

# BETTER BRISTOL

The Bristol Civic Society magazine

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An independent force for a better Bristol

**H**ello and welcome to the third issue of Better Bristol, the Bristol Civic Society magazine which is funded from members' subscriptions. If you are not yet a member and would like to support the society, to receive Better Bristol twice a year, as well as reductions at our regular events, do consider joining us, (details on how to join are on page 26).

### Activists since c1905

Bristol Civic Society (originally the Bristol Kyrle Society) works to make Bristol a better place for future generations. As an independent charity, let's hope we can continue for another 108 years.

We are delighted that our membership is growing, gradually more members are taking an active role in the society, but we still need help in several areas - for example, co-ordinating the Public Spaces Group, co-ordinating the Marketing Group and helping with the e-bulletin. If you think you could help,

please contact Alan Morris at enquiries@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk or call 07766 442495.

### New Members

A warm welcome to Lesley, Giles, Robert, Helen, Emma, Fiona, Gue, Hugo, John, Mark, Alan, Richard, Fiona, Stephen, Tom, Nick, Gavin and Sandra.

### Social Evening for all members

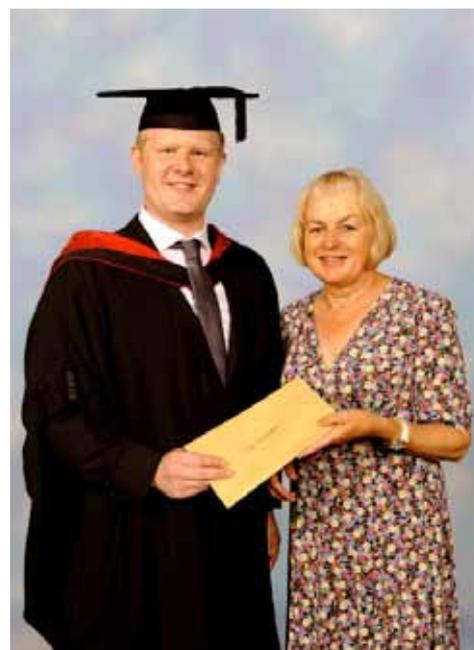
Everyone welcome, come along for a chat and a drink and meet other society members on Monday, December 2 from 7.30pm at the The Famous Navy Volunteer, 17-18 King Street.

### Summer of Fun

Bristol, with its many varied festivals and events, has been the place to be this summer.



House of Commons, Civic Day Launch, Secretary of State for CLG, Eric Pickles and Heather Leeson, June 10 2013 (picture: Jeff Lucas)



BCS Student Award, Bristol Cathedral, Tom Eddington and Heather Leeson, July 15, 2013

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- Keith Hallett
- Darren Hall
- Eugene Byrne
- Dave Cave
- John Gillett

Christine Davies

The Gromit Unleashed Trail, which raised £2.35 million for Bristol Children's Hospital, together with the Make Sundays Special experiment have boosted tourist numbers and the local economy.

Following the success of the Make Sundays Special events, Corn Street will now be closed to cars, at set times during the weekend. Mayor George Ferguson said: "I want this culture of claiming back the streets and really making the most of our wonderful old city to continue, offering residents and visitors a welcoming, vibrant atmosphere." (Read more on page 7)

### BRT2 white elephant challenge

As Chair, I resent the time and energy that the society, together with other objectors, has had to spend over recent years attending BRT meetings and so-called consultations, also writing lengthy responses to ever-changing BRT proposals, writing lengthy articles trying to keep society members informed of developments, and preparing and presenting evidence at a six-week long public inquiry, which concluded in July 2012. As I write, we are still awaiting the decision, from two secretaries of state, on the government inspector's report from the inquiry.

We have devoted our time and energy because we do not want future generations to inherit and have to pay for the white elephant that is BRT2.

I challenge anyone, particularly Bristol councillors, to tell us why BRT2 will be beneficial to the future generations of Bristol.

(Read more on pages 8, 9 and 10)

A big thank you to contributors and everyone who has helped produce this issue of Better Bristol.

*Heather Leeson*

Chair, Bristol Civic Society



## High water in Bristol?

### How will we cope with the city's tides, rivers and water waste in the age of rising sea levels?

**MONDAY NOV 11 7.00PM COLSTON HALL No 2**  
**Free and open to all: doors open 6.30pm**

Recent studies undertaken by Bristol City Council (BCC) in partnership with the Environment Agency have shown that the centre of Bristol faces many flooding challenges. These challenges are predicted to become very significant as climate change causes sea levels to rise.

Such flood risks have important implications for development in the city. BCC, with its partners, is developing a long-term strategy to manage flood risks to the city. This public presentation and debate will update you with the latest news on these issues, and enable you to have your own views heard by the city's policy makers.

#### Programme

**George Ferguson**, Mayor of Bristol: Keynote address.

**Melvin Wood**, Asset Manager at the Environment Agency: Bristol's current river and tidal management.

**Patrick Goodey**, Flood Control Manager at Bristol City Council: Future river and tidal management and the Avon defence feasibility study.

