayworth's Doughnut Economics vision and framing as inferior to its own, the current Council administration claims to embrace in its 2020-24 Corporate Strategy, Local Plan update and Economic Strategy. However, the 60 individuals attended 3.10.23 Doughnut Economics Workshop in Bath Abbey, "were predominantly public sector, third sector and community actors", making the connection and building common purpose with the Market sector of a Doughnut Economy at that event challenging. So, what, when and how will the Council to do make sure that its core strategies are shaped by all of the diverse communities, organisations and businesses in our district?

Answer from:

Cllr Paul Roper

We are still considering all aspects of the Doughnut Economics model. Respecting social foundations and environmental limits is critical to the work of the council and a fundamental part of our sustainable Economic Strategy. However, these elements cannot be considered in isolation of our businesses. To inform the development of the Economic Strategy and reflect the important role of the market, we held dedicated business workshops with organisations from across the district.