

Statement to the Audit Committee by Clare Minchington 5th February 2025

Thank you. I should like to draw the committee's attention to failures in the governance and decision-making surrounding the Liveable Neighbourhoods (LNs) programme.

In June 2021, an LN Bid for Walcot (including Camden Road) was rejected by the Cabinet and instead, a smaller LN initiative for London Road and Snow Hill was approved. The Council's decision document¹ states that the Walcot bid was:

“considered to be too complex and pose too many challenges to be included within the phase 1 programme as a complete project in phase 1. The level of through traffic in these areas is particularly high and potential schemes here will benefit from experience gained from scheme development and implementation in other parts of the district. However, it is considered that a small-scale scheme could be implemented in the London Road/Snow Hill/Kensington Gardens and adjacent roads area of Walcot as part of phase 1.”

The scaled down Phase 1 LN was approved by Cabinet and consultation was subsequently undertaken with local residents in London Road and Snow Hill. This generated excellent suggestions to improve the liveable nature of the area – unsurprisingly a bus gate on Camden Road was not discussed, as a bus gate on Camden Road which by the Council's own figures carries 6,000 vehicles a day, cannot be seen as small-scale, or as adjacent to London Road, Snow Hill and Kensington Gardens.

A FOI² request to BANES in 2023 revealed that the expansion of the scheme from that approved by Cabinet would be a single-member decision, but we have not found such a decision in the Weekly List.

The Council has failed to follow the correct procedure before successfully applying for WECA funding in September 2024 for the Camden bus gate, which was previously rejected by Cabinet. They have also failed to properly consult on the proposal as the focus of consultation activity was rightly around a LN for London Road and Snow Hill.

I would ask the committee to

1. Reconsider the scoring of the Corporate Governance Risk in the Council's risk register in light of the high likelihood of successful legal challenges to the validity of this ETRO in particular and other ETRO's being implemented across Bath.
2. Commission an internal audit of the LN programme focussing on compliance of BANES with its own consultation and decision-making frameworks, policies and processes.
3. Pay particular attention to the 'independent' examination of financial records conducted by the internal auditors to provide assurance that WECA LN grants are being used in compliance with their Terms and Conditions.

¹ E3285

² The FOI response stated that *'as far as the Council is concerned, no decision has been made on the final extent of the area to be considered in the first instance i.e., the extent of the "adjacent roads" referred to above in order to deliver a meaningful LN scheme. A single member decision will be issued in due course that will set out the interventions to be taken forward to preliminary design. The forward plan number allocated is E3418.'*