

## **MEMBER ADVOCATES – ANNUAL ACTIVITY REPORT 2024-25**

### **Councillor Jess David – Member Advocate for Green Infrastructure and Nature Recovery**

Over the last year activities have included:

- Attending Climate and Ecological Emergency Team Meetings with officers and Cabinet leads.
- Promoting and supported community nature and wildlife events included Festival of Nature, Bath in Bloom and Bath Urban Treescape walks.
- Meeting with partners including Avon Wildlife Trust to discuss opportunities around Team Wilder advisory service.
- Supporting ward-based initiatives around wildlife planting, habitats, and information boards.

### **Cllr Fiona Gourley – Member Advocate for Rural Communities**

#### **Public Transport**

- Worked with Sarah Warren and B&NES Bus Team and attended WECA meetings to represent B&NES residents, to lobby for better policies and services, and advocate to restore regular and reliable public transport to underserved communities, particularly in rural areas.
- Spoke about impact of lack of rural transport on residents to WECA and B&NES Council and in local media.
- Aimed to represent all rural residents across B&NES by working cross-party with other councillors to understand issues and support campaigns.
- Met First Bus regularly and worked closely to find solutions to bus-related problems, including the loss of services during A36 closure
- Successfully campaigned to save 94 bus

#### **Village Agents**

- Successfully advocated for Village Agents scheme to Cabinet during budget process.
- Promoted Villages Agents in Focus articles and village newsletters
- Regularly mentioned the role of Village Agents at Parish Council meetings and to residents who might benefit from their service.

### **Councillor Kevin Guy – Member Advocate for Armed Forces and Veterans**

I have met a number of veteran organisations over the year and we are looking at a comprehensive piece of work around the Armed Forces covenant in tandem with Key anchor institutions within the city of Bath. This work is being carried out in consultation with the British Legion.

I've attended veterans breakfast clubs in Keynsham and represented the Council on Armed Forces Day and laid a Wreath on behalf of the Council at Bath cenotaph, as well as attending the early morning ceremony at Bath station with the MP & Mayor to send a wreath to the national cenotaph in London.

I also had the pleasure recently of meeting Stan a local VE veteran on his 100th birthday in Keynsham.

### **Councillor Alan Hale – Member Advocate for Safer Roads**

As Road Safety Advocate I have recently met with two of the Road Safety team to gain an understanding of their work, their issues and their challenges. I have told them that I stand ready to support them.

I have considered and contributed to consultations on at least two proposals for changes to highway layout and speed limits.

I have stood ready to give advice to any fellow councillors.

I shall seek to have future meetings with the road safety team.

### **Councillor Ian Halsall – Member Advocate for Engagement with Students**

Secured direct funding in February from Cllr Paul May's budget to continue to support the Student Community Partnership for another year (previous contributions came from the Community Infrastructure Levy) safeguarding the Council's partnership with the two universities and the essential work carried out by the SCP manager and two community wardens all year long.

Successful "Moving Out" and extended "Moving In" campaigns during 2024-2025 engaging both with students and permanent residents alike over six Bath wards to educate on waste and recycling, combat fears and the threat of antisocial behaviour and signposting both groups to where they can obtain help whilst living together within the community.

The Pack for Good campaign as students moved out of their accommodation including Purpose Built Student Accommodation with unwanted belongings saw an exponential increase in donations during the Moving Out campaign through the siting

of numerous British Heart Foundation bins across inner wards of the city from April to September 2024. These raised over £95,000 and diverted 50.9 tonnes away from landfill with goods going directly to the charity. Such has been the success with permanent residents also being encouraged to use the donation banks that BHF have delivered more for the end of the 2024-25 academic year.

### **Councillor Liz Hardman – Member Advocate for Children Looked After**

One of the most important steps we took in council was to make being Care Experienced a protected characteristic. That was last year, but since then I have engaged with the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People to ensure this is happening in our Council and I have also ensured we have received updates about this in our Children, Adults, Health and Wellbeing Panel.

Another part of my role as the member advocate for Children Looked After is that I am a governor at the Virtual School. Every CLA is a pupil at this Virtual School. The children's attainment and progress are monitored very carefully, as well as their attendance and behaviour. As a governor, I attend meetings three times a year. The outstanding Virtual School Headteacher gives us an in-depth report on our CLA. The most recent report described how good relations are between our local college and our CLA. Once again, we have been informed that no CLA has been permanently excluded from school, not just for this year but for the past three years.

