

BRISTOL WALKING ALLIANCE

Response to West of England Joint Spatial Plan Issues and Options consultation

The Bristol Walking Alliance is a new consortium of organisations committed to making Bristol the best city for walking in the world. We want to create a pedestrian environment that is welcoming, safe, convenient and inclusive. We want to build on the achievements of Bristol's designation as European Green Capital and the Good Transport Plan for Bristol.

We are pleased to be involved at this early stage in the preparation of the West of England Joint Spatial Plan. We have responded to the consultation online, but would like to take this opportunity to express some general concerns.

Quality of the urban environment

We believe that the consultation document does not attach sufficient importance to the quality of urban environments. Bristol was recently ranked as the UK's most livable city. The attractiveness of Bristol as a place to live is of great importance to the sub-region's future prosperity. The city's green spaces and walking environment contribute hugely to this: traffic congestion and air pollution do not.

We are concerned that excessive 'densification' would threaten this if it is at the expense of valuable open or green spaces. The green spaces people prize most are, as everywhere, close to their homes. Open spaces are in short supply in many parts of the city, where development is dense, gardens are small, classrooms have been built on school playgrounds and cars occupy the streets. The city's green spaces and neighbourhood facilities need to be protected and more public spaces created. Car use needs to be curbed and more sustainable and active travel encouraged.

Design of new development

The document recognises that many recent developments have not been well-designed. We would like a commitment to making all new development walker-friendly and to improving routes throughout the region for walkers. We would like a commitment to following the principles in DfT's *Street Design for All* and to adopting Natural England's *Accessible Natural Green Space Standard*.

The principles of mixed use, permeability and programmes of soft measures to support development should be made explicit, to ensure that there is adequate policy support for the development policies that will come later.

Consultation questions

Critical Issues

Q1 Have the most appropriate critical spatial issues been identified in addressing housing and wellbeing; the economy; the environment; and transport?

A1 The headings are all right. On housing and well-being, we welcome the recognition in para 2.6 that patterns of development should not contribute to low levels of physical activity. This is not simply to reduce pressures on the health service but because activities like walking promote physical and mental well-being. The transport section rightly focuses on car dependency and the lack of jobs in many places, rendering many of the subsequent proposals curious.

Proposed Vision

Q2 Is our vision the most appropriate one for guiding development and growth in the West of England up to 2036? Are there any changes you would like to see to the vision?

A2 This is fine, especially the sentence: "Patterns of development and transport will facilitate healthy and sustainable lifestyles."

Spatial Objectives

Q3 Are the spatial objectives the most appropriate ones for guiding development and growth in the West of England up to 2036? Are there any changes or are there other objectives you would like to see?

A3 Most are OK, especially if sharpened up to be more meaningful and readable. In particular, objective 1 under "transport" should define infrastructure in a way which excludes roads: building more of those simply generates traffic.

Housing need

Q4 Are we planning for the right number of homes? Is there anything else we should take into consideration regarding the number of homes?

A4 We are surprised by the apparent assumption that all sites with permission will be developed.

Q5 What needs to happen to ensure the homes we need are built by 2036?

A5 Allowing development in 'desirable' and accessible areas, including some of the Green Belt, would help.

Q6 What needs to happen to ensure enough of the homes built are affordable?

A6 The NPPG national guidance seems preferable to most of the alternatives suggested.

Employment needs

Q7 Have we identified the right employment issues?

A7 We believe the importance of transport consequences should be clearly identified. Employment needs to be generated where people can get to work on foot or by sustainable means of travel.

Q8 Where should new employment land be located?

A8 Close to where potential employees live or close to public transport.

Meeting development needs within existing cities and towns

Q9 Is our priority of building more homes in Bristol and our main towns appropriate and how can this approach be achieved?

A9 Excessive 'densification' is a threat to the attractiveness of urban areas and therefore to the future prosperity of the sub-region.

Strategic locations

Q10 Have all the reasonable strategic locations been identified? Are there any others we should consider?

A10 Need to look at Bath and its surroundings again given the excellent transport links and employment opportunities.

Q11 Do you have comments on the suitability of any of the strategic locations?

A11 Not at this stage. We would like to look at the potential impact on car commuting and walking in due course.

Q12 In your opinion, do some strategic locations have advantages or disadvantages in terms of addressing the critical issues identified in chapter 2?

A12 See comments below on scenarios.

Spatial scenarios

Q13 Which spatial scenario (or mix of scenarios) is likely to best deliver the plan's objectives?

A13 A mix of 2, 3 and 4. Scenario 1 should be ruled out because it would generate unsustainable settlement patterns dependent on car commuting. The boundaries of the Green Belt need to be adjusted to retain and promote access to attractive countryside for all while allowing some development. Scenario 5 may be attractive but appears unachievable. A rounded assessment of all strategic locations needs to be made: proximity to transport corridors and employment may be outweighed by other factors, including the recreational value of the land that would be developed.

Q14 If a new settlement is a solution, how big should it be and where would you suggest it could go?

A14 With a size and location that will not significantly increase car commuting into Bristol

Q15 What transport improvements or measures would be required to support the scenarios?

A15 Better train and bus services into Bristol. Better traffic management in Bristol. Better provision for walking in Bristol and elsewhere.