

“We live within the sky, not beneath it”

Joanna Wright, 9th June 2018

Transport and Pollution Conference, Organised by Wera Hobhouse MP

It is the significant detail that matters.

Over the past few years I have made it my priority to ask people the significant details of their journeys, how they take them, why they take them and why they do not take them.

Right now in Milsom Place is an exhibition, which I have curated called #getoutofyourcar and the opportunity to invigilate has led to many more conversations with a diverse range of people.

I want to discuss in significant detail one conversation I had, with a retired white male, who visited with his teenage granddaughter. Let's call him John.

John came in and was intent at looking at Adam Reynolds' "Living Heart Map of Bath". He looked at it and wanted to know about how he could still use his car. John thought that Adam's map was the map that B&NES Council is considering for Bath. John was concerned about the restrictions that would be placed on him. I explained that it was not B&NES's proposal.

I suggested to John, that he catch a bus into the city centre.

John's response:

"I have worked hard all my life, I have 2 good cars which I have worked hard for, why can't I drive into Bath, why should I get on a bus? I want to use my car."

I gesticulated to John's granddaughter and suggested that he might be concerned about the air she breathes and the air that other young people breathe.

John responded, saying

"Why should I give up my diesel cars when half empty buses in the city pump out fumes, planes and boats and trains pump out emissions. I have worked hard all my life. I will die soon. Pollution is not my problem."

For too long the politics of this nation has catered to this man, to an idea of progress, of ownership, to wealth displayed through vehicles. Let's be in no doubt the car and road lobby are a mighty force, and their concern for future generations is in doubt.

This present generation of children, my children, your children, are the first that will not live as long as us due to inactivity and pollution.

For John to be more concerned with his worldly wealth, with his ownership of cars and the right to use them, is a narrative we can all put our hand up to.

My journey from A to B in a car, using a rat run, possibly parking on a pavement, using my mobile as I drive, going over the speed limit is something that every driver has done and justifies to themselves. Not only is the style of journey justified, but the refusal to understand the impact upon our social lives, our economic lives, our environmental lives is widespread. We have imbued vehicle culture into our very DNA and are unable to see it.

The first significant detail this city could make is to identify its Political Will or I would say lack of it, to wean itself away from private car ownership and the journey's these cars allow us all to make.

Bath requires POLITICS to think of the significant detail of a baby in a pram on the way to the park, a child walking into the city along the London Road, a teenager crossing the city on their way to school and recognise that the air they breathe is unsafe and in many cases killing them.

We, all of us, the adults, are failing them. This is unacceptable.

To think that we can create a Clean Air Zone in the city that does not include the London Road, with some of the highest levels of pollution in the country, is dismally negligent.

The British Government has failed to look after the health of its inhabitants. It has been taken to court by Client Earth over air pollution and lost 3 times.

At a local level we can challenge this and we should demand Clean Air.

We should not let Bath, a UNESCO world heritage city be a dirty, polluted, congested place. We should make Bath a CLEAN Air Zone and nothing less.

How we gather the data on movement of people and who these people are is essential and this requires a vision that is not based on SINGLE SUBJECT THINKING, but thinks about the complexity of the journey.

The significant detail behind the individual and their journey.

The parent after a day at work taking their 6 year old to a swimming lesson with a toddler in tow, the teenager with a music lesson after school and a bag full of books and a PE Kit.

The NHS staff on a shift, commuting from Bristol. The OAP wanting to get to the doctors.

B&NES clean air team must include, a diverse residents working party made up of different ages and socio economic groups from across the city, to act as a critical friend of the Council and show that the Council are not just paying lip service to this consultation.

Over and over we employ expensive single subject thinking experts that fail to understand the complexity of cities and how they work and how communities function. We need to rethink what makes a community viable.

If this city really wants to understand movement then it should invest in ANPR cameras over a year, with a range of experts from sociologist to mothers to think about the data gathered. Remember traffic studies are undertaken by traffic engineers who want to keep traffic moving, these are possibly not the most useful experts.

The significant detail of over 4000 children attending Private schools, the significant detail of over 4000 0 to 4 year olds and their journey's to preschools, the significant detail of over 3000 16 to 18 year olds would not have even been considered if the work Transition in Bath did had not highlighted it.

To actively take part in the changes needed to stop pollution and congestion in Bath we really need to change the dynamics of thought and create a much more robust and varied group of minds to implement this.

Did you know that three-quarters of UK children spend less time outside than prison inmates.

Car ownership has been gained at the loss of freedom and choice for children.

If I took away your ability to drive or be driven, what would you do? How easy would you find it, what problems would you find?

