

The following statements have been submitted – full details are attached:

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| CS01 | Councillor Fabian Breckels | Threats to British Democracy and its Impact on Bristol Residents |
| CS02 | Councillor Andrew Varney | Front Garden Tree Scheme |
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| CS06 | Councillor Andrew Brown | Romney House Development & the Mayor |
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CS01

Members Forum statement from Councillor Fabian Breckels

Subject: Statement on Threats to British Democracy and its Impact on Bristol Residents

I hope most of us are alarmed by the Government’s plans to bring in compulsory photo ID for people wanting to vote. That legislation continues to go through parliament this week. Three and a half million people in this country do not have any photo ID. With high levels of deprivation in parts of Bristol thousands of people living here will be among those denied their legitimate right to vote – because they are too poor to own a passport or driving licence. We can’t just accept that. Voter ID could cost up to £20 million to implement and to quote Darren Hughes, CEO of the Electoral Reform Society “There were just 28 allegations of personation - the type of fraud ID is meant to fix – in 2017 which resulted in a single conviction out of 45 million votes. That’s over £700k per allegation of polling station fraud last year – a lot of money to throw at unverified rumours, when we know there are real democratic problems to fix”.

Boris Johnson’s government also choose to avoid registering the whole population automatically. This will suppress the votes of those who move frequently, the digitally excluded, and those with language difficulties. The boundary review will reflect this, by only taking into account those on the electoral register, not the actual residential population.

These undemocratic policies disproportionately hit Bristol’s young people, those here on benefits, and poorer members of our communities, including ethnic minorities. Some go so far as to accuse the government of vote rigging.

We also need to be aware of the plans by the Conservative Government to replace the Supplementary Vote system used to elect Mayors, Metro Mayors and Police and Crime Commissioners with First Past The Post following this year’s elections. The supplementary vote gives voters a second preference, in case their first choice fails to win. This achieves much more consensus in support of elected Mayors and Police and Crime Commissioners, a consensus the First past the Post voting system can never provide.

First past the Post, is the system which gave the Johnson government an 80 seat majority on only 43% of the vote in 2019. Using that same electoral system will undermine the legitimacy of any

future Bristol Mayor, West of England Metro Mayor or Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Commissioner. That's no good when any of them may be forced to make difficult or unpopular decisions. This backwards step should concern anyone, from any political perspective, who believes in democratic legitimacy.

In contrast the Labour controlled Welsh Senedd passed the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill on 21 January this year which delivers not only the right of Local Councils to scrap First Past the Post and instead elect Councillors using the Single Transferable Vote, but also extends the franchise to 16 and 17 year olds and to all foreign citizens legally resident in Wales. The bill also paves the way for an overhaul of Wales' current system of voter registration. The bill could lead to a new system where registration officers can identify people missing from the register and let them know they'll be added. In other words, automatic voter registration. This is just what is needed in the whole of the UK.

English voters are already disadvantaged compared to voters in Northern Ireland, where STV has been used to elect Councils for decades; Scotland, where the same move was made in 2007, and now Wales is making the same changes available.

I would therefore urge everyone to back the Electoral Reform Society in demanding the same rights for English voters – including Bristol voters, of course, that are already enjoyed by voters in Northern Ireland, Scotland, and shortly in Wales, literally over the bridge from here.

We must commit to working with other Councils, Core Cities, Mayors and Metro Mayors and others to oppose the scrapping of the Supplementary Vote system that ensures more votes count and oppose the introduction of compulsory photo ID for voters. We must also not accept legislation that will allow our poorest and most disadvantaged residents to drop out of the electoral system. They have the same right to a voice as everyone else.

All of us, if we believe in democracy at all, should embrace electoral reform for all elections. England needs new legislation to allow English Councils to switch to STV if they so chose, the same choice now available to our close neighbours in Wales. That way everyone can vote for the candidates or parties they truly believe in safe in the knowledge that their vote will always count. We should all embrace votes at 16 and not be happy to leave English young people, including those in Bristol, disadvantaged. We should also all be committed to find ways of making voting and voter registration easier, not more difficult. Ultimately we need automatic voter registration.

The proposals being pushed through by Boris Johnson's Conservative government are a major threat to our democracy. We have to speak out because of the unacceptable impact on Bristol's residents and their ability to have their voices heard. Wales has already demonstrated that a better way forward is possible. We must demand the same rights.

CS02

Members Forum statement from Councillor Andrew Varney

Subject: Statement on Front Garden Tree Scheme

The climate emergency is an issue that undoubtedly unites all of us. We are all aware of the extreme seriousness of the situation and the urgency with which we need to take action.

