

Progress Report on the Bedminster Friendly Shops Project and Let's Walk Bedminster (January to May 2019)

Bedminster Friendly Shops Project and **Let's Walk Bedminster** are linked projects within Bristol, BS3. They are connected to city-wide initiatives such as the Bristol Walking Alliance and the efforts to make Bristol an Age-Friendly City. There has also been dialogue with BCC's Active Transport Team which is currently developing the city's first Walking Network, although this is unlikely to become a firm commitment until at least 2020.

Let's Walk Bedminster began in 2015 with funding from Bristol's Green City to the Greater Bedminster Community Partnership and continues under GBCP's successor organisation, Action Greater Bedminster. It aims to make the neighbourhood 'walkable', ie for the footways and wider environment to be **Safe, Easy and Pleasant for Everyone**.

The project is keenly aware that some sections of the population find the streets to be, at best 'difficult' and, at worst, dangerous. This is not a problem limited to Bristol and national bodies such as Guide Dogs and Living Streets are campaigning at the parliamentary level.

Those disadvantaged by a poor street environment include people with small children and/or pushing a buggy and people with mobility, balance and sight impairment. Not infrequently, street clutter (cars on pavements, overhanging vegetation, uncared for recycling bins, abandoned furniture, dog's droppings and general litter) forces people into the roadway; discourages them from leaving home or encourages them to make even short journeys by car.

Bedminster Friendly Shops Project is aimed at local businesses, especially within the Bedminster Business Improvement District (BBID), to encourage and help them become more accessible both as individual premises and in terms of the streets that link them.

This report focuses upon actions taken from January to early May 2019.

During this period the campaign took two main forms

A.Promotion of the idea of ‘walkability’ via local monthly journals (specifically The Pigeon and South Bristol Voice) and social media.

B.Street level campaigns.

A.Promotion of the idea of ‘walkability’ via local monthly journals (specifically The Pigeon and South Bristol Voice) and social media.

The aim is to raise awareness of problems caused by street clutter and to establish that obstructing the footway is socially unacceptable.

Press releases were sent to both journals during this period. Naturally, not all were published, but several were.

The aim of this campaign was to promote discussion and raise public awareness about ‘walkability’ and how they might help. It is difficult to measure the impact of particular articles. The assumption has been, say, ‘10,000 of each magazines distributed per month; 1000 people read about walkability; 100 are prompted to cut their hedge, take in their recycling bins etc., 1 might offer to become a BS3 Street Warden’ But, who knows?

On the other hand, writing a press release or letter to the editor is fairly straight forward and can be undertaken in a warm room with a hot drink, ie at low cost.

January: two page article in The Pigeon entitled ‘A Bedminster Walking Network’ (p28-29).

February: An article in SB Voice entitled ‘BS3 is getting cleaner thanks to wardens on the lookout’ (p11).

May: Letter in The Pigeon about air pollution, schools and the link to walkability (p19). Also, the local councillors picked up some references to walkability (p38-39). Getting support from councillors is useful. Walkability is not often seen as important or ‘political’, but it requires resources and political will, just like any other BCC matter.

All editions also had letters, articles and references picking up walkability related issues such as children walking to school, litter picking, cars parked on pavements, High Street investment and air pollution. They came from a range of sources outside our projects, but indicated a widespread concern about walkability and related issues.

I think that some Street Wardens will have used social media to raise walkability issues across the neighbourhood. However, I do not know the extent of this. Doing more would be useful.

Of course, some people will also have talked to neighbours and friends in the old fashioned way.

B. Street Level Campaigns.

This took several forms.

1. Action by the BS3 Street Wardens to report street issues to the BCC Enforcement Team. Currently, there are 34 people on the Street Warden circulation list. All are volunteers. More welcomed. If we don't tell them, how will they know?

2. Action by the BCC Enforcement Team. The team is stretched very thinly across the city and laws related to litter and other clutter are often vague, eg a plastic bag on the pavement is clearly litter. A wheelie bin full of plastic bags in the middle of the footway is, so I'm told, not litter.

We know that the team has been active on East Street and possibly North Street, but we have no details. They appear to be becoming more proactive than in the past. Good!

Ben met with enforcement Officer Tim Bird in April to review some of the efforts of the Bedminster Business Improvement District to enhance the street scene with pocket parks. This dialogue will continue.

3. Delivery of c350-400 letters to businesses in the Bedminster BID. This was funded via BS3 Community and also supported by Action Greater Bedminster,

Bedminster BID, Bristol Dementia Action Alliance (BDAA), Guide Dogs and RNIB. Letter attached.

Delivery was undertaken by supporting groups and including BS3 Street Wardens.

The letter was a follow-up to one delivered in autumn 2018 which offered support from BDAA to businesses that wished to better respond to customers with dementia. The second letter repeated this offer and added a similar offer from Guide Dogs and RNIB. The letter also urged businesses to ensure that the pavement outside their premises was free from obstructions. Some are already very good at this.

It is difficult to measure any success from this exercise. Some letters will not have reached the appropriate manager. Others will have done so, but found him/her unresponsive. Yet others letters will have caused the manager to consider and implement improvements to the premises and/or the nearby footway, but not to contact either the Bedminster BID or the Bedminster Friendly Shops Project. Probably, all these things happened.

