

Bathampton Parish Council

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Bathampton is a village of approximately 770 dwellings on the eastern side of Bath. Together with the neighbouring villages of Batheaston and Bathford it sits in and around Bathampton Meadows, the River Avon and the Kennet and Avon canal. It is located in the renowned Avon Valley. Bathampton is a member of the Valley Parish Alliance, a coalition of 8 parishes who act together to protect the environment of the Avon Valley.

Bathampton Meadows are situated in the Green Belt and parts are in the Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The Meadows form part of the green setting of the Bath UNESCO World Heritage Site. They are also part of the rural landscape of Bath viewed from the Iron Age fort on Little Solsbury, the Bath Skyline Walk and Lansdown. The village and the Meadows are part of the rural landscape where the people of Bath and many tourists run, walk and cycle on our footpaths, canal paths and cycles paths. They are a short walk out of the city with access to popular pubs and restaurants. They are an asset to the city and to its population. The importance of access to this kind of landscape on the edge of cities is increasingly being recognised as a major contributor to mental and physical wellbeing.

The Meadows are almost all within flood zone 3 ie the areas most likely to flood, with some in flood zone 2. The parts of the Meadows that are not in the designated flood zones still provide a valuable role in absorbing substantial amounts of water that would otherwise flow down to Bath. The Meadows flood regularly and have been an important part of regulating the flood waters down river for centuries.

Bathampton Lane and the area around the church and the school were designated a conservation area in 1984. The tollbridge which crosses the river Avon is one of the few privately owned tollbridges in the country. Bathampton Meadows provide the setting for all of this.

Unfortunately the importance of Bathampton Meadows has not been recognised by BANES council or its predecessors who have consistently seen the flat land on the valley floor as a convenient place to site anything from industrial estates (1940's), a power station (1950's) and since the 1970's an A36/46 link road and a park and ride. In recent months they have added a coach park to this list. The Joint Transport Study seems to include a freight consolidation centre – indicated by a purple star on a map. In a 1990 public enquiry into the then proposed A36/A46 link road the inspector stated that it would have “intolerable impacts on landscape and being devastating to recreational amenity.” This is still true today of the schemes being proposed.

The Joint Transport Study recognises the ambition in the Emerging Spatial Strategy to protect the green belt. This was one of two key messages arising from the consultation. It also identifies, as

one of four overarching priorities, the need to “protect and enhance the sub region's diverse and high quality environment and ensuring resilience including the protection against flood risk”. The Joint Transport Study sets its own aim as enabling people to “no longer rely on driving a car to work and make the trip by public transport.”

There does seem to be a disconnect between the stated objectives and the proposed tarmacking and industrialisation of Bathampton Meadows. There is also a general disconnect on the reliance on park and rides in both Bath and Bristol which require people to get in their car rather than taking public transport from home to their destination. Many studies have shown that park and rides increase road miles, attract passengers away from rural public transport making it less viable and are not attractive to commuters. DEFRA no longer support park and ride schemes as a means of reducing congestion.

The Joint Transport Study has set substantial aspirations to invest in integrated public transport, with evidence of substantial headway being made in Bristol. At the same time Bath and Wiltshire have reduced their bus services on the basis of affordability.

The Bathampton Meadows Alliance will lay out in its response to this consultation, the failure of BANES to provide any rational reasoning to support the need for an East of Bath park and ride. Indeed we have seen a continuing roll out of new reasons as the previous reason has been proven to be false. They will also demonstrate the poor utilisation of the existing park and rides and the fact that they are little used at times when traffic in Bath is at its peak. As such they have been a major waste of tax payers funds and we would caution against making the same mistake in this new plan.

The Valley Parish Alliance will lay out the reasons why an A36/46 link road will not solve Bath's traffic problems. Indeed its impact, based on modelling from previous proposals, will have a positive impact on a very small area of roads in Bath but a negative impact, due to attracted traffic, on most of the rest. The small percentage of actual through traffic in Bath (said by BANES to be less than 5%) means the real shift of traffic out of the city will be negligible with much traffic just being diverted. Although Bathampton is most likely to gain from a link road, by the removal of around 4,000 vehicles which use the tollbridge to avoid the London Road, few people will accept the price of replacing them with 16,000 vehicles crossing the valley on a flyover.

The final page of the Emerging Spatial Strategy includes the following analysis of a proposed potential site for housing on the edge of Bath.

“Based on the SA the significance (sic) impact that development of this scale and this location would have on World Heritage site and its setting has led to this full site not being considered as a reasonable option. The severity of harm caused by development in this location would significantly outweigh the benefits. It would cause significant harm to the setting of the WHS and whilst it is not in the AONB, it is on the edge of Bath and is visually prominent, thereby causing harm to the AONB. As such development would contradict national policy. It also performs very strongly in Green Belt terms. Therefore this location is not suitable for development in the plan period”

Whilst this could be mistaken for an assessment of the Bathampton Meadows, it is not! It is an assessment of an area on the other side of Bath. There is no assessment of Bathampton Meadows, just an implied assumption that the plan can ignore its stated aims of protecting the greenbelt and the “diverse and high quality environment” and instead pave over the greenbelt whilst encouraging people to get into their cars and drive to a park and ride site.

It appears possible that the consultation team are not familiar with Bathampton Meadows and the Parish Council would appreciate the opportunity of showing any of the team around our parish.