**Steve Arthur**, Strategic Planning Manager at Wessex Water Services Ltd: Current and future waste water management.

**Zoe Willcox**, Director of Planning at Bristol City Council: The relationship between water management and development control.

The event begins at 7pm at Colston Hall No.2 (doors open 6.30pm). After an hour of individual presentations the speakers will then form a panel on stage for questions and debate. Event closes 9-9.30pm. The event is free and no booking is needed.

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# CAN BRISTOL FINALLY LEARN FROM ITS PLANNING MISTAKES?

*It is time for our politicians to recognise that we cannot build a better Bristol for the 21st century based on the planning priorities of the 20th century, says Tony Dyer*

The architectural historian Sir John Summerson famously described Bristol as a city which has, architecturally speaking, developed in all directions and where nearly everything has happened.

He might also have described Bristol as a city where nearly every bad planning mistake has happened, often again and again.

Bristol is a beautiful city; nevertheless it has suffered from the repeated failure of many of its leaders to make brave decisions about its future.

Too often those deciding Bristol’s future seemed to think that “brave” meant “big” – that the bigger the proposal, the braver it was.

Thus we had plans for the council to buy more than 300 hectares in the city centre to create a brave new business world. This would have eradicated old-fashioned “eye-sores” such as Queen Square, Berkeley Square and Orchard Street and replace them with a plethora of Stalinistic, monolithic architectural nightmares across the city centre.

In the end, in no small measure thanks to the Bristol Civic Society, the council only purchased eight hectares in Broadmead as part of proposals to relocate Bristol’s shopping centre from the Castle Street area.

The proposed Civic Centre that would have instead occupied the Castle Street area - much of which is now Castle Park - also fell by the wayside, and, despite one of the largest petitions ever organised in Bristol, the High Street end of the site was given over to some mediocre buildings which continue to blight Bristol’s historic Saxon core to this day.

In some cases, grandiose plans were started only to invariably fail to reach completion, leaving Bristol with the worst of all outcomes; tremendous destruction of the cityscape for no appreciable gain.

As a result we saw large swathes of Totterdown and Easton demolished to make way for an Inner Ring Road that would never be completed; thus disappointing conservationists and traffic planners alike.

Almost every street in central Bristol saw proposals for street widening to accommodate the ever-increasing dependence on the motor car, with many historical and/or significant build-

ings lost to its demands while others were submerged by the increasing volumes of traffic that resulted.



The derelict former Bank of England building in Castle Park

Meanwhile, far too often, Bristol looks back at its planning history and continues to be constrained by it, rather than learning from it.

Bristol continues to build roads often, it seems, just because they have been proposed for so long rather than because they remain the best solution some 60 or so years after they were first mooted.

Bristol largely failed to live up to its potential throughout the 20th century and it is time for our politicians to recognise that we cannot build a better Bristol for the 21st century based on the planning priorities of the 20th century.

We can only hope that the election of an architect to lead the city will signal a new approach to the development of Bristol’s built environment, a brave approach that will meet the challenges and address the needs of a challenging future.

Tony Dyer is an independent business consultant and regular columnist for Bristol 24-7

# TURNING THE CORNER WITH LANDMARK BUILDINGS

## John Frenkel highlights the pitfalls of two major developments in Bristol's city centre



Artist's impression of Queen Square development

### Queen Square

Skanska will soon build on the prominent corner of Queen Square, Thunderbolt Square and King Street.

Peter-John Smyth, an eminent Bristol architect and Bristol Civic Society member says: "Queen Square is the finest large square in Bristol and King Street one of the finest streets. Reasons for the quality of Queen Square are that when most of it was built in the 18th century there was a strict height limit and a common restrained architectural language.

"In 2009, Bristol City Council gave planning permission for a new building on this corner, which was not only discordant with the square in style but was substantially higher than the height limit to which all the other buildings conform and would introduce a poor elevation on to King Street."

The public enthusiastically welcomed the council's restoration of Queen Square after the 20th century treated it badly. Into the acclaimed space, Skanska intend to insert a 'landmark' building. There are sites for such buildings in any city, but Queen Square is not the place for one.

Viewed from Queen Square, Skanska's penthouse floor would dominate the terrace end. The white render and glass wall would compete aggressively with the neighbouring Bath stone. The atrium entrance would introduce an element foreign to the square's uniform restrained style. The height ignores Queen Square's uniform roof line, while the large glass areas outshine the Almshouses.

The demolition of 22-23 King Street, a coarsely detailed office block would be welcome but the new King Street elevation would overwhelm the retained warehouse, while the additional storey would run over its top and destroy its separate identity.

Skanska argues that a large modern building already faces Thunderbolt Square. Peter-John says of that building: "At least it respects the square's height and has a low glass-to-wall ratio." The proposal for a curved elevation bears no relationship to either square.

The Society agrees with English Heritage's advice. Bristol City Council should have refused the application because it would harm no less than four immediately adjacent Grade II\*-listed heritage assets. To permit the developer to maximise the lettable space was the price the council paid to secure the repair of the empty and derelict Queen Square House and to secure its future. The final responsibility for this planning calamity lies with the developer.

