

Town Deal Community Engagement – B&FSTC 28 March 2023

I am Angie Ravn-Aagaard, Chair of BPARA (Bletchley Park Area Residents Association, established 33 years ago), member of COBRA (Consortium of Bletchley Residents Associations) & Town Deal Board (TDB) Member since its inception in July 2020, and on the working group prior to that. I am one of three Board Members who live in Bletchley. I am the only Board member, other than John Cove, (TDB Chair, who does not live in the area) who is not employed by or paid by a public sector organisation, and able to freely express my views.

I do agree to a certain extent with the motion on the meeting agenda - there is a need to improve Community Engagement.

As a Board member, I am bombarded with lengthy reports, each report can be anything between 30 and 70 pages long which, as I am retired, I have time to carefully read, and usually I submit questions prior to the meetings to ensure that I receive answers as time is tight in meetings. I refuse to be a figurehead and I always look at the topics under consideration from the point of view of a Bletchley/Fenny resident. Those who know me, will confirm that I am passionate about our area, and as meeting minutes have finally been uploaded on TDB website, and also from the latest BPARA Newsletter, you will note that I do not always support the decisions being made.

The last year has been busy, and the priority has been for the Board to finalise projects for sign off within tight timescales imposed by government, and Community Engagement has not been a main item on meeting agendas. For the last year, I have raised my concerns regarding the lack of information being made available to the public, both in meetings and [via regular emails](#) outside the meetings.

At the last Board meeting on 27 February, I flagged the misleading information within the Sainsbury acquisition announcement. I have become increasingly frustrated that Engagement has not been addressed, and as the next scheduled meeting is not until June, I have formally put my concerns in writing to Tracey Aldworth, MKCC Deputy CEO and John Cove, TDB Chair, copying to the Clerks at the Town & West Bletchley Councils. Despite Purdah, I have requested a meeting to discuss Community Engagement before June, particularly as work on the Public Realm Improvement project (Queensway & Fenny high streets) is in progress and will include details of how consultation on its Master Plan, due for publication this Summer, will be conducted. There may also be consultation regarding the Transport Hub which focuses on making part of Saxon Street a single carriage way in each direction.

However, you may or may not be aware that there is a [Community Engagement Plan](#) on the TDB website – it is one of the Appendices submitted with the Town Investment Plan when we applied for Town Deal Funding to the Government in 2020. I have used this report as the basis for my note to Tracey & John, concentrating on engagement with the public, and not businesses or other bodies.

This report consists of 46 pages and refers to 3 stages of engagement - we have been in the Stage 3 position since the Town Deal funding application was approved in the Summer of 2021. Pages 30/31 refer to “a bespoke programme of engagement”, “Stakeholder identification & engagement” and “Digital communications” - all of which have fallen short, even after allowing for restrictions during and post the Covid pandemic.

Three forms of community engagement have been used:

1. Via occasional presentations to both councils and BPARA/COBRA members, or via limited updates for the councils & BPARA newsletters, or
2. Via lengthy consultation documents as in the case of the [Central Bletchley Urban Design Framework Supplementary Planning Document](#) (SPD for short, the long title is indicative of the length of the document) & Fire/Police Station site consultations. These consultations either do not reach residents or put off those residents who are aware. In my 14 May email to the Council, I wrote. “**According to SPD feedback, some residents commented that public consultation ‘has not been very accessible ...**

little proactive communications about it to residents (e.g. leafleting, social media through local groups that are not affiliated to the Council, such as Resident Association groups etc)...’ This comment is taken from Pages 49 & 50 of Annex A - another lengthy document which details feedback on the CBUDF SPD.”

Turning to the third form of engagement – media:

1. Sadly, the **Town Deal web site** [Home | Groundbreaking Bletchley and Fenny Town Deal](#) has had limited information, and not been updated on a regular basis, nor does it automatically feed to the websites of the two Bletchley Councils – it is also difficult to access information on the MKCC website. Residents I met recently in Duncombe Street are amongst those unaware of the TDB website. There is no reference to the Town’s Neighbourhood Plan which links to Town Deal projects, or the Brunel acquisition by MKDP more than a year ago – the announcement on the MKDP website did not state that the acquisition included Wilkinson & Sainsbury carpark (only evident when the Police/Fire Station sites brief was published). The list of Board members has been out of date, despite having been flagged. However, in the last week and since sending my note, the TDB website has now been updated, even to the point of being blitzed with information on 21 March.
2. **Social media channels** - the last Twitter post was September 2020 and there is only 1 follower, that is because somebody decided to check this out a few days ago, and Facebook has 4 likes and 5 followers! NextDoor is not used by MKCC, but has become the platform for residents to provide their views - their posts are dire and embarrassing!

In early 2020 when requests for Town Deal projects were being collected, BPARA unsuccessfully suggested an **information point**, either a temporary structure on Stanier Square or use of an empty town centre unit. **MKDP has owned the Brunel Centre** with vacant units for more than a year and only now is Unit 4a being used for the WEURO 2022 Legacy Public Art Commission. As a minimum, Town Deal updates could have been displayed in the Brunel Centre, maybe screening the depressing empty units – an opportunity missed, as a little news is better than no news or fake news. Following on from the Food & Craft Fair last Saturday, we have a Summer of events coming up which should be used for community engagement. For the third year running, the BPARA AGM at Bletchley Park in May, open to other residents associations, will have a presentation on the Town Deal, with John Cove, speakers from the IOT, Bletchley Park, and myself taking part – I have asked for this to be filmed and posted on social media to reach a wider audience.

I do agree with the motion that there is a need to improve Community Engagement, and if budget for this is an issue, then money must be found. Having formally made known my concerns to Tracey & John, I would welcome support from this Council to put pressure on MKCC to treat Community Engagement as a priority, and, as I have already requested, arrange a meeting with relevant stakeholders as soon as possible, irrespective of Purdah.

Finally, engagement with local businesses has been in progress this year, being led by Sukhi Gill at MKCC.

**Angie Ravn-Aagaard, Hon Chair of Bletchley Park Area Residents Association (BPARA)
Bletchley & Fenny Stratford Town Deal Board Member – COBRA Acting Chair**