

Interim Survey of Neighbourhood Activities Designed to Improve Walkability in Bristol

This survey has been commissioned by the Bristol Walking Alliance. This is a first draft and may well include inaccuracies. There may also be examples of community action that have been left out. **If you don't tell us, how would we know?** In either case, please contact benbarker@blueyonder.co.uk.

1.1 What is 'Walkability' and why does it matter? Pedestrians (including wheelchair users) in an urban setting are generally expected to use pavements or footways. They are recommended to cross roads at designated and signposted places. Where this infrastructure is easy, pleasant and safe, we may say that there is a high level of 'walkability'. Where pavements and crossings are difficult, unpleasant and dangerous we may speak of a low level of 'walkability': a hostile rather than a friendly environment. Of course, a given pavement may be easily walkable by the young, fit and nimble, but be difficult for older, less fit and mobile members of the community. A cyclist on the pavement can transform it from 'walkable' to a source of anxiety for many. An area may be walkable by day, but much less so by night. Sometimes, some people find some pavements unwalkable. They either jump into a car or stay at home.

1.2 What About Bristol City Council? BCC lists 15 Bristol Transport Strategy Objectives. This includes:

5. Walking to be safe, pleasant, accessible and the first choice for local journeys and combined with public transport for longer journeys.
7. More people making sustainable and healthy transport choices by improving engagement with communities, schools and businesses.
10. A city centre that is accessible by active and sustainable transport and attractive to live, work and visit, enhancing its status as the foremost shopping and cultural centre in the South West.
12. Supported and enhanced local centres and high streets, recognising that they provide key services and facilities, and can also be transport corridors and destination points for visitors.

13. Reduced impact of motorised traffic on local centres creating better public spaces that are more accessible by walking, cycling and reliable public transport.

14. Key facilities and services increasingly accessible to all citizens without the need to rely on a car.

15. Safer places to live by working with citizens to design and deliver measures to improve movement and liveability in our neighbourhoods.

But, the proof of puddings.....

1.3 Bristol Labour Party Manifesto. At the last election for Mayor and Councillors, this manifesto included a promise to **prioritise the pedestrian** and

- Ensure all pavements are well-maintained and safe. This will include joint working between the Police and civil enforcement teams to combat dropped kerb and pavement parking;
- Create a safe, sustainable and attractive environment by using modern street lighting solutions throughout the city;
- Install Pedestrian Countdown on city centre traffic lights to replace puffin crossings at key destinations such as the BRI.

Should BWA be asking for a report on progress?

1.4 Health professionals assure us that regular and frequent walking is good for both mental and physical well-being. It does not create air pollution. It might be considered a basic right of everyone to move freely about their community and city, yet there are many who find the walking environment so unattractive that they tend to stay at home, thus being in danger of social isolation and loneliness. This last issue impacts strongly on older and disabled people and on children, but is not restricted to them.

2.1 Organised Walking Groups. There are a great many of these companionable groups across the city and they undoubtedly encourage people to walk, but, in general, they take the built environment at face value and do not seek to change it, apart, perhaps, from reporting street obstacles.

Although they are very valuable, this report does not list these many excellent opportunities.

3.1 Neighbourhood Maps. Many community organisations have produced maps showing routes to green spaces, linking historic sites etc and presenting the neighbourhood in a positive way. Sometimes the maps present local festivals such as arts trails. These undoubtedly encourage the exploration of particular localities, but again they tend to take the current state of streets, i.e. their walkability, as an unchanging given. This report makes no effort to list these maps, but respects their contribution.

4.1 Toilet Maps. This is a special case of maps. Access to a toilet is always useful and for some it is vital. It is generally accepted that some people will be very unwilling to leave their home unless they can be guaranteed easy access to a toilet. This is a hidden disability which has become more significant with the recent closure of public toilets across the city, although, it's worth recalling that many neighbourhoods have always been badly served for public toilets, or not served at all.

4.2 For many years, people have been using toilets in community centres, pubs, cafes and large stores. The more confident user will not think it necessary to make a purchase, at least on that day, but less confident people may prefer to stay at home or feel obliged to buy something that they don't really want. In 2009 Greater Bedminster published its first Toilet Map. This gave 'permission to pee' in c20 venues, mainly in the Bedminster shopping area. Three editions of the map have been published with the most recent appearing in 2017. A fourth version is in preparation.

4.3 In 2017 the **Greater Brislington Over 50s Project** created its own toilet map which was funded by Bristol Ageing Better. This shows 13 sites in commercial premises. The map is on-line, but I have not yet seen a printed version.

4.4 I am not aware of any other neighbourhood toilet map either in existence or in preparation. Please let me know of any other toilet maps in Bristol.

4.5 Bristol City Council has said that they will encourage commercial organisations and public buildings to step forward to make good the loss of public toilets. They have also talked about publishing neighbourhood toilet maps similar to those of Greater Bedminster and Greater Brislington. These maps have yet to emerge. Meanwhile,.....

