

Conclusions of the BetterBath Forum meeting 5 July 2010: Visions for the River in Bath

The tenth BetterBath meeting discussed visions for the river in Bath.

Professor Chris Baines highlighted the importance of looking beyond the B&NES boundaries at the whole of the very large River Avon catchment, not only in relation to managing flood risk but also for security of water supply and to make the most of opportunities for recreation, tourism, local food production etc. He emphasised the need to reverse the tendency for the city to turn its back on the river and argued that an accessible riverside should be at the heart of plans for regeneration, including any redevelopment of Bath Rugby's facilities. He suggested that there were also plenty of opportunities to bring the river back to life, independently of major regeneration projects, for example by organising a major regatta.

David Lawrence (B&NES) reminded the meeting that the Council's *Vision for Bath* recognised the need to enhance the relationship between the city and the river, and showed examples of riverside developments in other cities. He said that the Council welcomed projects such as the recent illumination of Pulteney Bridge during the MusicFest, and was considering the scope for a programme of sporting activities such as triathlons.

John Betty (B&NES) spoke about the potential for regeneration of the riverside development sites to unlock added value which could provide funds for public realm improvements. He proposed a number of criteria which riverside development should meet (see the penultimate slide of his presentation) and suggested that priority should be given to persuading riverside landowners to allow access, working with the Environment Agency on reduced engineering solutions, and encouraging owners to reverse the trend for developments to turn their back on the river.

Gerald Chown chaired a wide-ranging discussion. There was widespread agreement on the need for a new relationship between the city and the river and a general recognition that regeneration of the run-down sites close to the city centre would provide the opportunity to achieve this. Some speakers queried whether comprehensive redevelopment was appropriate, particularly for lower-value sites to the west of the city. Several people stressed the need to preserve and enhance the riverside as a location for tranquil recreation (walking, fishing) and wildlife. They argued that the needs of the local communities in (for example) Oldfield Park and Twerton must be given at least as much weight as the desirability of enhancing the city centre.

There was strong support for examining the scope for the river to contribute to reducing traffic congestion. A proposal to use the river to transport waste from the Midland Road depot to the recycling centre at Pixash Lane in Keynsham met with loud applause. Numerous specific suggestions for improving the current degraded state of the riverside were mentioned (see Annex).

A significant report was produced between 2002 and 2004 by a working group led by B&NES and involving British Waterways, Kennet & Avon Canal Trust, the Inland Waterways Association and the Environment Agency. This report has never been published, but could provide a useful starting point for a fresh attempt to revitalise the river. Short term, low cost action is needed as well as long-term regeneration.

Local elections are due next year, and it will be important for residents who consider that improvements to the river are a real priority to make this clear to the politicians. However, against the background of substantial cuts to Council budgets, it is unrealistic to expect the Council to be in a position to meet all the aspirations: champions will need to emerge from the local community to provide leadership and harness the enthusiasm to make things happen. Passion and creativity will be needed, and the creative sector could make a contribution.

Conclusion 1

Action: The Editor, Bath Chronicle

The community needs to get involved in the enhancement of the river. Local people who are prepared to make things happen need to be identified. The Chronicle should encourage people to come forward.

Conclusion 2

Action: The Chairman, Creative Bath

Bath-based companies working in the creative industry sector should be encouraged to contribute to development and implementation of the vision for the river.

Conclusion 3

Action: Cllr Terry Gazzard

The Council's regeneration delivery plan for the river corridor should take account of the needs of the existing communities along the river as well as the need for economic development.

Conclusion 4

Action: Cllr Terry Gazzard

The Council should publish the 2005 report *Bath River Avon Corridor Study* as an important background document.

Conclusion 5

Action: Cllr Charles Gerrish

The Council's transport policies should investigate the scope for new forms of river-based transport to reduce congestion and air pollution on the roads.

- **Regeneration**

- Bring the Council-owned Colonnades into use to generate funds for enhancement of the riverside
- Ensure that any redevelopment of the Rugby Club's facilities on the Rec provides an attractive riverside walkway from Bath Spa Station
- More bars, cafes etc to bring the riverside to life and/or a riverside concert hall and conference centre

- **Recreation**

- Require all new riverside developments to provide public access to the riverbank
- Increase easy (step free) access to the riverside
- New footbridges to encourage access (eg Manvers St/Ferry Road, Walcot)
- More slipways
- Provide facilities for river bathing (eg at Pulteney Weir, Cleveland Pools)
- Turn the island at Twerton into an environmental asset instead of a bus depot
- Designate the river bank between Bath and the Dundas aqueduct as a conservation area and create a footpath to provide a circular route using the river and the canal
- Open up the footpath from Kensington Meadows to the city centre
- Provide separate routes for cyclists and walkers, eg by opening up access on both sides of river

- **Transport**

- Interchange for river transport alongside rail and bus stations
- Use river to transport people, waste, supplies for supermarkets
- Reduce heavy traffic over North Parade Bridge so as to improve amenity of riverside

- **Environmental management**

- Increase positive management of the river channel (dredging, tree management)

- Bring radial gate at Pulteney Weir back into use
- Refurbish Victoria Bridge
- Clean up footpath on north bank and remove graffiti from buildings
- Move badly sited litter bin at Pulteney Bridge steps
- Remove shrubs damaging structure and clean up stairs at North Parade Bridge
- Realign footpath at Green Park so as to reduce flooding and mud in winter