

## Public meeting and discussion with Ben Howlett MP

Earlier this summer Bath and District United Nations Association and Bath Stop War Coalition\* held three discussions on **Rethinking Security**.

We looked at the meaning of security for us, for society and for our planet, and how it can be increased, both here in the UK and globally. Our last session focused on what we can do - here and now - to challenge conventional, weapons-based definitions of security. Engaging the local MP in a principled discussion was a high priority.

Ben Howlett MP accepted our invitation to hear from us what emerged from our discussions and address us on the question of what makes us and others safe.

That meeting, entitled Rethinking Security, took place at 7:30 pm on Wednesday 28th and widely advertised through networks including local political parties, to attract a wide audience.

The programme was:

Welcome from the Chair (Diana Page)

Introduction and summary of the earlier discussions (Diana Francis)

Two short videos: a 3-minute talk by a former CIA Agent Amaryllis Fox called "Everybody Believes They're The Good Guy" and an extract from Celia McKeon's TED talk "Re-imagining Security" (shown at the first group discussion)

Key ideas from the sessions presented by four participants (Jane Stephenson, Cate Mack, Tim Williamson and Rosemary Todd)

Response from Ben Howlett MP

Open discussion

Closing remarks from the Chair (c 9.15)

Over sixty people came, young and old from a variety of backgrounds, and all listened attentively.

The four participants in the Bath Rethinking Security sessions earlier in the year were very well received and the content and manner of their presentations did a lot to make this a different kind of event, with their various perspectives, setting the open tone that was reflected in the nature of Ben Howlett's response and the courtesy of the discussion that followed.

By the time the meeting ended, a few minutes late, the discussion had lasted for fifty minutes, so all felt that it had been substantial and fair. The buzz at the end was very positive and many, including Ben who was already running behind, stayed on to talk, some for half an hour.

Ben left with the promise to put the questions asked by the four Rethinking Security presenters on his website and to let us have his considered responses.

***Comment from the organising group:***

‘The discussion was largely focussed on challenging military approaches to security and did not explore the wider hinterland, but that was to be expected, given current government policy and action. What was important was that a genuine dialogue had taken place and a voice given to those whose voices are not often heard. Some new perspectives were powerfully and kindly introduced and taken seriously.

With this encouragement we have plenty to build on, so our next step will be to review progress and consider what comes next.’

**The four presenters’ questions:**

1. Jane Stephenson

How can Government take a lead in widening the national security discussion to encompass wider concerns about what security means to them?

2. Cate Mack

How can you see your role in government in setting a course that rethinks the political and economic choices that support peace and security within our communities?

3. Tim Williamson

To what extent can Conservative MPs represent those constituents, those of us who didn’t vote for them?

4. Rosemary Todd

What is the UK’s foreign policy? Is security is primary aim?

Are we pulling our weight in offering safety to refugees?

What influence do you feel you can have on government to build security at home and abroad?

Diana Francis 1.10.16