### New Bridewell



The existing New Bridewell site

A place where a landmark building would be appropriate is the New Bridewell site, which the Watkin Jones Group seeks to redevelop into student accommodation. Although flanked by Grade II-listed buildings (the former Bridewell Street Magistrates' Court, former Police Station and the former Employment Exchange) the former police headquarters is a dull, eight-storey tower of no intrinsic interest.

The development would be in a 'C-shaped' form to create a public square on the Nelson Street/Bridewell Street corner. In the centre of the site would be a landscaped courtyard for the students to use.

A 'landmark' building would sit well here. The guidelines in the council's policy document - Nelson Street Regeneration (SPD 8) - calls for a development "of exemplar architectural quality that will form a landmark corner on Rupert Street and Bridewell Street".

This is a huge opportunity to begin to remedy one of the worst planning disasters of the 1960s. Nelson Street is a canyon of bad architecture. The same developer has planning permission to redevelop of the former Nelson Street Magistrates Court and has the opportunity to integrate the adjoining schemes. The proposal for 14 floors on Rupert Street and five floors on Nelson Street would be too high in the setting of the nearby listed buildings and would perpetuate past planning mistakes.

In the 1960s, planners failed to understand the context of the Frome valley drainage pattern that created the city; they permitted tall buildings to flatten its topography. The scheme proposes flexible ground floor uses associated with the student accommodation to create active street frontages. While retail may create active frontages, it is not the only solution. Development must not add to the sterile, boarded-up shop fronts seen in many recent mixed-use developments.

A new piazza on the Bridewell Street/Nelson Street corner needs careful consideration to avoid being just a 'hole in the street' like the current open space; it is inconsistent with the area's urban grain. A confident and elaborate building entrance fronting the pavement could separate the public from private space to give a 'milling around' space for students and to form attractive views into and out of site.

The developer does not appear to have considered the development in the context either of its next-door development or within the surrounding buildings and streets.

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# Towards a Biophilic Bristol

*City design that has the relationship between man and nature at its heart would bring big benefits to Bristol's economic and social well-being, writes Dr Mike Wells*

**B**ristol was the only city to opt for a directly elected mayor in 2012 and the city's first elected mayor, George Ferguson, is an architect with a long track record in green and sustainable approaches. I believe that this creates a new opportunity for Bristol to become a showcase for what has in recent times become known as 'Biophilic Design'.

Such a design approach strongly features environmental elements, natural shapes, forms, patterns and processes, embraces light and space, explores environmental characteristics of place and focuses on engendering positive relationships between people and nature.

It is based on the concept 'biophilia', a term first coined by Erich Fromm in the 1960s who postulated that mankind had an innate complex of weak genetic tendencies to respond positively to nature and benefit from an association with it.

This hypothesis was then further developed by others including the famous biologist Edward O Wilson and the renowned social ecologist Stephen Kellert. They identified the key elements of the biophilic environment as:

- Fresh clean water (ideally falling from source) – essential for life;
- Semi-wooded environments (fuel and building material for primitive man yet with a view of oncoming dangers);
- Topographical relief (refuge).

Research around the world has shown, for example, reduced incidence of illness, faster recovery from illness, greater tolerance of pain and reduced use of medicines in people who have access to views of savannah-type natural environments often with open water when compared to those with views devoid of the same.

A number of studies are now suggesting that biodiversity can be of benefit specifically in the office environment. In one study, adding plants to a windowless work place (a college computer lab) was associated with greatly increased productivity (12% quicker reaction time on a timed computer task) and reductions in stress as demonstrated by reductions in blood pressure, compared with test results in the absence of plants.

Recently I calculated that for an office development for 6,000 workers in Malaysia, the annual end-user benefits of a biophilic design approach could exceed £2.2million per year, every year. When you sum the potential benefits at a city scale, the overall potential beneficial economic impact is truly staggering.

Many other studies, too numerous to cite here, indicate substantial increases in property value and reduced crime rates.

The 'elevated refuge' element of biophilia has recently been framed as the 'urban cliff hypothesis', which maintains that man, emerging from the forests, found refuge on tall rocky outcrops in the savannah. From this the tendency to live in elevated caves (houses and towers) emerged.

The idea of greening modern towers artificially would seem perfectly natural in this theoretical light; we humans favour resources close to the safety of our homes. We do not always want to head out to 'face tooth and claw

on the plains'. Most recently there have been moves to apply the concept at the city scale and a 'call to arms' for cities to unite in moving towards a biophilic utopia that has been joined to date by Singapore, San Francisco, Oslo, Portland, Perth, Vitoria-Gasteiz, and (amazingly and encouragingly, given that it is an exemplar of urban sprawl) Phoenix.

Through my work on the Bristol Urban Design Forum, I know that there are some wonderful parts of Bristol but there are other parts where virtually no biophilic characteristics exist. There are huge advantages to be gained by adopting strongly biophilic principles in the regeneration and refurbishment of the city, not only in terms of health, well-being and quality of life of citizens, but in terms of the economy.



