

Comments by Bristol Walking Alliance on making East Street, Bedminster more walkable.



Bristol Walking Alliance (BWA) welcomes the opportunity to engage with Bedminster BID's East Street vision. The street in its current format has some considerable merits for people on foot and using mobility aids such as mobility scooters. However, there is room for improvement and our comments and suggestions are provided below.

Improvements for walking

Retaining what is good: East Street in its current configuration has considerable merits for people on foot that should not be lost. In a recent focus group that one of our members conducted with people who were visually impaired, some of them used East Street as an example of the best walking street in Bristol. The thing they appreciated was the ability to walk all the way from Cannon Street to Asda on Bedminster Parade without have to worry about crossing a single side road. Although this may not technically the case, that was their perception and walked experience - they felt confident that they had continuous priority and did not have to worry about turning vehicles. This is an asset that must not be lost

Night-time: East Street is perceived to require improvements if it is to feel welcoming to people on foot in the evenings. Although we are not aware of any of our members having personally experienced any problems, some avoid it as it can be intimidating. There is frequently lots of shouting and little obvious activity other than drinking. More diversity of evening activity would help to attract more footfall that would make it feel safe. The proposal of a cinema that has been mooted for St Catherine's Place would be an example of that which would be welcomed.

Street design: Perhaps the biggest opportunity in East Street is to redesign it so that the whole width of the street could be much more open to use by pedestrians and other business activity, without losing safe clutter-free strips each side adjacent to the shop fronts. The current design - different surfaces (tarmac roadway and narrow pavements) and frequent bollards - reinforces the feel of a pavement separate from the road. The red paving looks a bit tired. The roadspace for vehicles is too wide.

We propose Frodsham Street in Chester as an example of what might be possible:

<https://www.google.com/maps/@53.1914613,-2.8880958,3a,75y,346.56h,68.65t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1sBJP2zTvs0VwLtO5Mnf1F3g!2e0!7i13312!8i6656>

Frodsham Street redesign has been used for more than two years now and several features could be used to enhance East Street:

- Clutter free strips, with tactile guidance for people who are visually impaired in front of the shops on both sides
- Clutter free means that these zones are completely clear of everything including A-boards, fruit and veg stalls, street signs, bins, street lights, bike parking, post boxes, BT boxes, etc
- All of these things where required are placed the other side of the tactile guidance strips (note that unfortunately in recent months, years after implementation the original design guidance has been forgotten by some and a bin has recently appeared in the clutter free zone)

- The central section aims to not look like a road so that pedestrians take priority everywhere
- In Frodsham Street vehicle access is one way, mainly bus and delivery with restricted times - cars can come but it does not really go anywhere useful for them; see below for BWA's recommendations for vehicular access
- No parking allowed
- Uses 'artwork' on big wooden posts to guide where vehicles can/cannot go, but keeps these looking a bit random so that it does not look or feel like a road
- The very limited signage (eg no loading 10h30am to 4pm and no parking) is limited to the street entrance and on some of the art 'totems' – the street culture is more guided by strong design rather signage
- Entrances at each end are as narrow as possible while still allowing a bus to enter or leave and are created using seating which makes drivers very nervous on entering and means it is almost impossible to enter at more than 10mph which is typically the maximum speed on the street
- It seems to work at different times of day (commuting times, shopping times and evening times)
- Cycle access is two way, but again pedestrians have priority and dominate

BWA suggests that the bollards are all removed. They reinforce the sense that there is a part of the street where pedestrians should not go and restrict movement. They serve only to restrict the movement of private cars and that function would become redundant if these were banned at all times (see below).

There needs to be room for spilling out from shop premises.

Towards the top of the street, there are some seats that face the shop. If the streetscape was more welcoming the seats would naturally face into the street.

Gateway: Changes at the Cannon Street end could be used to ensure a welcoming gateway. The width for motor vehicles entering at the gateway should be narrowed. The creation of a major gateway into East Street is possible There is lots of redundant carriageway space between Hunters and HSBC that could be brought into the public realm for seating, green infrastructure and art work: https://www.google.com/maps/@51.4409028,-2.6008015,3a,75y,140.25h,67.53t/data=!3m7!1e1!3m5!1sRasfeUeux6fVHiYzp8mbyw!2e0!6s%2F%2Fgeo3.ggpht.com%2Fcbk%3Fpanoid%3DRasfeUeux6fVHiYzp8mbyw%26output%3Dthumbnail%26cb_client%3Dmaps_sv.tactile.gps%26thumb%3D2%26w%3D203%26h%3D100%26yaw%3D125.26516%26pitch%3D0%26thumbfov%3D100!7i16384!8i8192

Greening: BWA would welcome other ways of 'greening' the street, for instance hanging baskets and pocket parks. However, we recognise that this needs to be done in a way that will be maintained, perhaps by involving community groups, local businesses and corporate sponsorship from the bigger names along the street.

Access by other transport modes

Bus access: There is a downside to allowing bus access to East Street. The street is not very wide, and keeping a central aisle free for buses risks leaving the impression of a road with pavements either side, rather than the pedestrian street that it is intended to be. Allowing buses in may make enforcement of access restrictions for other vehicles more difficult.

However, we recognise that the current north-bound bus access along East Street works well, and the East Street stop is a popular start and end point for many walking trips on the street. It also helps to maintain a small level of footfall in the evening. There are suggestions in plans for Bedminster Green that this stop will be lost to one on Dalby Avenue. It should be noted that the southbound stop there is far less used than the northbound stop in East Street as people choose to alight on Bedminster Parade or West Street instead. This is an indication that rerouting buses would not be popular with pedestrians who use the bus, or East Street traders.

Cycles: BWA feels that two-way cycle access up and down East Street (and cross street using the Malago Greenway) should be retained, but we would not advocate for this to be any more formalised than it is. This street is about cycle permeability and not a high speed route. The whole look, feel and design of the street should be focused on pedestrians using the whole space, with bikes, bus and delivery having access where required, but not priority.

Motor vehicles other than buses: BWA proposes that access by vehicles other than buses is more restricted.

- Delivery times should be restricted, perhaps in line with the proposal for Old City – Frodsham Street bans deliveries from 10am to 4h30pm
- We suggest that taxi, blue badge and other private car access is banned at all times. In recent years they have been allowed in the evenings with the aim of making the street feel safer. It does not work. Cars speeding though when it is less busy makes it feel less safe for pedestrians and not more safe. The only thing that will make it feel safe for pedestrians in the evening is more pedestrians.
- Taxi drop off/pick up and blue badge parking should be better catered for via the access points at the various side roads
- No parking should be allowed
- Enforcement of access restrictions is important – delivery vehicles, taxis, mini-cabs, blue badge cars, other cars. It is currently weak and the rules are confusing, and the restrictions are widely abused. If there are vehicles frequently passing along and others parked in the street, it changes the whole feel of the space. Without such changes, the feel of the street will not change, and any improvements will be for nothing.

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