

Minutes from the meeting of the Bathavon Area Forum
5th July 2023 at St Andrews Community Church, Foxhill, Bath

Welcome

John Adler, Chair of Bathavon forum welcomed all in attendance at the first in person meeting of the forum since February 2020.

In Attendance – Denise Perrin (WERN); Louise Morris (Head of Green Transformation, B&NES); Stuart Ashman (Somerset Coal Canel); Moira Brennan (Bathampton PC); Jan Helps (Bathampton PC); Anna Beria (Claverton PC); Fiona Gourley (Bathavon South Ward Councillor); Robert Law (Englishcombe PC); Hillary Carr (Bathford PC); Jean Fossaceco (Shoscombe PC); Jocelyn Nichols (Priston PC); Alex Eldridge (Grow for Life); Wayne McMaster (Grow for Life); Chris Cook (Wellow PC); John Adler (Freshford Pc & Chair of Bathavon Area Forum); Malcolm Morgan (St Andrew's Community Church); Dave Orme (Dunkerton and Tunley PC); Paul Harris Paul Harris, Executive Director for Customer Experience at Curo / The Health and Wellbeing Board); Cllr Sarah Warren (Bathavon North Ward Councillor / Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency and Sustainable Travel); Matt McCabe (Bathavon South Ward Councillor); Mark Hayward (Community Engagement Officer, B&NES); Dave Dixon (Community Engagement Manager, B&NES); Stephen George (Planning Officer, B&NES); Ruth (Village Agent); Chantelle (Village Agent).

Apologies – Cllr Kevin Guy (Bathavon North Ward Councillor / B&NES Council Leader); Will Godfrey (Chief Executive B&NES Council); Kelston PC and Charlcombe PC.

Cabinet Priorities

The forum welcomed Cllr Sarah Warren, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency and Sustainable Travel who gave an overview of [Cabinet priorities](#) following the May 2023 election.

The clean and green team's work was highlighted as a success. To access the program of work or make requests for future plans, concerned individuals can submit requests to highways through the fix my street website.

Regarding restoring fingerposts, there is no B&NES program, so parishes can use their neighbourhood CIL funds or reach out to their ward councillors for potential support. Community volunteering days have been held in the past for this purpose.

Local Plan

The Forum received an update on the [Local Plan](#) from Stephen George – Planning Officer, B&NES. It was explained that further engagement with Parishes and other stakeholders is planned for July and September 2023.

During the discussion on liveable rural neighbourhoods, several points were raised. It was emphasised that rural transport must be efficient, including transportation between rural areas.

- It was clarified that the details that parish councils feed in counts as evidence in the local plan.
- The Westlink scheme was criticised for not being suitable for its intended purpose.
- Access to care for low-income individuals was highlighted as a significant issue.
- It was acknowledged that implementing the wrong policies can have detrimental effects on rural communities.
- Ensuring access to cities and off-grid areas was deemed essential.
- The lack of adequate public transportation to the meeting was noted.
- The absence of electric charging points in public spaces and at properties without off-street parking was identified as a concern.
- It was stressed that existing communities should have a say in the planning process.
- Additionally, sustainable travel options must be incorporated into plans for new housing.
- The discussion recognised the need to balance addressing the climate emergency with the challenges faced and balancing the needs of cities and rural areas.

Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy

In June, the new seven-year [Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy](#) was launched.

During the Forum meeting, Paul Harris, Executive Director for Customer Experience at Curo, provided an [update on the strategy](#). There will be further engagement to encourage local communities to participate in its delivery.

The Health and Wellbeing Board consists of over twenty-five representatives. The strategy document was informed by data from the joint strategic needs assessment (JSNA), including input from the NHS and health data.

Curo was commended for their work in addressing mental health issues among their employees.

Paul Harris emphasised that the strategy requires the collective effort of organizations and individuals in our communities

Grow for Life

[Grow for Life](#), a social and therapeutic gardening charity, operates in Bath and towns and villages across North East Somerset.

Wayne McMaster, the Project Manager, delivered a [presentation](#) to the forum. The walled garden in Newton St Loe is situated on dutchy land and rent is paid for its use.

The project has gained increased attention, including coverage on [Gardeners World](#), specifically on Episode 8, which can be found on I-Player.

WERN Village Agents

- [WERN Village Agents](#) is an organisation that link people in rural areas with advice and support services for independent living. The forum received a [presentation](#) from Denise Perrin.