Green Wall, Southampton

Extensive areas of concrete-covered river in the city could be viewed as enormous biophilic design opportunities waiting to be capitalised upon. 'Mean streets' with no vegetation could become green corridors growing linear woodlands, nectar gardens and freely available food managed by local co-operatives and enriched by all manner of rain gardens.

Vast areas of flat roof and wall which currently only contribute to the urban heat island effect could become lush green and attractive oases full of biodiversity or food crops. These would in turn support the beleaguered British bees and other pollinators, reduce flood risk, reduce air pollution, absorb noise and electromagnetic radiation and raise property values.

Working with other consultants I have been proposing such a transformation for significant areas of London around Church Street; Bristol needs to catch up with what the capital is doing.

The time is ripe and the time is now. Let the new mayor, all Bristolians and neighbours like me who love the city, join the biophilic movement wholeheartedly and show the world how it is done.

If you have enjoyed this article and wish to investigate the topics and issued raised further, you may find the following of interest: Fromm, E. (1964). *The Heart of Man*. Harper & Row, New York; Kellert, S.R & Wilson, E.O. (1993). *The Biophilia Hypothesis*. Island Press, New York; Larson, D.W. (2004). *The Urban Cliff Revolution. New Findings on the Origins and Evolution of Human Habitats*. Fitzhenry and Whiteside, Allston, USA.; Beatley, T. (2010). *Biophilic Cities: Integrating Nature into Urban Design and Planning*. Island Press, NY.

Dr Mike Wells will speak to the society on March 13, 2014, see page 28

Mike Wells is an ecologist and eco-urbanist. He serves on the Bristol Urban Design Forum and is Director of Biodiversity by Design Ltd – an ecological consultancy based in Bath that has a particular focus on biophilic design at home and abroad. Mike is also a Visiting Research Fellow of Bath School of Architecture and Civil Engineering. Tel: 01225 318444  
Web: [www.biodiversitybydesign.co.uk](http://www.biodiversitybydesign.co.uk)

# And on the seventh day, the fightback began against Bristol's traffic...

*With religious zeal, mayor's Make Sundays Special initiative has seen city centre streets closed to cars once a month. Is this the start of a permanent conversion?*

**B**ack in the mid 1980s, a group called Keep Sunday Special was set up by campaigners to oppose plans to introduce Sunday trading in England and Wales. Supported by trade unions and some small businesses, its aim was to protect Sunday as the traditional day of rest - the Lord's day - from the relentless pressure from the new god, retail.

By 1994 though, the campaign effectively ended when the Sunday Trading Bill became law. Strict observance of Sabbath was declining, and other religions celebrated different Sabbath days or none. As church attendances declined, people celebrated a new, dare I say it, religion... that of shopping. Shops were the new churches, superstores the new cathedrals. And the motor car was the chariot that took them to their chosen place of retail worship.

Dr Michael Schluter, who set up the campaign, may have failed to 'keep Sunday special', but a new campaign has been launched in Bristol this year. It does not have the same aims, and certainly has no problem with trading on the Sabbath, but George Ferguson's 'Make Sundays Special' events have a similar zeal.

Announced in April with disciples wearing rollerskates, others on stilts and another playing a piano on wheels, the mayor unveiled plans to begin to fight the good fight against the motor car.

All streets in the Old City area would be shut, as well as Baldwin Street, Queen Charlotte Street, King Street and streets surrounding the ambulance station on the eastern side of Castle Park, for five Sundays during 2013.

The streets would come alive with fun and colour, he said, adding that he wasn't closing the streets to traffic, but opening them up for people.

He called on "creative, active and organised groups" to provide entertainment and businesses to set up stalls to bring life to the centre.

"I want to see a city centre that is buzzing with life and activity. Let's have dance groups, fitness camps, Tai Chi, puppet shows, street games, hula hoopers, on-street basketball, street theatre, local history tour guides, judo demonstrations, comedy acts, plug in and play, choirs, stilt walkers, circus and everything in between," he proclaimed.

The inspiration comes from Bristol's twin city Bordeaux and the capital of Colombia, Bogota, where British journalist - and now permanent

resident - Lloyd Rundle told Bristol24-7: "Once a week the city comes together as one. Although it is known as the 'cycle path' most are pedestrians - families, children eating ice cream; people from all over the city coming together as one, without fear."

"Once a week the cars stop, the traffic ends and I can truly relax in the place I'm happy to call home."

So far, four Make Sundays Special events have taken place in Bristol, with city centre streets closed to traffic and filled with colour and



Small Street during Make Sundays Special event (photo: Bristol24-7)

bizarre costumes.

The atmosphere, helped by the most welcome hot weather, has been warm and welcoming. The dominance of the car has, for a short time at least, been subdued. And despite warnings I can confirm that, during those few hours of pedestrian power, the fabric of society was not torn asunder by removing traffic from the area!

The mayor has said the reaction of people to the experiment will determine whether the scheme is extended.

