

Manifesto for Bristol

This is Bristol Civic Society's manifesto for Bristol. It describes some key high-level principles that unite us when we work to make Bristol a better place.

High-level vision and our role

- 1) Bristol has distinctive features that make it special to us: for instance, its waterways, harbour, green spaces, hills, position, maritime history, industrial history, and the buildings, streets, spaces, and architectural design that history has left us. We wish Bristol to live up to its status as a regional capital, reflected in its cityscape, cultural activities and economic life, to be a place its citizens are proud of, and a place that people want to visit, especially through its buildings, facilities and public spaces.
- 2) We are for blending the new with the old: to recognise Bristol's assets and to implement change through good planning and design. We want to add to the beauty, character and diversity of the city, and to revitalise areas and improve the quality of life for all across the city. We want the best for Bristol.

The balance of social, economic and environmental objectives

- 3) Like others, we value the fruits of a healthy economy, but we also place an emphasis on environmental and social objectives. Environmental objectives can support social and economic objectives, particularly in deprived areas. We accept there is sometimes a balance to be struck between conflicting objectives, and we fight to ensure the right balance is struck. We do not regard 'sustainability' as an 'add-on', but rather an essential part of a balanced approach.
- 4) We believe that we have not inherited the earth from our parents, but we have borrowed it from our children. We need to think globally and act locally. So we choose approaches that minimise carbon emissions and energy use in the longer-term, such as measures to reduce total car journeys.
- 5) We believe that 'smart' environmental measures can improve the quality of life for us all. For instance, mixed use at street level encourages street life which reduces the fear of crime; more journeys on foot and fewer by car creates a street buzz and encourages social contact.

Citywide planning

- 6) We take an interest in any issues of cross-Bristol significance, for example the plans for how Bristol should grow across the different parts of the city.
- 7) In-city development makes use of existing infrastructure, and allows shorter journeys. Urban extensions require new infrastructure, and create more traffic congestion and carbon emissions. We should build within the city boundary before considering greenfield urban extensions. This should be enforced, because otherwise developers will choose the easy option of building on greenfield sites rather than "recycle" brownfield sites.

8) Public transport routes should link centres of services and amenities, and new building should be prioritised to be near those routes. This minimises traffic congestion and carbon emissions.

9) Suburban centres should have a sufficient mix of uses and a density of nearby housing to maintain an active life and reduce car journeys. The city centre and the suburban centres need people living in them, not just commercial activity. They need a mix of tenures and housing types, suitable for both families and single people. We need to promote the social, economic and cultural regeneration of our deprived neighbourhoods as a priority.

Designing buildings and spaces

10) We support a mixed-use approach to developments at street level, because that facilitates diversity and activity, ensuring the presence of people outdoors on different schedules and different purposes. Also a variety by size, tenure and type in each area of the city.

11) The visual design of buildings matters. We do not take a fixed view of what is good design, for example that 'modern' is bad. We simply seek that the design of spaces and buildings should seek to enhance locally distinctive character and fit in with the surroundings and historical context. And that the detailed design should add to the beauty and the diversity of the cityscape.

12) Buildings and spaces are not stand-alone design objects. Visual design matters, but equally important is that they work for the people that use them, that they are safe and secured by design, fully accessible for disabled people, and that they facilitate activities - for instance, ground floor frontages of large blocks that are welcoming to street life.

13) Residential city dwellings should generally be high density. High density does not need tall buildings: it can be achieved through 3- and 4-storey buildings. High density can be achieved not just from new building, but from conversions, subdivisions, space above shops, attics etc. Higher density can mean more people to keep an eye on streets and keep them safer, encouraging more pedestrian movement.

14) We welcome small, incremental developments, including self-build, as they bring more diversity and less upheaval than big schemes.

Building standards

All housing should be assessed against CABE's 20 Building for Life criteria with the aim of scoring at least 15/20 (good), and the Code for Sustainable Homes with the aim of reaching code level four or above.

We support all homes being "Lifetime Homes" that make life as easy as possible for as long as possible because they are thoughtfully designed. They provide accessible and adaptable accommodation for everyone, from young families to older people and individuals with a temporary or permanent physical impairment.

BREEAM (Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method) is a tool that allows the owners, users and designers of buildings to review and improve environmental performance throughout the life of a building. We encourage all developments to have a BREEAM assessment and expect all major developments to gain a 'very good' or 'excellent' BREEAM rating.

Streets and transport

15) We support the green transport hierarchy of:

1. reducing the need to travel
2. pedestrians
3. bicycles

4. public transport (including community and demand-responsive transport)
5. motorcyclists
6. commercial vehicles/lorries
7. taxis
8. high occupancy vehicles/cars
9. single occupancy vehicles/cars

We are not anti-car, but we know that motor traffic drives out pedestrians and reduces social contact. We should ensure a network of streets and spaces that frees up pedestrian movement and brings back pedestrians, adding to street life. We support pedestrian priority areas and routes. We also support appropriate shared use of street space between motor vehicles and other modes, including pedestrians.

16) To reduce congestion and carbon emissions, we want a step-change in public transport, alongside other measures to encourage alternative modes of transport.

17) The street environment matters: we support initiatives that keep our city clean, bring nature into the city, and improve parks and other green features.

How we do things

18) We celebrate Bristol's built heritage, and we recognise quality in newly-completed development. As new development evolves, we campaign to improve it, working proactively and constructively within the system, both at the city-wide strategic/policy level and at the level of individual developments.

19) We aim to represent the views of our members and the wider community. We engage with developers and the council to help ensure high standards of community involvement. For certain developments, we facilitate the community involvement process to help ensure that the outcome meets the needs of those that live and work there.

20) We also work with other groups. The Society is a prime mover in the Bristol Neighbourhood Planning Network – a network partnership of planning and amenity groups across Bristol, and we join with a network group whenever there is a common interest. We are one of the organisations in the Transport for Greater Bristol alliance.

21) We acknowledge and respect the drive and skills of developers to develop, the skills of professionals to design within a developer's brief, the expertise of planning professionals, and the role of democratic government to set and apply planning policy and regulations. At the same time, we will represent our views of what is right, based on the principles we follow and founded on our fund of experience and expertise.