At a Corporate Parents' meeting last year, a request was put in from our Care Experienced Young People for free bus travel for those aged 18-21. This was to be funded by WECA until March 2025. I have liaised with the Cabinet Member and Care Experienced team leader in contacting WECA to ensure free bus travel is extended for another year until March 2026.

I hope to meet regularly with The Senior and Junior In Care groups. I met up with the group of Care Experienced young people in April. We discussed many options in helping them move on with their lives, including help with getting driving licences.

As Councillors, we are all champions of our CLA. I have had discussions with our young people both at Corporate Parents and at my meeting in April about encouraging more Councillors to attend our Corporate Parents' meetings. Hopefully after reading this, we might see more of you at our Corporate Parents' meetings.

### **Councillor Saskia Heijltjes – Member Advocate for Active Travel – Bath**

- Liaised with residents and officers regarding poor road surface on North Road resulting in emergency pothole repairs in May 2024 and resurfacing in August 2024.

- Panellist at Imagining Future Transport event held by WESTACT (November 2024)
- Attended Global Bike Bus Summit in Worcester (April 2025)
- Attended meetings as member of Beyond the Bicycle Coalition
- Attended meeting to discuss shared e-scooters and e-bikes to be allowed access to Linear Park
- Organised Dott e-scooter, e-bike and e-cargo bike demo in Alice Park for the Larkhall Festival
- Observed Journey to Net Zero meetings
- Arranged meeting for recumbent tricycle user with GLL and Council to discuss accessible cycle parking at the leisure centre in Bath
- Attended quarterly meetings with Cabinet Member
- Commented on various planning applications and Highways projects with regards to active travel infrastructure
- Interviewed by BBC Radio Bristol about bike theft
- Interviewed by Global Cycling Network (GCN) for item on road rage: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wmUP8OH50E0>
- Raised numerous issues with active travel infrastructure through Fix My Street
- Raised issues around diversions for river towpath closures, in particular access issues for disabled cyclists and lack of signage

### **Councillor John Leach – Member Advocate for Climate Resilience**

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### **Councillor Ruth Malloy – Member Advocate for Great Spa Towns of Europe and Twinning**

#### **The Great Spa Towns of Europe**

The General Assembly #5 of the GSTE Association took place in Baden bei Wien (Austria) in November 2024, and the GA #6 in Mariánské Lázně (Czechia) in May 2025. The EU-funded 'Interspace' project enabled 100 teenagers from six of the eleven spa towns to participate in co-design workshops, where they developed ideas about shaping the future of their spa towns and learned more about our shared heritage.

The first Combined City of Bath and GSTE World Heritage Sites Management Plan (2024-2030) has now been completed, and I'm sure this will increase public awareness about our second WH inscription.

### **Twinning**

2025 is the 80th anniversary of the Bath-Alkmaar link with many commemorative events planned, including a visit from the Mayor of Alkmaar in coming July. In April the City of Bath Male Choir performed in Alkmaar, followed by a citizens' visit in early May, when an oak 'tree of friendship' was unveiled.

The Bath-Alkmaar, Bath-Braunschweig and Bath-Aix en Provence TAs again shared a chalet at the Christmas Market, and all have been very active during this past year, as has the Bath-Beppu Friendship Association. There were two meetings of the Twinning Forum, in July 2024 and January 2025.

### **Councillor Sarah Moore – Member Advocate for Accessibility**

During the past 12 months, I have attended various meetings including the City Centre Security Board and the Corporate Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Steering Group, where I have discussed a number of accessibility issues.

I have met with a lot of residents and am also working with our Highways Officers to make sure our footpaths and roads are safe and accessible for all.

### **Councillor Michelle O'Doherty – Member Advocate for Homeless People**

Bath & North East Somerset is facing a worsening housing crisis, as is every local authority in the UK. Social housing demand hit record highs, with some families facing waits of over 200 years. High rents and property prices made housing unaffordable, while poor conditions, including mould, affected many residents. In response, the council has launched new affordable housing projects, introduced higher council tax on second homes, and began a Local Plan Reset to meet national housing targets and address local needs. I have continued to support a local group who take hot food to rough sleepers and others who aren't necessarily homeless but for whom their living arrangements are very precarious – the group is seeing an increasing number of people each week, from around 12 when the group started last year up to a regular number of 30+ people each week.