"Many European cities have done this and thrived, with businesses gaining more trade not less. The fear brigade would have you believe otherwise," he told me.

Mr Ferguson was quick to point out that there was no "conspiracy" behind the events to introduce a permanent ban on cars from the city centre.

But this is undoubtedly the opening salvo in an attempt to change the culture of Bristol's historic heart, which has already led to the announcement in August that Corn Street and Small Street would be closed to traffic at weekends from now on.

Steve Melia, from Living Heart for Bristol, wants

the mayor to go further, citing the example of Paris, where car-free Sundays led to the permanent creation of a car-free area along the River Seine earlier this year.

"The Mayor should be congratulated for this bold step forward. Once people have seen this part of the city centre free from traffic, we think they will want to see more of it. Once businesses see how they benefit from more people on the streets, we think they will want more of it," he said.

The controversial project by the socialist mayor of Paris to pedestrianise a section of the River Seine's Left Bank came into force in January, when part of a highway was permanently closed to cars.

Cars are no longer able to travel along the two miles of road between the Musée d'Orsay and the Pont de L'Alma (Alma Bridge) on the city's famous Rive Gauche.

The Tarmac is being replaced by about 4.5 hectares of green space, including 1,800 square metre floating gardens, which are due to open for use in spring at a reported cost of £30million.

At a cost of £190,000, Make Sundays Special isn't in the same league as Paris' move. But the mayor, while insisting there is no conspiracy, has said he would look to extend the scheme should it prove to be a success.

It is unlikely there will be many people in Bristol who, once the final event has finished on October 20, will say they flatly dislike wandering through the car-free city streets on a Sunday. The conversion has begun...

For more information about Make Sundays Special, visit <http://www.bristol.gov.uk/page/leisure-and-culture/make-sundays-special>

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# Independent study needed on Metrobus figures

*John Frenkel, convenor of the Major Sites Group, says Bristol could end up paying a bigger subsidy than it does for current Ashton Vale park and ride service*

In 2012, the Government held a public enquiry into the Ashton Vale to Temple Meads Metrobus (AVTM) route. The graphic (above) shows its original one-way, anti-clockwise route.

The concrete guided bus track left the Long Ashton Park and Ride (LAPR) and crossed the Portishead rail track via a new flyover. It then travelled along the former Docks Railway route under the high-level roads and crossed the restored Ashton Avenue swing bridge.

Next, the route ran along the rail track beside the New Cut, through the Cumberland Road tunnel, along Wapping Wharf into Wapping Road. After the Prince Street Bridge, the separated busway joined the public roads to follow a circuit via Temple Meads and the Centre back to the Prince Street Bridge. Double deck buses from North Somerset could use the separated busway.

At the public enquiry, James Smith, society spokesman for transport, gave evidence that the Bristol Civic Society objected

to buses travelling through Wapping Wharf and over the Prince Street Bridge. Buses would harm the Docks Conservation Area, which attracts more than one million visitors a year.

**What has happened since?**

The Government has not explained why it has failed to publish the government inspector's report, which was due in May. Bristol mayor George Ferguson decided that buses must not run along the rail track beside the New Cut, through Wapping Wharf or over the Prince Street Bridge.

Bristol City Council (BCC) then chose an alternative route. At Avon Crescent, the guided busway would join the public roads. AVTM would then travel along Cumberland Road to avoid the rail track next to the New Cut and Wapping Wharf. The bridge across the Bathurst Basin lock would be doubled to take AVTM into Clarence Road and then down Redcliffe Hill to join the one-way central circuit, as previously planned. Through the Mayor's action, the Society has achieved its aim.



Ashton Avenue Bridge, (Festival Way) - part of the MetroBus, BRT route

### The cost-benefit ratio

The estimated capital cost to build the bus track is £51.5m. The Government grant would be £34.5m. Bristol would contribute 80% and North Somerset 20% of the £17m local contribution that the Government requires. The two local authorities would underwrite the risk of any cost overrun.

BCC's evidence to the public enquiry showed that most 903 passengers travel to the city centre or to the bus station. The AVTM passengers would travel to those stops via Temple Meads and Cabot Circus. Thus there would be a minimal overall travel-to-work time saving for most passengers.

### The 903 bus service subsidy

The Society believes that there is a real risk that AVTM will require a permanent subsidy larger than the subsidy currently paid to the 903 operator. AVTM is a 903 bus replacement, not a new transport system. In 2010-11, BCC paid the operator a £170,000 subsidy to run the 903.

### Operating costs

AVTM would cost more to operate than the 903 bus. The 903 does not pay to use the public roads, while the AVTM operator would have to pay to maintain the busway. The higher specification AVTM vehicles would also cost the operator more to buy.

The AVTM service would be more frequent and would run on seven, not five, days a week. BCC concedes that AVTM would require subsidy for an initial period, while the interest on the

government loan to raise the £13.5m local contribution will be a charge on BCC's general debt. It will not be charged against revenue from passenger use.

