

Comments by Bristol Walking Alliance to help shape the Western Harbour masterplan



Bristol Walking Alliance (BWA) believes that an important measure of success for any development of the Western Harbour is whether it provides a welcoming, safe, convenient and inclusive environment for walking. We suggest here what that would mean for the pending masterplan for the area.

Introduction

In December 2021 we submitted a document to the Harbour Hopes engagement that identified the key walking routes we believe must be considered in any future proposals for the Western Harbour. We also highlighted the relevant actions from our '50 Ways to Better Walking' that should be applied in any development.

We are repeating these suggestions here and also suggesting how the initial thoughts expressed in the current consultation could be refined in creating the masterplan.

Latest ideas

We are pleased to see that the latest ideas for the area have moved on considerably from the initial road alignment proposals for the Western Harbour put forward in 2019. We support the four key aims of the vision.

It does seem sensible to retain the current **road alignment** of Brunel Way. This would minimise cost and new-build carbon emissions while keeping the separation of through motor traffic from local pedestrian and other travel. However it is not clear how the ramps connecting Plimsoll Bridge to Hotwell Road can be better configured.

We support the opportunity for the essential new **flood defences** to enable new public realm that is inclusive and offers space for leisure and relaxation.

See our more detailed comments on **connectivity** below.

We also support the potential for new **green spaces**, improved biodiversity and better access to the waterfront, all of which can lead to a healthier environment for residents and visitors as well as nature.

The reconfiguration of the Western Harbour to allow **new homes** is sensible. It has good public transport and is within walking distance of the city centre, so there should be no need for private motor vehicle provision. The density and scale of any new buildings should not dominate the space and should be proportionate to the local facilities for services and recreation.

The Riverside Garden Centre has shown how this area can attract community support. By providing a **mix of uses**, particularly by activating ground floors of buildings, it will ensure that the area can attract a wider variety of people throughout the year.

Connectivity

In BWA, our main concern is for those on foot or wheeling. We would like there to be both good pedestrian access to the area, and good routes through the area.

In the current consultation there is a site plan that shows potential connections for active travel and public transport. It has a number of shortcomings:

- It does not distinguish between walking and cycling.
- It focuses on entry and exit point to the area rather than desire lines through and around the area.
- It does not recognise the very popular circular Harbourside walkway.

Presumably Active Travel England will be required to give their assessment of any proposals for the area. They recognise that, particularly in urban areas, **walking and cycling should be segregated** as far as possible in new developments. We would expect this to be the case in the Western Harbour masterplan.

For those who are not able to cycle or to walk far, public transport is very important. The masterplan should not only show the two Metrobus stops within the area, but also consider the pedestrian routes for those who will need to **access other nearby buses**, such as those going along the Portway corridor and those going across Brunel Way.

We were pleased to hear in the stakeholder presentation that there is scope to widen routes across Junction Swing Bridge. This route (along Merchants Road) is currently a bottleneck on the **Harbourside walkway**. As we pointed out in our recent response to the Harbour Place Shaping Strategy, it is not clear to us whether that strategy or the Western Harbour masterplan will provide the definitive aims for this section of the walkway.

The connectivity site plan shows desire lines across the lock gates of the Entrance Lock. These are clearly not accessible routes, but there is a real need for a ground level accessible route linking to Hotwells and the Portway at this end of Cumberland Basin.

In the following section (repeated from our 2021 submission) we show what we believe to be the key walking routes in the area.