A significant detail put to me by a resident was:

“as a pedestrian I feel like a 2nd class citizen in Bath.”

Vehicles dominate the landscape, they are aggressive, they park on pavements, there are endless rat runs which are not challenged, if this city really believes in a Clean Air City it would make pedestrians VIP's.

And it doesn't cost much either, again it is the significant detail that would change the walk for thousands.

Build 10 foot/cycle bridges in Bath. Transition Larkhall has been campaigning for one for years in Lambridge. Bathampton want their Conker crossing.

Restrict private vehicles between 9.30 and 6pm daily in the city centre.

Make the whole city a 20mph zone.

Improve pavements.

A person walking should know that their journey is as important as those in a car.

Lewis Mumford said “The right to have access to every building by private car is the right to destroy a city”.

Amsterdam did not wake up one day to find everyone cycling. It took political will, it took investment and infrastructure to create it.

If we want a city in which people cycle, politicians have to create it, there is no other way. How many Bike racks are in Batheaston? 2, in the central reservation surrounded by fencing. For the last year I have been pushing for more racks to be created and what an uphill struggle this is. There are many car parking spaces by the shops and not a single bike rack.

Lidl recently created a new parking lot on a major Sustrans Route near the two tunnels, how many bike racks? Cars expect parking spaces, so if we want people to cycle we have to create spaces to park bicycles.

Electric bikes are a game changer. Electric Bike hire for residents should be set up in all the villages of Bath, from Weston, to Twerton, to Snow Hill to Combe Down.

Did you know that last year B&NES Council paid the private bus companies in Bath £3.8 million for OAP bus use. Yet this Council is unable to question bus routes that these companies deploy.

Why are there 2 bus stops on the London Road within 100 yards of each other?

It would seem that this prohibits the use of the cheap 3 stop ticket from being used on the east of Bath to get into the city centre.

Why has the Council not challenged this?

The bus companies are running rings around us all and this has to stop. One of the reasons we have congestion every morning is parents driving kids to school. The significant detail is that it is cheaper if you have more than 1 child to drive.

First Bus does offer a child's annual bus ticket at £325, which roughly works out at £1 a day.

So why can't there be a bus ticket at £1 a day all day, for all bus providers for people under the age of 18 in this city?

Most people in Bath think buses are too expensive and unreliable. If this city wants to put bums on bus seats, it needs to demand that it is affordable, reliable and moves people effectively.

A parent told me this significant detail.

“At a time when I was not running a second car, I had a parents' evening to attend at Ralph Allen school. I don't cycle, so my only option was the number 3 bus, this takes an hour, I walk a mile to catch it in Batheaston, and have a mile to walk at the other end, there is in no direct service. So, I decided to put on my walking boots and walk. It took 75mins, the same time as the bus journey. The only public transport option in Bath is the same speed as walking, over 6 miles, to a major secondary school?”

Corporate responsibility should be demanded in this city. This means bus companies actually engaging with the public on new routes and costs.

I spoke with a friend, who is a mother, works at the RUH and lives in a village on the outskirts of Bath about her driving.

What do you want to #getoutofyourcar?

“A reliable bus service from Lansdowne's Park and Ride to the RUH, that works 24/7. I have spoken to many colleagues who live in Swindon or Cold Ashton and they all say the same thing – we don't want to drive to the RUH but there are no options” was her response.

Where is the joined up thinking about the largest employer in Bath and shift work and parking?

A collaborating artist visited me recently coming from London with her husband and child. I asked them about the train journey.

“No, we did not come by train, we came by car. I looked into the price of tickets and it was the same price as travelling by Eurostar from Amsterdam to London, so it was cheaper to drive” was the reply.

Our railways are overly expensive. If we want less private vehicles in Bath, we need cheaper trains and more of them with new stations created in Wiltshire, that run on time.

Active travel and the benefits for us all should be the vision. It deals with obesity and pollution.

The future of our young people and the ones that will follow them is our responsibility. We are only caretakers. We need to build a better city that focuses on the health of the young. To fail to do this is an economic time bomb.

Remember this “private driving costs so much less than it costs society”.

So

Plant more trees

Expect civic duty

Get better data

Demand corporate responsibility

Move beyond party politics

Invest in walking and cycling infrastructure

Change perceptions of travel

Insist upon affordable transport

Create a Clean Air Zone for Bath

Build 10 foot and cycle bridges

Create a city centre free of private vehicles

Imagine what independent travel for young people looks like

Remember breathing is required, driving is optional

Realise that considering the significant details makes a difference to everyone

Believe that if we can build a successful city for children then we will build a successful city for all people.