I am certain everyone is delighted that the Council is committed to doubling tree canopy cover across the city by 2050. Planting trees, especially street trees, has not only enormous environmental benefits but also social and economic benefits too.

Countless research has shown that trees absorb pollution, reduce the risk of flooding, counter the 'heat island' effect of the urban environment, increase biodiversity and provide wildlife corridors, boost economic activity, help with people's mental health, and even reduce road rage and crime.

However, the lack of suitable sites for street trees across the city and the high cost of installation is deeply concerning. In my own ward of Brislington West, very few sites have been identified and so it is difficult to see how doubling our tree canopy cover can be easily achieved, especially in areas where trees would be most beneficial.

That is why I am proposing in my motion submitted today that we investigate the feasibility of setting up a Front Garden Tree Scheme to be run by Bristol City Council. There are potentially many thousands of front gardens across the city which would provide suitable sites for tree planting with nearly all the benefits of street trees but at a fraction of the cost.

In the spirit of working together for the benefit of Bristol and its citizens, I would be willing to meet with council officers and members of other parties to discuss my idea in more detail and to see how it might be progressed.

CS03

Members Forum statement from Councillor Jos Clark

Subject Electric Vehicle Charging Provision

Having taken a holiday recently in this country using my electric car, I now fully understand the reason why people are so reluctant to make the switch. As a councillor, I, along with all of my fellow councillors, want to do the right thing for our residents and city.

So when I talk to people in Brislington about changing to an electric vehicle they regularly tell me why they do not feel confident to make the switch and why would they when the Prime minister's spokesperson for COP26, Allegra Stratton, said she didn't 'fancy' buying one? If you look at the current share of EV vehicles on British roads which is 4% and compare it with a country like Norway at nearly 20% it is clear we are changing at too slow a rate. Many local residents' reasons include lack of publicly accessible charging points in retail spaces and little or no opportunity to charge your car close to home. Those who are able to charge at home have this year lost the grant to get a home charger installed and the government installed fewer public chargers than the year before.

Using an app you choose your charging location and when you get to a charging point it may not be available because it is out of order or being used by someone else. Other challenges include car parks which only allow a 2hr stay and it will take your car longer to fully charge.

Supermarkets are a good way to enable people to charge and shop but the older installations only have facilities with 7kws, newer supermarkets have up to 50kws known as rapid chargers, sadly we do not have enough. Just 296 'rapid' chargers were installed in the past three months and fewer than 20% of all chargers are 'rapid'.

If we are to help, and help is what is needed, for people to make the change, then we as a council need to embrace and push that agenda forward with speed and purpose.

This council's planning department must ensure that public and private charging points become the norm in all new builds. Existing facilities should be refurbished and upgraded to enable fast charging. This council cannot simply wait for government funding, but it needs to drive the agenda.

CS04

Members Forum statement from Councillor Cllr Alex Hartley

Subject: St George's School Site Re-Development

Since the closure of St George's Primary School in July, part of the site has now been put up for sale by the Diocese of Bristol. Both local residents and myself feel that the best use of this land would be for continued educational use. Local members of the Brandon Hill Residents Association have already reached out to commercial nursery providers to attempt to find a buyer, and I sincerely hope that both the Diocese and the Council will support their efforts. Failing this, I would suggest that given the lack of SEND provision in Bristol, this site could be also be utilised by Bristol City Council to increase SEND provision without the need to use independent operators, saving the council thousands of pounds in the long-term.

If the educational nature of the site cannot be preserved, I hope that any developer will work with the BHRA to build a low-rise development that is in keeping with the rich heritage of the site and the surrounding area. Within a small area, there are currently hundreds of student accommodation rooms, but little to no housing for families in the area. The site is within the Park Street & Brandon Hill Conservation Area with a huge number of Grade 1 and Grade 2 listed properties in the area. The St George's site faces directly onto Brandon Hill Park and adjoins the main entrance and viewing corridor into the park from the south. The closeness to this important public green space, of high environmental, biodiversity and heritage value with archaeological sites within it, will require any development to be highly sensitive to the setting. I sincerely hope that the Council and planning team will listen to the views of local residents when it comes to any planning decision and respect the nature of the site and the surrounding heritage.

CS05

Members Forum statement from Councillor Gary Hopkins

Subject: Secondary School Places

This authority faces a major problem over the next few years with regard to pupils progressing into secondary schools. There will be a shortfall of several hundred places. The longer-term solution in South Bristol is an excellent one in that it not only plugs the 20 year gap in provision in Knowle but also enhances the community provision at the Park, local opportunity centre. All partners have been thanked for their contribution to the partnership.