Denise highlighted the ongoing efforts to share information about the newly introduced Westlink service. Additionally, she emphasized the importance of community intelligence in identifying and assisting the most vulnerable individuals.

Denise also addressed the growing concern of individuals who possess assets but lack sufficient cash.

Lastly, she mentioned that Village Agents cover all of Bathavon and recommended referring people to the [Community Wellbeing Hub](#) for assistance.

Bathavon Forum Priorities

John Adler distributed a form to the parish council prior to the meeting to gather input on the top three priorities. The response rate has been low thus far, so it is important to hear from as many parishes as possible. Please return the forms to John Adler promptly.

The meeting focused on improving the forum's function. Suggestions included holding more focused meetings on specific topics like The Local Plan, assessing if the forum meets the needs of the parishes and community, and evaluating the current meeting arrangements.

It was emphasised that the forum should be a platform for community voices to be heard. Areas of interest such as Planning, Public Transport (Buses), Speeding, and Parking should be included.

Additionally, consideration should be given to the geographical areas impacted by a topic, as some parishes look towards other cities for guidance. It was suggested to listen to the parishes for topic suggestions, as grassroots issues often require attention.

Duplication with other meetings, such as Parish Liaison, should be avoided. Meetings should be held three times a year and relevant topics can be sourced from parish newsletters. Lastly, meetings should encourage a two-way flow of communication and ample interaction.

Parish Council Deficits

The small number of parishes in rural areas needing elections in May 2023 sparked a discussion.

A deficit in the number of councillors in a parish has significant implications. It increases the workload for the remaining councillors, diminishes representation, and hampers the functioning of the council. It is crucial for a parish to address and rectify such deficits to ensure effective governance and community representation.

Points raised included difficulty attracting younger residents as councillors, potential issues with attracting co-opted councillors, outdated Standing Orders, and the possibility of changing meeting timing and days. Sharing existing local skills between parish councils and B&NES was also suggested.

The 'life as a parish councillor' letter would serve as a powerful tool to promote vacancies and attract qualified individuals by providing a factual and detailed account of the responsibilities.

The cost-of-living crisis has led to an increase in working hours for many individuals. In addition to longer working hours, the cost-of-living crisis has also created greater family commitments for some individuals.

By knocking on doors in a parish, meaningful conversations can be initiated with both new and established residents. This could generate interest in filling the council vacancies.

AOB

1. Somer Valley Links Consultation

The Forum heard from Councillor Sarah Warren about the consultation currently taking place on the [Somer Valley Links](#) project. This aims to make using buses an easier and more pleasant experience alongside some changes to walking and cycling routes. The project relates to the A367; A362 and A37 – major routes into Bath and Bristol from the Somer Valley and other areas. The consultation runs until 6 August, and we would encourage you to take part as well as sharing information with your own networks.

There will be drop in events taking place as follows:

- Wednesday 12 July, 2pm - 7pm, Trinity Methodist Church, The Street, Radstock BA3 3PL

- Wednesday 19 July, 3pm - 8pm, St Luke's Church, Hatfield Road, Bath BA2 2BD
- Monday 24 July, 2pm - 7pm, Farrington Gurney Memorial Hall, Temple View, Church Lane, Farrington Gurney BS39 6UA

There is also a webinar taking place on Thursday 6 July, 6.30pm - 7.30pm. The [webinar will also be recorded.](#)

You can [visit the consultation webpage](#) to find out more and share your views. The page includes an [interactive map](#) which is useful for seeing the proposals by location.

2. Volunteering opportunities at Somersetshire Coal Canal

Stuart Ashman, Work Party Organiser provided an overview of [volunteering](#) opportunities at [Somersetshire Coal Canal](#)

3. West of England Rural Fund

The [West of England Rural Fund](#) is Funding for small and micro businesses based in rural areas. The Business & Skills Team from B&NES Council asked for this link to be shared with the Bathavon Area Forum.

4. WESTlink Feedback

During the previous round of Forum meetings, we received information from WECA on their [WESTlink](#) bus service which was then due to launch. It is now operational and if you have any feedback to give, you can do so by email to WestLink@westofengland-ca.gov.uk

Future Meeting Date

If you are interested in presenting at the next Bathavon Area Forum meeting or have suggestions for Agenda items do let us know. It is currently scheduled for 25th September at 6pm and will be the Forum's AGM.