

FIRST SLIDE/LOGO

Thank you for coming, everyone.

I came here tonight because I want the best for Bath.

I am sure you came here for that reason too.

We all want that. We all want the best for Bath.

What – or who- do we mean by Bath? We mean its residents. The people who live, work and vote here.

Bath's schoolchildren, pensioners, parents, job seekers, teachers, students... everyone.

I know the council want what is best for Bath too. That is why Council Leader Tim Warren and Councillor for Communities Martin Veal are here tonight.

B&NES Core Strategy for 2016-2020 SLIDE

In fact, in a blog post last week, I noticed Councillor Tim Warren said the new Cabinet's aims are to "ensure it puts residents first."

Good news!

This rhetoric is also what lies at the heart of B&NES core strategy.

But the reality is very different. For over 6 months Save Bath Library been asking your cabinet to engage with us but our emails, questions and concerns have been largely ignored.

Residents have told the council what they want. They want a *proper* library, with qualified librarians on the staff, great book and DVD availability, plenty of study space, event space, and good wifi for the *minority* who come to the library to use computers.

BATH CHRONICLE SLIDE Your own initial survey taken earlier this year showed you that scarcely 1 in 4 library users believe it is important to be able to report a pot hole, or pay their council tax, when they are in the library.

You've spent a lot of time and money *telling* residents that they want an integrated library & council service, but you haven't been *listening*.

We're here to ask you, now, tonight to truly listen, and to truly put residents' needs first.

SLIDE: THIS LIBRARY IS MOVING SIGN

Back in December, you told residents that the library was moving via press announcements, leaflets and a series of 2-metre high marketing signs in the library.

You *told* us work would begin this past spring, 2017, to begin moving council offices into the Podium and the Podium library into the One Stop Shop on Manvers street.

When in February, Tim Warren took part in a BBC Radio Bristol interview he made it clear the decision to move the library was a done deal: Residents would not be consulted on the change of location.

Definitely not putting residents first.

ADD SLIDE: FLINCH/HOWLETT SG COMBO

When our elected leaders were asked why residents hadn't been properly consulted on this move Councillor Veal said "it is our decision to make and we will not flinch from that".

Then MP Ben Howlett said the decision was made before Christmas. "Your library is moving. *DO* send in your views."

Residents first?

The data council used to justify the change said that only 9% of library users check out books compared to a massive 52% who come in to use computers.

SLIDE: VEAL QUOTE

But I practically lived in the library for a few years, first when my children were in preschool and then, when my husband and I used it like an office when starting our businesses, and that figure just didn't sound right. When I spoke to you in January, Councillor Veal, before you stopped taking questions on the library, I asked you for the sample size and methodology. You said you'd provide it. Despite repeated follow up requests, you never once replied.

SLIDE: 70% INFOGRAPHIC

So we looked at BANES own Voicebox survey conducted in 2015 and found the truth is that **70%** of users use the library for borrowing books and other resources. And only **16%** of users said they used the computers. This data is also consistent with the UK-wide government findings.

VEAL 'NO LIBRARY' QUOTE

Then we were told: If Bath residents did not like the idea of an “integrated modern library” – an idea that didn't seem to understand what a library was or what it means to residents - they were given only one alternative: no library at all.

SLIDE OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES ACT

(Councillor Veal had obviously forgotten that Local authorities have a statutory duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 'to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons')

The other reason given for the proposed library change? Austerity.

SLIDE OF SAVINGS CLAIM

The council said shutting Bath Central Library's Podium site would save Bath £800,000 a year every year.

When we asked how this figure was arrived at, the cabinet were unable to give a clear reply.

We finally learned that the savings would not come from any rental savings, because the Council would continue to rent the Podium

site—spending *millions* refurbishing it into new council offices for council staff.

By March 13th, Council Officers admitted that NO business plan had been made, and the £800k was simply “a target.”

When the library move was announced, NO mention was made of the enormous capital cost of almost £6MILLION to turn the library into office and offices into a library.