There are though two problems;

1. The opening date was fixed for 2023 which leaves a huge gap for 2022 and;
2. Central government cannot now deliver for 2023 which leaves an even larger gap. (local partners are not at fault in any way)

My ward partner and I, with huge local support, have been campaigning for a 2022 opening in temporary accommodation but whilst LEA officers have supported in principle there has been a lack of clear feedback.

The failure of delivery of the new school at Temple Meads has made the situation even more serious, with no solution date in sight, and clearly forcing our children to travel outside Bristol, which some already do, is not a satisfactory solution.

We should all feel considerable sympathy for the pupils from Barton Hill and nearby areas and we must hope that strenuous effort is being put in to solve the problem.

The Knowle/South Bristol problem though is solvable with four possible temporary sites having been given to officers and central government.

One of these is the former site of New Fosseway school which although not ideal geographically would be accepted by parents for 2 years and might make management easier for Oasis. The site is earmarked for future housing but temporary use for this important purpose should not be a problem.

It is the legal duty of this authority to ensure there are the school places and if necessary funds should be made available just as there were some years ago to tackle primary places.

CS06

Members Forum statement from Councillor Cllr Andrew Brown

Subject: Romney House Development & the Mayor

The Mayor often talks about the responsibilities that come with his role and berates Councillors for what he characterises as political point scoring. This is particularly noticeable when they ask questions that, not to put too fine a point on it, he doesn't want to answer.

I experienced this personally last month when the answers to my questions about his attitude to expansion of Bristol Airport – where he had lauded their commitment to carbon reduction in their ground operations – were, at best, perfunctory although they could also be characterised as evasive. A similar approach can be seen in the answers provided to questions posed by other members. Indeed, he told one member that “the airport is not an aeroplane”.

That comment was particularly patronising, but I know I'm not alone in being made to feel like a naughty schoolchild whenever the Mayor addresses Council. It's as if he regards us an inconvenience compared to his cabinet, the One City project, and the building of personal profile nationally and internationally.

What the Mayor seems to overlook, when dealing with Councillors, is that we have responsibilities too – not only to our own electorates, but to the wider population of Bristol. It is our role to scrutinise the Executive; through the various scrutiny commissions, in the chamber, and through members' questions and statements.

Another key part of our role is to make planning and licencing decisions which we must be able to do without fear or favour. That is why it was disappointing that the Mayor hosted a post on his blog from two members of his cabinet on the proposed development of the Romney House site in Lockleaze.

This stated that the plans were due to be presented to one of the council's planning committees "for approval" whereas, like any proposal coming before the committee, they were actually being presented for determination. That is a small but significant point which needs to be recognised by the administration as and when further plans are brought forward by the Council's housing company, Goram Homes.

The blog ended with the following statement: "We are sure that the planning committee knows what could well happen next if they defer or reject these plans ... Our city can't afford to risk losing more land to private developers building more unaffordable homes or student flats, rather than building more affordable homes for Bristolians." This reads like a threat – rather than relying on the qualities of the proposed scheme, we were forcefully told that a failure to approve would have dire consequences.

It is vitally important that the planning committees both are, and are seen to be, able to fully scrutinise these proposals and arrive at decisions independent of the view of the executive and without undue pressure. I hope that the Mayor will reflect on his approach in this case and review how future plans are handled.

In the event, the scheme was unanimously approved. I can't speak for other members of the committee but in my case the decision made was in spite of, not because of, the blogpost.

CS07

Members Forum statement from Councillor Carla Denyer

Subject: The Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty

The burning of fossil fuels is the primary cause of the current climate crisis. And yet the Paris Agreement, the landmark accord which is meant to keep the world from passing warming of 1.5C, does not even mention them. (1)

It may therefore come as no surprise that almost half of all carbon emissions emitted into the atmosphere as a result of the burning of fossil fuels has happened since the signing of the Paris Agreement to tackle climate change by almost every country in the world (2)

Much of the blame for the unfolding climate disaster that we see around us today lies not with those in the past who were largely ignorant of the consequences, but with those, many still in powerful positions today, who willfully allowed, and even encouraged expansion of, the burning of fossil fuels whilst simultaneously signing up to tackle climate change.

The UK alone was spending £11 billion in fossil fuel subsidies despite signing up to the Paris Agreement and being the first national government to declare a Climate Emergency. It also has one of the worse records in terms of transparency on its fossil fuel financial support. (3)

For too long we have had words without action, and people and the planet are paying the price.