People delivering the letters reported that many shop workers were very supportive and wished to be welcoming to all customers. Difficulties included shortage of cash for improvements and uncertainty about their relationship with BCC which was seen as 'owning' the pavements.

We need to have further discussions with BCC and Bedminster Business BID around responsibility and collaboration, if we are to make significant progress.

An 'Information Day' was held in ASDA on January 25 and led by RNIB. A second one will be on May 25 led by the Bristol Dementia Alliance.

4. Links with University of the West of England (UWE) on mobility access to businesses.

So far, only two businesses have signed up to UWE's offer to design access ramps to fit particular shops. Ramps are being designed and will appear shortly.

5.Delivery of 2500 Window Bills with letter to ‘key’ residential streets across BS3.

Letters initially went to the ‘key routes’ that have been provisionally identified to fit with BCC’s city-wide Walking Network. See attached map. This was completed before the end of March and additional streets were added. Nearly all the letters have now been distributed thanks to help from the BS3 Street Warden group.

Apart from rehearsing the usual points about cluttered streets making it difficult for some people to move safely, easily and pleasantly, the letter asked residents to display a window bill. A few people did so, but not many.

Nevertheless, the impression of some Street Wardens is that, following distribution, a few more bins seemed to be put away and a few more hedges were being cut. Assuming that this signifies a real response rather than wishful thinking on behalf of Street Wardens, how long will this last?

This exercise was funded by Bristol Waste Company: £139 for printing and supported by Action Greater Bedminster, BS3 Community, Bristol Dementia Action Alliance, Guide Dogs and RNIB.

6.Clutter Patrols. Only one Clutter Patrols were undertaken in this period.

On April 2 a small group of BS3 Street Wardens walked from Aldi to the Hen&Chicken on North Street and back on the other side. They were accompanied by Ed Troughton from Bristol Waste Company. Obstructions such as A-boards were noted and positive and friendly conversations took place with shop staff. A couple of the more significant issues were reported to the BCC Enforcement Team. There was a general feeling that the footpath on both sides of the street was much more walkable than a year ago. But, not yet perfect! Next one in May?

7.Bedminster Access Group (BAG)

This is intended as an advisory group composed of people with particular perspectives on BS3 footways arising from their own experiences of mobility and sight impairment and other factors such as pushing a buggy. Recruitment

has been slow and now stands at 3. We probably need at least 10 in order to get a good spread of experience.

As well as giving general advice to the projects, we have considered an annual and well publicised award to, say, the top 20 most accessible businesses in BS3. BAG would act as the award judges. Depending on the development of BAG, this could be launched in autumn 2019 or spring 2020.

BAG members might also pinpoint particularly poor performance, so that we can offer helpful advice in a more focused way.

8.Seating, Planting, Art Work. Various agencies including the Bedminster BID, Upfest, Good Garden Awards and Bedminster Patchwork Group are seeking to make local streets more interesting and attractive to walkers. Some parts of BS3 are well provided with seats, but it would be useful to identify areas that are poorly served so that further seating might be sought.

An important issue relating to seating and plant boxes is to ensure that they do not obstruct footways or offer trip hazards. Francesca from Guide Dogs has suggested a review of these and the application of easily seen colour strips to, for example, flower boxes. We need to seek advice on this.

9.Access to Toilets. Access to a toilet is useful for anyone who ventures out of their house and for many, especially older people, it is fundamental. National research has shown that fear of not finding a toilet is one cause of social isolation. The closure of public toilets in Bristol has highlighted this issue, although BS3 has never been very well served.

Funding has been secured from Bristol Health Partners to up-date, design and print the fourth Bedminster Toilet Map. This will replace the earlier version that came out in 2017. The process of contacting premises has begun and it is hoped to publish the map in June.

C.What about the future?

Although the raising of public awareness seems to have reduced street clutter, there is still a long way to go. It's also the case that there is a high turnover of people coming and going across the neighbourhood. This suggests a never ending need to encourage, and perhaps enforce, good behaviour.

In May, it is expected that Bristol Ageing Better will launch its Age-Friendly Neighbourhood initiative. Clearly, the reduction of street clutter, pleasanter walking conditions and access to toilets are important contributions to Age-Friendliness in any neighbourhood.

1. BS3 Street Wardens will continue with reporting to BCC's Enforcement Team.

2. Activities including Clutter Patrols, articles and letters in the magazines and occasional letters to businesses and residents will also continue. It would be good if we could share these tasks more widely.

3. We need to build up the Bedminster Access Group (BAG) and increase BS3 Street Warden numbers.

4. In a few places, groups of residents have started to talk to their neighbours about improving particular streets. This is very much at an early stage, but needs to be supported and encouraged.

5. Review seating and plant boxes to ensure that they are not obstructions, trip hazards and are easily identified by people with sight impairment.

6. Bristol Waste Company has established a city-wide Clean Streets Forum. This is still mostly talk, but, hopefully, it will move to practical measures. We will maintain links.

7. A postcard sized notice is in production. BS3 Street Wardens will have a stock of these to post through doors where, for example, there are bins permanently on the pavement, hedges need cutting etc.

8. Research, design, print and distribute the fourth edition of the Bedminster Toilet Map, hopefully, by June.

Other ideas and suggestions welcomed. Ben Barker, May 2019.

benbarker@blueyonder.co.uk