5. Networking Between Communities

5.1 Bristol Walking Alliance. This is an alliance of general walking groups; community organisations and disability groups. Following the demise of Neighbourhood Partnerships, community representation is less than might be expected. Community and neighbourhood organisations interested in walkability are urged to join BWA or one of its constituent groups.

5.2 BWC Initiative. On 19 June 2018, Bristol Waste Company convened the first meeting of the Bristol Clean Streets Forum. Although this was mainly concerned with litter and recycling, it also touched on other street issues such as cars on pavements and overhanging hedges. This forum has the potential to promote walkability by linking together people from many communities and public agencies concerned with the street scene

6. Walkability in Greater Bedminster/BS3.

6.1 Early Projects. Southville Community Development Association (now BS3 Community Development) initiated several walkability projects as early as the 1990s. These included a 'benches project' involving several public seats across the area; the Good Garden Awards (from 2002) where attractive gardens were seen as an encouragement to walk rather than pop into a car for short journeys and 'Patchwork'. The Patchwork Group of local residents identified, cleared and tended previously abandoned small patches of land, turning them from fly-tipping site into community garden. Several other community groups have adopted patches in their area. These activities were championed and supported by the Neighbourhood Partnership (Greater Bedminster Community Partnership: GBCP) until its abolition in 2017. They continue as part of the coalition of organisations and projects now known as **Action**

Greater Bedminster. See bloomingbedminster.org.uk for info about various gardening and planting projects.

GBCP also published a 'Great Street Check List' encouraging residents to audit their own street as a social space rather than just a storage area for cars and bins. This is available upon request.

6.2 Bedminster Business Improvement District has used some of its funds and influence to make the retail streets more inviting by adding planters, art work and other improvements. Better to walk to your local shops than drive to a distant supermarket.

6.3 The period of the Neighbourhood Partnership with funding for highway innovations led to improvements including zebra crossings, buildouts and island designed to improve walkability. Other NPs across the city were also able to do this. In theory Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) could, at least, partially fill this gap, but this is, at best, currently uncertain.

6.4 In 2010 part of the area (Southville) was one of two districts in Bristol to pilot 20mph. By 2012, the 20mph area was significantly extended across the city. Although there are still enforcement issues, even slight reductions in vehicle speed contribute to greater walkability.

6.5 More recently, the northern part of BS3 has become a Residents' Parking Zone. Reduced traffic in this area has enhanced its walkability, but much parking (including on pavements) has been diverted to the non-RPZ area where walkability has become worse. The relative success of Bristol City football and rugby teams has increased crowd sizes thus contributing to street clutter and pressure on parking. Everyone seems to agree that 'something needs to be done' to protect the walkability of the area around the stadium, but what?

6.6 Current and proposed Projects. In 2015 GBCP secured funding (£40K plus additional funding from BCC) from the Green Capital for **Let's Walk Bedminster**. The general aim of this project was to enhance walkability in BS3. This was done via events, propaganda, art work etc. It cut across all generations. Basically, it sought to raise public awareness and reduce street

clutter. The general feeling is that, up to a point, it worked and that the streets were clearer than before.

6.7 However, the problems of clutter and obstruction were far from solved. The message that footways should be kept clear needs constant reinforcement.

6.8 This issue was picked up again in 2018 and linked to Bristol's aspiration to be recognised by the World Health Organisation as an **Age Friendly City**. If BS3 was to be an Age Friendly Neighbourhood, everyone should be able to move freely, easily and safely around its streets. The current unfunded project has several sections, some of which are already underway, whilst others are in preparation.

6.9 Two local monthly magazines, South Bristol Voice and The Pigeon, along with social media are good ways of contacting local people. Each month, both magazines have included articles and letters promoting the on-going **Let's Walk Bedminster** project in order to raise awareness and mobilise volunteers. This propaganda effort will continue indefinitely.

6.10 In March 2018 we had our first '**Clutter Patrol**'. These are monthly walks, initially along sections of our retail streets, to identify waste bins, A-frames and other impediments to users of the footway and to encourage people to visit our shops. The police, BCC officers, Bristol Waste Company and community members are involved along with representatives of the Bedminster Business Improvement District and the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB). At least one city councillor has joined on most occasions. Problems are identified and, in some case, sorted.

6.11 In June 2018 we resurrected our '**BS3 Street Warden**' scheme. The original version collapsed a few years ago. It was dependent on a BCC officer who was moved. The new scheme is based in a local organisation (BS3 Community). We now have 19 residents (our initial target is 40) who have agreed to report footway obstructions to appropriate authorities. We are building good links to these authorities and our hope is that by raising awareness we reduce the need for BCC, Bristol Waste etc to intervene. Prevention is better than cure!!