### AVTM revenue

The promoter's evidence to the public enquiry showed:

- 85% of AVTM's passengers would begin or end their journey at the LAPR;
- LAPR use had been static for the last five to six years at about 880 vehicles a day;
- LAPR use must rise to 1,250 vehicles a day if AVTM is to be cost neutral.

The evidence to support the assertion of a 40% rise in use over four years was: "The Treasury predicts economic growth that will generate that increase of business activity in the city centre."

### The Society's proposal – an independent audit

Any increase in the '903 subsidy' must be found from cuts to other transport subsidies. When the busway is complete, BCC should not face an operator who demands a '903 plus' permanent subsidy to avoid the political embarrassment of an empty busway.

BCC should immediately commission a report into the AVTM's projected revenue and operating cost. A body with no interest in the development, such as the council's auditors, should write the report.

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# A short history of madness

*Keith Hallett's easy guide to the folly of Bus Rapid Transit for which, shortly, we all will be paying*

**2006** Under Labour, Bristol and neighbouring councils South Gloucestershire, North Somerset and Bath and North East Somerset (B&NES), were required to commit to a new housebuilding programme for 2006 to 2026, amounting to 115,000 new houses. About 15,000 of these were proposed as a South West extension to Bristol, across Ashton Vale, engulfing Long Ashton and beyond.

Under this pressure, the councils sensibly put forward the case for seeking available government grants for new public transport infrastructure, upfront.

**2007** Bristol City Council (BCC) invites an independent consortium to present a business case for a low-cost, environmentally friendly tram to run on the existing unused railway from Ashton Vale, along the New Cut to Princes Wharf. BCC recognised this as a first phase, later to street-run on to Temple Meads and also link to Portishead.

**2008** BCC dumps the tram option, to take advantage of 90% Government funds being made available for Bus Rapid Transit (BRT).

**2008-10** An army of council officers and fee-hungry consultants commit large amounts of public money to prepare a submission to the Department of Transport (DoT) for grant support. The public is told there is no time for community consultation: a grant submission was needed in double-quick time ... the route for the new BRT is already chosen to occupy the existing railway along the New Cut ... it is too late to consider using the railway for a future tram-based system. It is 'full-steam ahead' for guided buses along this new route into town, even though it is miles away from where people want to go and the recently constructed Cambridge guided busway is now recognised nationally as a costly white elephant.

**2010** The new Coalition Government throws out the 2006-26 new housing targets.

The disappearance of the 15,000-house 'South West extension' across Ashton Vale removes the original need for upfront, expensive BRT.

The Coalition drastically reduces the grant for BRT so that is the end of the project surely? Long Ashton Park & Ride 903 bus service already satisfies commuter needs and operates around half-full, so there's lots of capacity for the future. The 903 uses Hotwells Road on the way into town, setting passengers down at established destinations, so what purpose to divert people from where they want to go? This is where the madness arrives, in several forms.

First is North Somerset Council's commitment to divert all the A370 buses (Weston-super-Mare, Clevedon and Nailsea) away from Hotwells Road along the same diversion as BRT along the New Cut. So many more passengers will be taken away from their everyday destinations.

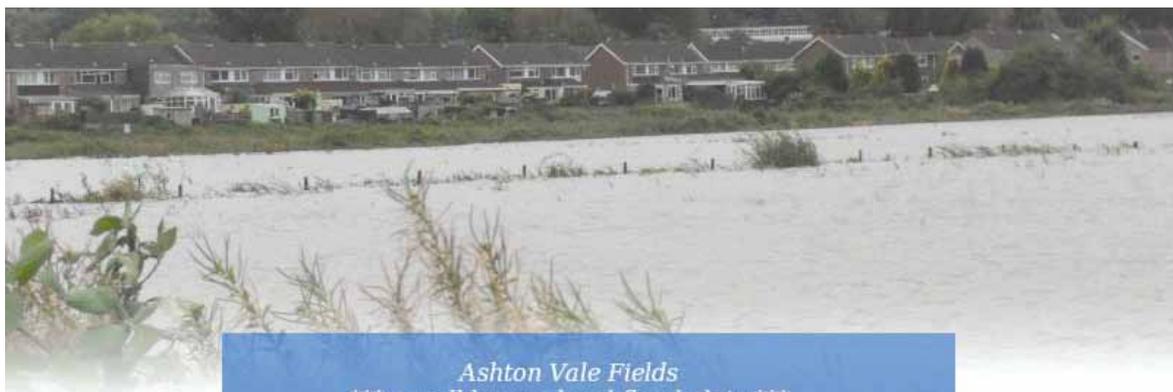
Meanwhile, the Portishead rail link is now gaining ground. Buses taking over an existing railway into town along the New Cut must surely be short-term thinking, and stupid in the long term? Everyone wants a tram system in preference to buses; why remove that opportunity by usurping a vital piece of railway infrastructure? Just to keep a crowd of BCC officers and their consultant sidekicks in business?

Finally, there is the illusion that the DoT grant depends on keeping the scheme 'on track'. Maybe that is true but do we really want a government grant for a white elephant project with a sting in the tail that any (highly likely) cost overrun will be ours to pick up?