## **Councillor Shaun Stephenson-McGall – Member Advocate for Active Travel – North East Somerset & LGBTQ+ issues**

### **Active Travel – North East Somerset**

I have had various meetings with Cllr Sarah Warren, Cllr Manda Rigby and various B&NES Officers on this topic. I've also liaised with Cllr Saskia Heijltjes who covers Bath. I've attended various webinars on this and related topics by organisations like Livings Streets, and others. I've had regular meetings and email exchanges with volunteers and advocates for cycling, wheeling and walking locally. I have requested and received updates on various projects including the LCWIP, Somer Valley Links, and of course the Active Travel Master Plan. Alongside this role, I am the B&NES Council representative on the Joint Local Access Forum where I'm working with others to improve Public Rights of Ways across B&NES, Bristol, and South Gloucestershire.

### **LGBTQ+ issues**

Bath Pride 2024 was the highlight of the year, and I would like to whole heartily thank the Trustees, Committee and dozens of volunteers who helped make Pride such an amazing success for our queer community, our allies and the local community of Bath and North East Somerset. Thank you to the Holburne Museum for hosting last year and for all those charities, community groups and local business who supported us so well.

Plans for Bath Pride 2025 are well underway and I've been liaising with and supporting the organisers and attending various meetings to help push the plans forwards.

I attended the LGA LGBTQ+ Cllrs Weekend together with Cllr Kevin Guy was very useful and helps to create a great cross-party network of LGBTQ+ councillors at this difficult time for Trans member of our community. National, elected LGBTQ+ councillors are facing increased abuse which is sadly reflective of the societal pressures facing our LGBTQ+ communities.

Following the recent Supreme Court ruling about the legal definition of 'woman' and its relation to biological sex, I know that there is significant concern and upset amongst many and particularly members of our trans community locally. B&NES Council, like I hope all councils, will continue to navigate this issue sensitively, with respect for differing beliefs, an adherence to the law, and with continuing lawful support for members of the trans community and people with different gender identities. I hope the Council will do this whilst respecting protections for all equalities strands covered by the Equality Act 2010, including sex and religion or belief. B&NES will have to consider what, if any, updates are required to its politics and practices once national guidance is updated by central government.

I've continued to have discussions with Public Health Officers around HIV & Sexual Health services locally and what potential changes to service provision could be made at the Riverside Clinic, for example, the provision of postal STI testing kits, when the current services are recommissioned.

## **Councillor Sam Ross - Member Advocate for Rural Housing & Community Buildings**

### **Rural Housing**

With increased pressure on our rural areas due to the Government's new housing plan, rural housing in B&NES continues to face both challenges and opportunities in meeting the demands of residents.

Through engagement with the LDF Steering Group/Spatial Planning Working Group, as well as ongoing discussions with officers throughout the year, I have continued to advocate for rural housing that:

- Is sustainable and proportional.
- Is affordable.
- Meets the needs of local people.
- Includes improved infrastructure and community buildings.
- Incorporates renewable energy.
- Protects and enhances the natural environment.

Given that housing developments in villages are often small, I have suggested that S106 funding agreements should consider the interaction of neighbouring villages. This would enable a comprehensive assessment of the necessary infrastructure for connected communities across a wider area, thereby securing more funding for meaningful improvements for an area rather than several restricted and limited funds that cannot achieve the best outcome.

### **Community Buildings**

Place-making is crucial for maintaining and fostering diverse and thriving rural communities. Too many developments focus solely on housing while overlooking the supporting buildings that bring communities together or placing them at a lower priority. This results in dormitory areas with limited interaction, and plans for business units are often later changed to include more homes.

Over the past year, I have engaged with Plunkett UK and developer Thakeham, who have collaborated to create a new development in West Sussex with a community

shop at its heart. <https://plunkett.co.uk/pioneering-community-owned-shop-opens-to-customers>

Through the LDF Steering Group/Spatial Planning Working Group and ongoing discussions with officers, I have recommended incorporating this approach into the new Local Plan so that more and better community buildings are included in proposals.

### **Councillor Andy Wait – Member Advocate for Rivers and Waterways**

I would like to share my most recent case. At the Widcombe lock system there are some swans. At this time of year, they have cygnets. These locks have drains for overflow water. When the cygnets are small, they are washed down these drains. Only brave action by residents involving plunging into the water has saved them. One sadly died last year. We have come up with a solution, to put a temporary wide gauge net across the drains. At the time of writing, they are not yet in place as the Canal and River Trust are objecting. Discussions are ongoing, lives are at stake!