

Better schemes, less waste:

Why B&NES needs to rebuild its relationship with community groups

An open letter to Bath & North East Somerset Council

Bath & North East Somerset has a long history of working with community organisations to develop and deliver walking, wheeling and cycling infrastructure.

Some of the most significant improvements across the district began with ideas from local campaigners, working alongside councillors, officers and delivery partners.

The [Two Tunnels Greenway](#) grew out of a community campaign involving people still active in Walk Ride Bath today. CycleBath, our predecessor, developed the Scholars' Way proposals and partnered with the council on its successful £3.8 million Cycle City Ambition Fund 2 bid, which helped fund canal towpath improvements and subsequently Bath Quays Bridge.

Our members have also contributed to the development of transport policy, including bringing ideas around low-traffic neighbourhoods into discussions with residents' associations and councillors.

These weren't achievements of any single organisation. They demonstrate what becomes possible when community knowledge, professional expertise and political leadership work together.

We believe it is time to rebuild that relationship.

The value of institutional memory

Community organisations bring something that can be difficult for councils to retain: decades of accumulated local knowledge and institutional memory.

Councillors change, officers move between roles, consultants come and go, and political priorities evolve. With local elections approaching in May 2027, that continuity becomes particularly relevant.

Yet many community volunteers remain involved in the same places, routes and projects for years, sometimes decades. They remember which ideas have already been explored, why decisions were made, what commitments were given and where opportunities remain.

That knowledge can help prevent the same issues being revisited, avoid unnecessary work and bring new councillors and officers up to speed much more quickly.

Why consultation alone isn't enough

Public consultation is essential. It provides an opportunity for residents, businesses and everyone affected by a proposal to have their say.

But it serves a different purpose from an ongoing working relationship with community organisations.

Groups such as Walk Ride Bath have members who have spent years developing their understanding of transport networks, design standards, accessibility and local conditions. They contribute because they care about improving their communities.

Bringing that expertise into discussions early, before schemes have been substantially designed or funding committed, can identify problems, develop alternatives and build community understanding before formal consultation begins.

[Active Travel England's guidance](#) recognises that meaningful, continuing engagement can improve designs and save time and money.

A constructive relationship that delivers results

B&NES previously operated an Active Travel and Accessibility Forum, which appears to have last met in March 2021. The subsequent Journey to Net Zero Transport Forum provided broader transport discussions but, in our experience, did not replace that continuing, focused working relationship.

We are not simply asking for the previous forum to be recreated, or for another series of meetings and presentations.

A forum needs to be a genuinely constructive, two-way relationship.

Community organisations should be able to contribute ideas, local knowledge and constructive challenge. Officers should be able to share their professional expertise, explain constraints and work through solutions.

Neither side has to agree on everything. The objective is to identify opportunities, resolve problems earlier and produce better outcomes.

The council has previously recognised this value. Its [2019 Keynsham High Street report](#) acknowledges how advice from the former forum helped improve accessibility considerations in the design.

Our call to the council

We are calling on B&NES Council to commit to re-establishing a constructive Walking, Wheeling and Cycling Forum for the whole of Bath and North East Somerset.

The precise arrangements should be developed collaboratively between the council and relevant community organisations.

The measure of success should not be how many meetings take place, but what those meetings help achieve.

We have already demonstrated what cooperation can deliver. There is no reason we shouldn't be building on that experience again, across the whole of Bath and North East Somerset.

Walk Ride Bath