6.12 Our feeling is that most obstructions are the result of thoughtlessness rather than malice. Why put away your bin if you've got other things on your mind? Who knew that hedges could grow so quickly and block the pavement? However, a friendly reminder, or even a letter from BCC, may not always be enough. In some cases there may really be no suitable place to store recycling bins or a resident may be too ill to look after their hedge. We are trying to find ways of dealing with this and are currently involved with BCC, Bristol Waste Co and others about the best way forward.

6.13 Cars parked on pavements are a frequent problem. In Bristol the rules on this are very unclear and there seems to be no public agency able to offer a solution. A high level of walkability will never be achieved until there is the political will to tackle this issue.

6.14 UWE Project. Three Architecture and Planning students worked with local people as part of their final year exams. In a five week project they looked at routes to six destinations in BS3 analysing both 'good' and 'bad' features of walkability. Using data from Transport for London, they set out a simple process for measuring the walkability of streets. The report can be seen at <https://bs3community.org.uk/about/projects-partnership-2/>.

6.15 Over the next six months we hope to establish an '**Access Advisory Panel**'. This will be composed of local residents with a particular expertise. This might arise from their experience as a wheelchair user, being of poor eye-sight, etc. This expertise will be available to the Let's Walk Bedminster project as well as public agencies and local businesses.

6.16 A second aspiration for the future is our '**Friendly Shop Award**'. As well as a concern to keep pavements clear, we are also interested in making as many shops and businesses in BS3 as accessible to everyone as possible. We are talking to RNIB, Guidedogs, Dementia Action, the Deaf Centre and Bristol Disability Equality Forum about how to do this in a way which is supportive of local businesses and doesn't cost much. This project is very much a work in early progress, but, if we can crack it, it may serve as a pilot for other areas.

6.17 Action Greater Bedminster is currently developing a **Community Plan for BS3**. No doubt, the aspiration to make an all age-friendly and walkable neighbourhood will be included.

7. Walkability in other parts of Bristol.

7.1 Relatively little information has been sent to me. The impression that I get is that community led activity on walkability is very patchy, often random and not part of any long-term and coherent plan. Or, perhaps, there's lots going on, but nobody is prepared to share. If you don't blow your own trumpet, who will? More information gladly received.

7.2 Bishopston and St Andrews Traffic and Parking Group. This is a new group particularly concerned about traffic and pavement safety. Many of these issues also affect walkability – such as pavement parking, blocked dropped kerbs, double yellow and corner parking, speeding and dangerous driving as well as pavement obstructions. They have been actively lobbying BCC for a solution to these issues for nearly 2 years, this has become worse due to neighbouring RPZ schemes. They publish a regular newsletter and are on Facebook. They attend council meetings and make statements to Full Council regularly and have a petition on the council website.

7.3 Hengrove Park. A local care worker is exploring routes for people in wheelchairs. Routes through local green spaces are blocked for wheelchairs and difficult for prams by entrances designed to exclude motorcycles. There also seems to be few dropped kerbs in that general area. Outrageous!?

7.4 St George Community Network. This is the successor organisation for the St George Neighbourhood Partnership. There is currently an active air quality campaign focused on schools. Some planting is organised by St George in Bloom to improve the street scene and the St George Strollers (a walking group associated with the Friends of Troopers Hill) report walkability issues that they encounter to BCC etc.

Currently, there is a local debate about a public toilet situated in St George Park, but maintained by the BCC Highways, and therefore now closed. (There may be other examples of this, eg the public toilet in Greville Smyth Park). To date, no community toilets have been identified (possibly one pub on the main road may join the scheme) and this affects some people's ability/willingness to walk around. The former Neighbourhood Partnership produced an excellent

map of local green spaces and the routes connecting them, but this has not resulted in any ongoing, organised work about walkability.

7.5 Horfield. An all-weather path was recently installed on Horfield Common using funds raised locally by Friends of Horfield Common.

7.6 Bishopston, Cotham and Redland Street Scene Group (BCR Street Scene) and **Sustainable Bishopston** used a sustainable transport grant to install benches on the Gloucester Road and surrounding hills.

7.7 Bishopston-Southmead. Walk Your Way to Health in conjunction with North Bristol NHS have developed maps to encourage walking by staff and patients to Southmead Hospital, together with a keep-fit set of circuits based around Horfield Common. (info@bcrcp.org.uk).

7.8 The BCR Street Scene Group have a network of volunteers who are encouraged to report obstructions caused by hedges to BCC, engage with residents, particularly 2nd year students when they come to live in the community to take their bins back into their property. BCR Street Scene Group has had regular 'action days' when vegetation that encroaches over pavements is cut back.

8. Conclusions? Over to you on this one, dear reader. Can you sum everything up in a few sentences? If so, send your thoughts to me, along with any additional information.

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Thanks you to all those who sent in information and made comments. Please send more, so that the next version of this summary can be more comprehensive.