Like the Meadows team, Save Bath Libraries was shocked to discover that major public expenditure had been approved without proper evidence or a business case amid cuts in public services.

Some austerity, huh?

SLIDE: ‘EQUIVALENT’ ON SIGNS ETC.

Also like the Meadows team, we kept discovering hugely misleading and inaccurate claims to support the Council’s programme. For example, they said the space would be the equivalent size of the existing space, but just looking at the buildings, this seemed impossible.

We requested floorplans.

No reply.

SLIDE: SIDE BY SIDE FLOORPLANS

So we had two local architects draw up and verify floorplans and confirm that the proposed space in Lewis House was approximately HALF the size of the Podium library site. We presented our findings to the cabinet in February and again asked Martin Veal to clarify.

No reply.

By March council directors admitted during a scrutiny panel that they had not yet done the work on the size of the buildings.

We don’t feel *any* of this puts local residents first.

And through all of this, we have been petitioning, making public statements at council meetings, emailing Councillors and Council Officers, marching and demonstrating and doing countless interviews for local and national media.

We've been asking for the truth, asking for engagement, asking to be able to share residents' and librarians' ideas.

We've been asking the Council to consider solutions that think bigger and better and brighter than the single solution of integrating council services—whether at the Podium or at Lewis House or at a third site.

PERRY HARRIS NO U-TURN SLIDE

There's a final reason why listening to residents and following government and legal guidance is of vital importance. Somerset County council had its library restructuring plans quashed in the high court and must now pay its own legal fees plus those of the campaign.

The law is crystal clear on what constitutes a lawful public consultation. That is why when on February 8th Save Bath Library sent you a pre-litigation letter, explaining your statutory consultation duties, you postponed the library move and denied that you'd ever said the library is moving.

Now we are facing a new consultation, and though Tim Warren promised us, in person, in April, that library campaigners and librarians would be allowed to consult on the design of that consultation, we've heard nothing.

SLIDE: 2020 vision

We believe a great city like Bath deserves great vision. All cities face austerity right now, but some have risen to the challenge to create beautiful public spaces and opportunities for residents. Doesn't Bath deserve the same?

Putting residents first does not mean simply saying you will do it. It means actually doing it. And it certainly doesn't mean telling residents they do not have a choice or that they can only comment on a list of options driven first and foremost by council interests.

Putting residents first means engaging openly, honestly and meaningfully.

It means answering emails.

It means saying you want to do better, that you'll own your mistakes and work together, with residents, for what is best for Bath.

It means listening. Today's announcement makes it clear, you still aren't listening.

SLIDE: KILLER QUESTIONS

If you are genuinely committed to putting residents first, then I ask you, Council Leader Warren, can you promise, here tonight, in front of all these people, that you will do four things:

1. Don't tell us integration is the only solution, particularly when residents have already told you it's not what we want.
2. Commit to working with Save Bath Libraries and librarians to ensure a resident-led list of options is created for officers to cost out, prior to any proper public consultation about Bath Central Library.
3. Commit to ensuring those options are evidence-based with full business case headlines set out so that we can make sure the best decisions are made with our city's limited resources
4. Insist that your cabinet members put residents first too. You must commit to ensuring that meetings requests and emails are responded to within days and not ignored in the hopes they will just go away. They won't.
5. Publicly correcting false or misleading statements in order to start to rebuild public trust

Remember, there is nothing inevitable about diminishing our community's libraries. It's a choice.

SLIDE: CARNEGIE TRUST

Libraries generate £5 for every £1 spent.

Three in four people say they are important for communities.

Despite the cuts to hours, staffing and bookstock in Bath Central Library, visit numbers are still almost half a million a year.

We all want what's best for Bath.

Let's work together on a list of solutions that truly puts residents' needs first, NOT just a council-led take-it-or-leave-it single solution of integration.

SLIDE: RETURN TO KILLER QUESTIONS & LEAVE UP

That's all I wanted to say.

And for once, councillors, I am truly happy to say, Thanks for listening.