**2012** Moving into the asylum. A public inquiry, costing £1 million, is assembled before a government inspector and over the course of six weeks everyone tells him it is a mad scheme. He goes on a walk along the route and sees for himself the madness. By autumn 2013 we have still not heard from the inspector.

**2013** January. Newly elected mayor George Ferguson states that BRT2 will not run through the historic Harbourside or over Prince Street Bridge – an alternative route to this section will be proposed.

**2013 July 31 and August 7**, exhibitions of the proposed new BRT route (now MetroBus) along Cumberland Road, Commercial Road and Redcliffe Hill. The madness continues. We, the people of Bristol, are being bamboozled into a completely crazy and costly nonsense.



Ashton Vale Fields  
 \*\*\* a well-known local flood plain \*\*\*  
 What a good choice for a daft BRT2 guideway!

# A fitting way to save heritage from ravages of climate change

*Environmentally friendly updates to historical buildings can successfully please both green campaigners and conservationists says Darren Hall, Bristol's Green Capital partnership manager*

I recently attended a lecture given by an estates manager for the National Trust about the impact of climate change on the Trust's buildings. There was no doubt in his mind that his buildings were being ravaged by extremes of hot and cold, wet and dry, and the cost to the National Trust in coming years would run into millions of pounds.

He was insistent that the Trust needed to do two things – adapt their existing buildings to be climate change resistant and also do much more to reduce their contribution to climate change.

By 2050, carbon dioxide emissions are to be reduced by 80% and government targets are forcing local authorities to improve urban sustainability. In the UK, buildings are responsible for 40-50% of national primary energy consumption and energy efficient targets have been designed so that all privately rented housing, including listed properties and those owned by the Trust, have to achieve minimum energy standards.

Westminster City Council stated recently that conserving historical buildings is part of sustainable development as these buildings tend to have large embodied energy. The National Trust and English Heritage own many historic buildings in the UK, and believe that retrofitting is integral to their survival, as occupancy and use means the buildings will continue to be conserved.

But it is a contentious issue as there is significant resistance against the retrofit of historic buildings. Plans to make alterations to Trinity College, Cambridge by installing double glazed windows were challenged by conservationists. Similarly, there was outrage in Thornbury when a resident installed solar panels on the roof of their 18th-century cottage.



Castle Street, Thornbury

It seems that many people averse to retrofitting are of the attitude that it is acceptable if it is out of site.

To overcome these problems, many pro-retrofiters attempt to compromise with conservationists by designing sensitive and 'in keeping' retrofit solutions using natural resources.

The Royal Institute of British Architects and SusCon produced a paper highlighting the need to consider the aesthetic impact of retrofit

projects. English Heritage takes a similar stance; while encouraging the integration of renewable energy sources, these sustainable technologies need to be carefully placed. For instance, removing historically significant roof tiles to aid the installation of solar panels would be 'wrong', and instead the panels should be placed out of sight or on a flat roof. In some cases, measures are resisted as certain technologies can cause a deterioration of historic structures.

Bristol faces a dilemma. Despite its diverse historical architecture, attention seems to be more focussed on new build. However, there are 29 conservation areas in the city, including Clifton, Montpelier, Park Street and Brandon Hill. There are also 100 Grade I-listed buildings, 500 Grade II\* buildings and more than 3,900 Grade II buildings. The desire to preserve their character and appearance can often limit retrofits and the installation of renewable energy.

Bristol is also case study of successful retrofit projects, such as Redcliffe Way, Paintworks and Spike Island. Transformed streets and buildings were celebrated at 'Bristol: Retrofit City' – an exhibition held at the Architecture Centre last year. Indeed, the Architecture Centre itself was retrofitted in order to serve modern needs as well as remain sympathetic to the historical significance of the building.

New legislation regarding energy requirements for privately rented houses could also positively impact Bristol's carbon footprint. In 2011, 22.1% of properties in Bristol were privately rented, showing almost a 10% increase over 10 years. Many rented homes are at risk of fuel poverty and can be hazardous for tenants' health.

New legislation will force landlords by law to prevent their properties from being cold and draughty – great news for shivering students everywhere! Low carbon solutions such as basic standards of insulation will be required to protect families from fuel poverty and high energy prices.

Retrofitting is an effective solution to help reduce the environmental impact of urban spaces and reach ambitious emission targets. Many buildings most in need of retrofitting technologies are historic, and are often listed or protected by conservation areas.

Conservationists seem to fear the aesthetic integrity of these buildings being compromised by retrofitting. However, a number of local authority-led projects emphasise how retrofitting can be done while maintaining the appearance of historic buildings.

With careful consideration and the use of natural and local materials, retrofits of historical buildings can successfully please both the motives of the eco-conscious and conservationists. After all, if we don't find solutions, it is likely to be the historic buildings that suffer the most.

Darren Hall will speak to the society on December 11, 2013. See page 27.

