

This document has been produced for members and friends of The Bishopston Society as a guide to decision-making on the future of our organisation, given the proposal to its 2019 AGM which foresees it being closed down.



A short history of TBS

The Bishopston Society was formed in 2002 by local residents who were concerned at the growth of planning applications for houses to be built in back gardens. This developed into a broad focus on Bishopston's amenities and built environment, and on representing community interests over local planning, architecture and related matters.

The Society has successfully broadened its appeal over the last few years by working additionally on social and economic aspects of Bishopston, including collaboration with traders to celebrate and boost our great British high street. The Society has also been able to reflect growth in communal life in the area, such as the flowering of street parties.

We have also demonstrated a commitment to integrating cultural and environmental perspectives on Bishopston's development with our traditional focus. And we initiated the Clean Air Bishopston project, in partnership with our friends Sustainable Bishopston and others, and wider perspectives are emerging on how planning and amenity work can contribute to sustainability campaigning and an environmental focus, and vice-versa.

The most recent statement of our **mission** was *"to secure the improvement of local amenities and the social, environmental and historic character of Bishopston, and to become the recognized voice of the area on these matters"*.

Our published **vision** is *"a Bishopston that is sustainable, has a pride in its history and its future, with attractive architecture, sound planning and design, popular amenities, a welcoming atmosphere, cultural diversity, and an informed and engaged population acting together as a democratic voice for our communities"*.

Achievements and shortcomings

Arguably, our achievements include the following: we think we have:-

- critically examined local developments (including planning applications) and represented Bishopston residents effectively to public authorities and others
- publicised and supported improvements to local amenities
- demonstrated that people can find us and get help when needed
- run a successful series of public meetings on popular topics relevant to our mission
- worked with partners on local campaigns and issues
- started to modernise our image and appeal
- developed and maintained an informative news and information service via a lively and popular web site

- extended our e-services into the social media sphere

.....but the shortcomings of our work include:-

- being unable to find enough new blood to sustain established activities without risking burn out on the part of a small core of activists
- conveying an old-fashioned image
- being unable to attract a representative demographic, especially into leadership roles
- launched relevant and innovative services, envisaged others and generated exciting ideas, without being able to find enough person-power to sustain them
- not engaging members and other stakeholders actively or frequently
- making limited progress towards more recent modernisation goals, and integration of social, economic and environmental perspectives with our traditional focus.

What else? What do *you* think? We hope that a **“viability” group** (see below) will add depth to a critical evaluation of both achievements and shortcomings.

Current situation

Despite our achievements (or perhaps because of our shortcomings), we have, like so many small community groups, struggled to find adequate resources, primarily in the form of people-power, to run the organisation over the course of the years. Potential closure has been considered before, though avoided, despite appeals for more help largely failing. We now feel forced to re-consider winding up, following the decision of three more committee members, including Planning Advisor, Membership Secretary and Chair, to stand down, and the very slim chances of being able to fill their roles.

Though we’re gutted to have to do this, we want to be realistic and open about the next steps. We also think it’s important to engage our community in this big decision by providing an opportunity for reflection and evaluation, and to consult over a range of possibilities before TBS’ fate is sealed.

We wouldn’t rule out some form of rescue plan, if there's a strong feeling that the work must continue, and enough help emerges to carry out a relaunch supported by the two or three of us prepared to continue serving. Equally, we’re going to ask whether the Society could merge with another organisation to exploit economies of scale to sustain some of our activities, or ask another body to take on some of our functions. Or the outcome might be to simply recognise that our time has come, and simply shut up shop.

The AGM is therefore being asked to consider broad options for our future, by convening a meeting of “critical friends” named a VIABILITY group, standing for **Voluntary Independent Advisory Board Investigating Longterm Interests for TBS this Year (!)**. The key principle behind this move is to bring into play *an independent perspective from community stakeholders* whose voice we think should be taken into account prior to (or part of) a final decision.

Motion proposed to AGM 1/10/19

“This meeting notes that the Society’s committee membership has dropped to a level which renders its work unviable, and most TBS activities have been suspended. The meeting notes with regret that a winding-up resolution will be presented to a Special General Meeting in the near future. However, the meeting also supports the proposal that a ‘viability group’ be convened on the same occasion to enable voting members to take into account the independent advice of critical friends on any alternatives which might lead to a continuation of the Society’s work, or part of it.”

Questions for a VIABILITY group

If a “viability group” meeting takes place, some of the questions it might address might include (but are not necessarily limited to) the following:-

- What are TBS’ achievements and shortcomings?
- What areas of work should be preserved, and why?
- Who can/should help?
- Could/should selected functions be moved to (an)other organisation(s)?
- What options for the future are there?
- Which is the best option?

Options for the future

1. No change (“business as usual”)
2. Postpone a decision in case new blood emerges
3. Continue with limited functions
4. Merge with another organisation
5. Transfer selected functions to other organisation(s)
6. Establish a new organisation (with others)
7. Wind up.

Current committee profile

Name	Main role(s)	Status	Joined
Neil Embleton	Planning Advisor	Resigned	2007
Dick Farrow	Treasurer, Etc	Would consider re-serving	2006
Kevin Molloy	Clean Air Bishopston	Resigned	2017
Nick Plant	Chair, e-Services, Etc	Would consider re-serving but not in Chair, Etc roles	2009
Simon Randolph	Newsletter & Web Editor	Would consider re-serving	2008
Joanna Towner	Local groups	Resigned	2006
Lionel White	Membership, Etc	Resigned	<2006

Footnote – one view on the wider context

Our Chair ventured a personal view recently to local media: “there’s so much craziness going on in the echelons of power in today’s world that have led to the climate emergency, the threat of extinction, the rise of the hate agenda and the loss of decency and grace within our political systems, that it’s all the more vital for people to work together more closely and with new mutual respect at community level.”

"So I for one hope passionately that in Bishopston we can continue to use community power to campaign for better use of our planning system, effective responses to the climate emergency, sustainability, a vibrant cohesive culture, and a human- and eco-friendly local economy."

Next steps – please contribute!

We'd like your views on this "think piece".

If you would like an invitation to the VIABILITY meeting, or have comments, questions or feedback on our options for the future, please get in touch via our Contact form at <https://bishopstonsociety.org.uk/about/contactus> or email hq@bishopstonsociety.org.uk.

NB: whether you are familiar or not with The Bishopston Society, further details on our aims and objectives, vision, mission and latest strategy are all available on the web site "About" section <https://bishopstonsociety.org.uk/about>.

Nick Plant, TBS Chair, 27/09/19
