

Bristol Walking Alliance response to Bristol City Centre Retail and Leisure Study



Bristol Walking Alliance has been asked by the Bristol City Council City Centre Development Team to engage with a Bristol City Centre Retail & Leisure Study which has initially commissioned a survey of landowners, businesses, residents and other stakeholders to which this is our response.

1. Please can you provide your contact information

enquiries@bristolwalkingalliance.org.uk

2. What do you see as the current strengths of Bristol city centre – particularly those that underpin repeat visits and generate footfall? (Please do refer to uses, operators, etc)

Central Bristol is a hub for travel, work, entertainment, food and drink, tourism, health services.

3. Thinking about future development and growth what would you like to see in the city centre in the next 5-10 years in terms of:

a) Retail

Encourage a wider range of smaller independent stores and businesses. Deliveries to stores should be further amalgamated via distribution hubs to reduce number of heavy delivery vehicles. Stores should offer delivery options so there is no need for purchasers to have access to a car for heavy items. More fresh food/grocery/convenience stores and informal eating places for city centre residents. Recognition of the value of the 'pedestrian pound' for retail areas, with facilities to ensure pedestrian comfort including benches as resting places, public toilets, water fountains, places offering shade and shelter.

b) Leisure / culture

Focus on experiences, such as walking, meeting, eating, exploring, and learning. Support street entertainers. Focus on many smaller diverse activities rather than large festivals. Attract local people as much as tourists. Add walking routes with signage and plaques to highlight historic events and interesting buildings, statues, artwork.

c) Office

Anticipate the need for fewer large offices and more shared offices spaces, with more options to work from home at least for some of the week. More shared conference/meeting facilities for workers to gather only when necessary. More flexible office hours to avoid peak hour commuting and so reduce congestion and air pollution for everyone.

d) Residential

Housing better integrated into the city centre, offering all-hours presence of people to increase oversight and safety. Provide a variety of housing, including some low-cost, to increase social mix and diversity. Use space above shops and businesses for residential accommodation – ensuring a balance i.e. not just student housing and HMOs – to support a safe environment for pedestrians well into the evening.

e) Movement and accessibility

Improve the environment for pedestrians, by providing a quieter and more pleasant environment accompanied by public realm improvements. Proactive enhancement of primary and secondary pedestrian routes to, from and within the city centre – including greening and other public realm enhancement, wide pavements, continuous footways, convenient crossings, and segregation from cycle routes. Private cars deterred as far as possible, except for those required for accessibility. Good access to centre by public transport, especially buses. Pick-up/drop-off points for use by taxis and future on-demand self-drive vehicles. Park-and-Ride should be available from all surrounding directions. Provide free local city-centre buses connecting transport hubs (Temple Meads Station, Bus Station, The Centre) and all central areas.

The 10 aims for walking of the Bristol Transport Strategy 2019 should be implemented throughout the area as appropriate. These are:

1. Deliver, identify and enhance the network of walking routes across the city.
2. Adopt design standards for accessible and inclusive walking infrastructure.
3. Develop walkable communities through planning and development.
4. Improve walking links to public transport.
5. Count, monitor, and share information about walking, exploring the use of new technologies.
6. Reduce obstructions to walking and improve enforcement measures relating to bins, parking on footways and across access points, street clutter, litter and dog fouling.
7. Make walking safe through footpath design and repairs, lighting, safe crossings, reducing conflict with other road users, air and noise pollution.
8. Make walking pleasant and comfortable by providing access to toilets, changing facilities, drinking water, benches and shaded areas and include this information on online maps that can be easily updated.
9. Provide comprehensive walking information and resources including maps and Bristol Legible City wayfinding.
10. Support walking through travel planning and make walking the easy transport choice.

f) Healthcare

Provide: better hospital connections to public transport including pick-up/drop-off points for on-demand vehicles; more regular, free, 24-hour transport between healthcare centres, transport interchanges and park-and-ride; information and directions for people combining walking with public transport.

g) Community

Offer low-cost meeting places for use by city-wide community groups. Large residential blocks should have their own community spaces. Protect public rights of way and permeability and freedom of movement through the public domain.

h) Green / public open space

Take the climate and ecological emergencies seriously: add greening wherever possible by introducing trees, planters, green walls etc to improve air quality, reduce the heat island effect and increase personal well-being. Provide benches as resting places, water fountains, wayfinding information, information about relevant plants and wildlife, 'incredible edible' planting, sufficient bins for waste. Incorporate informal playful opportunities e.g. a pavement chessboard or hopscotch, wildlife 'trails' to follow. Increase public green spaces to compensate for high-density residential blocks lacking their own outdoor spaces.

4. Looking beyond the current COVID-19 pandemic, do you see larger ‘destination’ retail anchor stores surviving? If not, what type of uses/activities do you see replacing them?’

Large stores may only survive by encompassing more diverse, experience-related activities, not just retail. Conventional retail is likely to decline in favour of more personal service outlets, food outlets, or entertainment experiences that cannot easily be delivered within the home. Encourage shared space for businesses that complement each other.

5. Thinking before the COVID-19 pandemic, retail has historically been a key driver of footfall in the city centre. Do you still consider this to be the case in 5 years time?

Though retail may recover from the Covid-19 closures, it is unlikely to return to historical levels, especially for items which can be purchased online. However, ‘shopping’ is much more than buying essential items. People enjoy ‘going shopping’ and ‘going into town’.

6. What could further underpin the retail and leisure activity in the city centre?

Provide more communal pedestrian spaces with seating suitable for busking/performances/music/etc and more covered pedestrian spaces suitable for year-round use. Retail could be seen as an adjunct to other activities, rather than the main objective. Cinemas, theatres, fashion shows, busking, opportunities to ‘people watch’, walking tours, book readings, street art, ferry boat trips, open top buses, and more can all attract footfall to the city centre. Have a regular, changing programme of events, performances, art installations, fairs etc.

7. Is there more that could be done to support local businesses in the city centre?

Encourage local businesses to commit to sourcing local products, using local labour and re-investing in the city. Support the local excellence that already exists instead of importing national or global brands.

8. Any other comments, or useful resources we should be looking at?

Look at the lessons from cities that have put pedestrians first:

www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/16/how-helsinki-and-oslo-cut-pedestrian-deaths-to-zero

www.livingstreets.org.uk/media/3890/pedestrian-pound-2018.pdf

content.tfl.gov.uk/street-appeal.pdf

healthystreets.com/

Build the city around a sustainable economic model:

wellbeingeconomy.org/amsterdam-embraces-doughnut-economics-by-kate-raworth

www.c40.org/other/agenda-for-a-green-and-just-recovery

Bristol Walking Alliance

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