

Statement on the Arena and impact on residents in Totterdown

Further to the report to Cabinet in connection with the Arena project, I wish to highlight areas of concern to the residents of Totterdown.

The report notes that there may be impacts in terms of congestion and car parking on nearby communities. It does this in the context of equalities issues – but there is real concern in Totterdown that this will be felt by all residents within walking distance.

The mention of this risk appears to be a tacit admission that people will seek to drive to the Arena, irrespective of the lack of car parking provided. Indeed, even where venues have car parks, many people drive to nearby areas hoping to save on car-parking charges and avoid long traffic queues when leaving: and this needs to be recognised in the planning process.

The report omits to mention if measures to encourage use of alternative transport options – such as the provision of park and ride facilities, or active promotion of rail links – will form part of the contract of the Arena operator. Of course, this level of detail may be outside the scope of this report, but it is details like this that the residents Totterdown are most interested in, and that could help maintain the goodwill towards a project that retains broad support even whilst provoking concern.

Over and above encouraging more sustainable travel arrangements, there needs to be a recognition that some people will still seek to drive to venue and park in nearby residential streets. This can't be shrugged off on the basis that it'd be no different to, say, living next to a football stadium. If you buy a house near a football stadium, you can probably expect disruption to local traffic and parking every second weekend: the Arena will bring nightly and weekend traffic, all year round.

Unlike the analogy of a football stadium, dealing with these issues has never been part of the deal for residents of Totterdown. This isn't just an issue of convenience for those wishing to park their cars near their houses – it's about the amenity of the area to all residents. Any contract to operate the arena will need to ensure that funds are available to put in place measures to prevent residential streets being turned into free car-parks.

In addition to providing opportunities to encourage more sustainable transport options and discouraging abuse of neighbouring residential streets, the advent of the Arena also provides an opportunity to completely remodel the road system around Temple Meads, and the Arena Island area.

The report before cabinet makes reference to £5m being available for this. One change that residents of Totterdown (and, indeed, other parts of South Bristol) would welcome would be the ability to turn from the northbound carriageway of Wells Road into Bath Road: reducing congestion on the Bath Bridge roundabout.

We need joined up thinking on the transport infrastructure issues surrounding the Arena if we truly want to gain the benefits from this addition to our cultural infrastructure. Failure to tackle these issues will cause the Arena to reduce its catchment area to those with the easiest of transport options – and therefore risk reducing the profitability and viability of the venue.