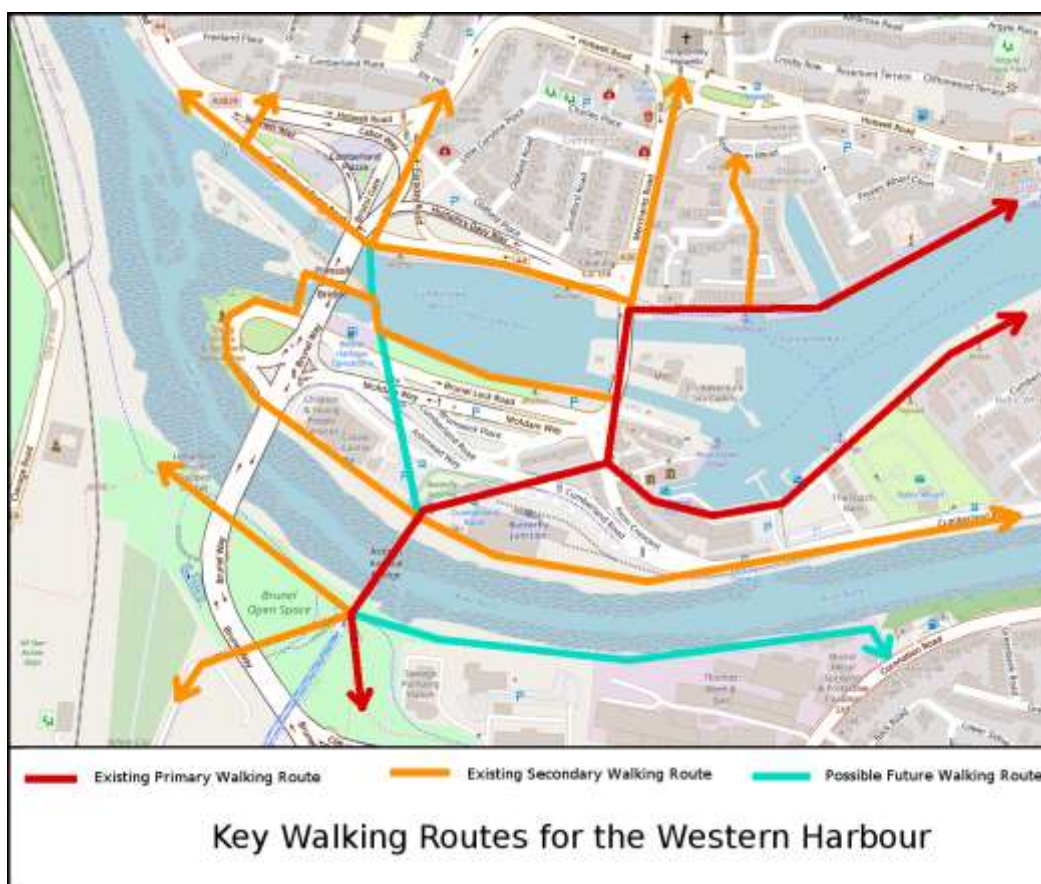
Key Walking Routes

The following map shows the key existing walking routes through the Western Harbour area that we believe need to be retained and improved. It also suggests some future key routes that could be added to improve connectivity through the area. All routes need to be made fully accessible.

The existing primary routes are those around the north and south of the harbour, which meet at the Junction Lock swing bridge, and extend across Ashton Avenue Bridge towards Southville.

The existing secondary routes cover those around the rest of Spike Island, including the Chocolate Path, and those that connect to the Portway and Hotwells in the north, across to Ashton Court in the south and along the south side of the Avon to the west.

Possible future routes include a connection along the southern bank of the New Cut (which is likely to be enabled in pending and future planning applications) and an accessible ground-level link across the Entrance Lock providing a second north-south link across this end of the harbour.



These routes only indicate the principal desire lines for pedestrians in order to allow walking to be a prime mode of travel through the area.

Beyond that there will be the need to provide good pedestrian access to whatever developments might take place. But until more specific proposals are put forward it is not feasible to suggest a finer level of detail.

Further considerations

In the BWA booklet '*50 Ways to Better Walking*' (bristolwalkingalliance.org.uk/50-ways), we set out 50 ways in which the walking environment in Bristol could be improved. When considering how the Western Harbour should be developed we suggest the following actions from that booklet would be particularly important.

1. Identify and promote key walking routes into and around the city centre, and between and within neighbourhoods, using clear, consistent signage

6. Audit and upgrade pedestrian routes across the Feeder Canal, River Avon, River Avon New Cut and the Floating Harbour
7. Adopt and publicise clear and inclusive design standards for the pedestrian environment
8. Ensure footways are wide enough to provide safe and convenient access for people using wheelchairs, mobility scooters and walking aids, and people with pushchairs
11. Work with equalities groups when developing transport schemes and making changes, including temporary changes, that affect the pedestrian environment
14. Make use of the Healthy Streets approach in the design of transport schemes
18. Audit and improve the provision of fully accessible toilets for public use in areas of high pedestrian footfall
23. Identify walking as a separate mode of transport in travel reports, policy documents and transport planning; do not conflate 'walking and cycling' or subsume walking in 'active transport'
24. Monitor and count pedestrian movements with the aim of improving the provision, standard and safety of pedestrian routes
25. Include questions about walking in travel surveys, planning consultations and quality of life questionnaires
32. Re-purpose parking bays to remove pavement obstructions e.g. on-street bin collection points, electric scooter parking hubs, electric vehicle charging
33. Position street furniture such as benches, signs and lampposts, to maximise the useable footway width and remove redundant street furniture
34. Segregate pedestrians from bicycles and e-scooters on key walking routes
37. Ensure key walking routes are well-lit with sufficient oversight, and prioritise 'active frontage' in planning applications
40. Protect and plant street trees, and provide and maintain other green infrastructure e.g. parklets
43. Work with communities, developers and businesses to improve streetscapes by providing benches, lighting, interpretation boards, and public art as appropriate

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