If the latest IPCC report makes one thing clear, it is that we cannot continue to burn fossil fuels, that instead we should be immediately transitioning away from the dirty energy of oil, coal and gas. THAT WE NEED TO KEEP FOSSIL FUELS IN THE GROUND. (4)

Yet, instead of scaling down fossil fuel production, we continue to see vast amounts of both public and private funding being thrown at not only expanding fossil fuel production, but also in exploration operations to uncover new reserves. This is madness. (5)

It is precisely because of the duplicitous nature of state government support for fossil fuels whilst signing up for climate action, that increasingly it is cities that are beginning to take the lead in tackling the Climate Emergency.

The Climate Emergency declaration that I brought to this council, and which received the support of all parties and the Mayor was followed swiftly by similar declarations across the UK and the rest of Europe. Bristol was at the forefront of the movement to combat the climate emergency and now over 300 UK local authorities have followed our lead. (6)

But it is abundantly clear to all of us, that in order to meet the challenging target we have set ourselves, to reach carbon zero by 2030, we need the financial support, the underwritten guarantees, the long term investment, and the security for investors that only the support of national government can help us provide. There are billions in pension and insurance funds, in green municipal bonds, in climate change focused financing that can be mobilised to help cities like Bristol, Barcelona and Los Angeles reach the targets we know we much reach if we are to have a just transition to a sustainable future.

The Mayor has previously said that the cost of decarbonising Bristol's housing, transport, economy, commerce and industry, the cost of Bristol reaching net zero by 2030 is over £9 billion. (7)

That is less than a single year of fossil fuel subsidies. The time has come for cities like Bristol to call for a full transition of government subsidies away from dirty energy, and into a clean future.

The Fossil Fuel Non Proliferation Treaty has been, and is being, signed by a growing number of cities, including Barcelona and Los Angeles, who recognise that every penny spent on fossil fuel subsidies is not only money lost to tackling climate change but, worse still, is money spent making the goal of tackling climate change that much harder to achieve.

The Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty provides a vehicle to spur the international cooperation needed, drawing on lessons from global efforts to stop the spread of nuclear weapons and ban asbestos, ozone-depleting chemicals, landmines and other threats to humanity. It will advance action under three pillars:

Pillar 1: Non-Proliferation - Don't Add to the Problem

An immediate end to the expansion into new reserves of coal, oil and natural gas would limit the globe's production of carbon emissions (which if left alone would create more than twice over the limit set by the United Nations and other organizations).

Pillar 2: Global Disarmament - Get Rid of the Existing Threat

Since existing oil and gas fields and coal mines contain enough carbon on their own, phasing out those current stockpiles is a much-needed step to keep the world under the Paris Agreement's temperature limits.

Pillar 3: Peaceful Transition - Accelerate an Equitable Transition

Every worker, community, and country must be taken into the deepest consideration on the way to fast-tracking all solutions. Only a proactive plan to enable economic diversification, implement renewable energy and other reliable, cost-effective low-carbon solutions will be able to meet the needs of a sustainable future.

CS08

Members Forum statement from Councillor Christine Townsend

Subject: Supporting South Bristol SMEs

Whitehouse Lane Autos is a successful family run SME that specialises in providing private hire taxis with the MoT and inspection services required by the council, it has regular customers in south Bristol that the family and their employees have nurtured relationships with over many years.

The current site on Whitehouse Lane is part of the development proposals in and around the Bedminster Green and Whitehouse Lane in Southville ward. The Mayor made a visit to the site in August 2021 gaining PR locally and presenting the proposals in only positive terms, there was no visit however to Whitehouse Lane Autos or mention that this family run business that is under threat of closure. Forced closure as a result of site redevelopment will rob south Bristol of a much used and successful motor vehicle service and is causing great anxiety, stress and mental anguish for the family and the people they employ. There is understanding that relocation is required but time is running out to ensure this business can continue, a suitable relocation site must be found.

The Bristol City Council Economic Development Team claims to provide support for businesses in the city – to date this department's support has amounted to sending one email containing a link to some inappropriately sized sites available for rent in areas of the city other than south Bristol, where the business has built its customer base.

I hope the Mayor will commit to support this local SME that wishes to invest in workforce training in preparation for the switch to electric powered vehicles and take a personal interest in the work of his Economic Development Team and the support provided by it. The Mayor's mantras of 'leaving no one behind' and 'building back better' cannot be achieved if much needed developments within the city destroy viable family businesses and result in the people they employ losing their jobs.

This is a test case for this new administration as it enters into what will be a period of much change, re-development and associated upheaval in south Bristol.