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# Residents Parking Zones:

## YOUR COMPLETELY BIASED BLUFFER'S GUIDE

*The hottest issue in Bristol's local politics this year has unquestionably been the proposed introduction of Residents' Parking Zones across much of the city. Eugene Byrne explains what all the fuss is about*

**H**ello, I have just arrived in your Little Old Bristol from another city/country/planet and will be residing here for the foreseeable future. Please explain to me what is this Residents Parking Thing everyone here is going on about?

Ah, welcome! Yes, Residents' Parking Zones (RPZ) are the hottest local issue of 2013.

**I thought that was the argument about whether the Gromits were wonderful or utterly wonderful?**

OK, second only to the wonderfulness of the Gromits are the RPZs. These already operate in Kingsdown, Cotham and Redcliffe, but Bristol's elected Mayor, George Ferguson, is now determined to introduce them across much of the rest of the city over the next year and a bit.

There will be variations in different neighbourhoods, but the basic idea is that people parking in streets affected by the schemes will have to pay to park cars there at least some of the time (typically during office hours). People living on said streets will have to pay for annual permits to park cars on them.



**What the blithering tarnation? Pay to park outside my own house? It's an outrage!**

Isn't it funny how so many folks assume that when they buy or rent a house this also gives them some sort of rights over the street outside?

Many are bitterly opposed to the idea. The Bristol Post has been going to various neighbourhoods all summer to gather residents' opinions. Most folk are against it, though in some places, where narrow Victorian streets are daily clogged up by commuters' cars, they're screaming out for it to be brought in as soon as possible.

Generally speaking, though, most people in the letters pages of the Post and comments sections of local websites are bitterly opposed to the plan. If you believe the howls of outrage from these people (whose brains have been shrivelled by petrol fumes) Mayor Ferguson wants to do to the poor, honest, hard-working motorist what Nero did to the Christians.

**While I finish hyperventilating, tell me how much this annual permit will cost.**

Depends according to your vehicular emissions, but a permit for most types of car will be £48 for the first vehicle, £96 for the second and £192 for the third. If you have more than three vehicles in your household, you're going to have to put the others somewhere else. You could always knock through a couple of downstairs rooms and turn them into garages I suppose.

**But what about all those student houses in Clifton where seven or eight posh kids all live together and all have cars which their mummies and daddies bought?**

Maximum of three permits per household.

**Or what about if I was young and fancy-free once more and lived in a shared house full of good-looking and witty young professionals?**

Maximum of three permits per household. Chandler or Joey or Rachel or Monica or one of the other ones will have to get a bike.

**And what of visitors? If my in-laws invite themselves over will I be able to regretfully inform them that they'll have to pay through the nose to park here?**



You get 50 free visitors permits per year. You can then buy up to 50 more at £1 a time. But no more than 100 visitors' permits per household per year. What you do with them is your own business.

[And how does charging me my hard-earned to park outside my own home make Bristol a better place?](#)

RPZs discourage people from commuting in by car. Every day, Bristol City Council claims, about 18,000 commuters' cars are parked on Bristol's residential streets. The Mayor wants to encourage these freeloaders to travel in by public transport, or cycle, or use the Park & Ride schemes. Fewer commuter cars mean less congestion, cleaner air and happier residents. Once your local scheme is in place you'll probably find it a lot easier to park your own car near your home.

[So the people the scheme will actually bother most are people who drive in to work from Weston or Thornbury or wherever?](#)

The Mayor would like to believe that these commuters will, once they have discovered the joys of First Bus, become keen on public transport. I'm not altogether convinced that's going to happen.

[Fair play. I'm all in favour of charging commuters to park in my street, but why should I have to pay, too?](#)

The council claims it's necessary to set up the scheme and see it's administered and enforced properly.

[So what happens now?](#)

The schemes are being rolled out over the next year, with consultations in the affected areas. So not all will operate in exactly the same way, but take account of local needs. For more, and updates on the whens and wheres, see [www.bristol.gov.uk/page/transport-and-streets/residents-parking-schemes](http://www.bristol.gov.uk/page/transport-and-streets/residents-parking-schemes)

[This is going to be the political death of George Ferguson, isn't it?](#)

Maybe, but don't bet on it. He's doing this now so that it's out of the way by the time he's up for re-election in 2016.

The experience so far is that once the schemes are in place, the residents love it (and of course no Bristol voter gives a monkey's what the commuters think.) Council surveys of residents in Cotham South and Kingsdown are almost all positive. People love being able to park their own cars within walking distance of their homes and not find that their streets are clogged up with commuter cars by day. The streets are quieter and safer, and aren't full of cars buzzing around, vulture-like, at 8.30 every weekday morning, looking for somewhere to park.

[What?! You're saying it might even make him more popular?](#)

Let's not get carried away here. But think of it like gay marriage. You announce plans to bring it in, and certain groups and individuals screech that this will be the end of civilisation as we know it. But once it's there most people will find they rather like it. Your cousin Kevin can get hitched to Alan, whom you always thought was just his lodger. Mum has an excuse for a nice new hat and there's a brilliant party, and Uncle Trevor doesn't grope any of the bridesmaids (... because they're all men.)

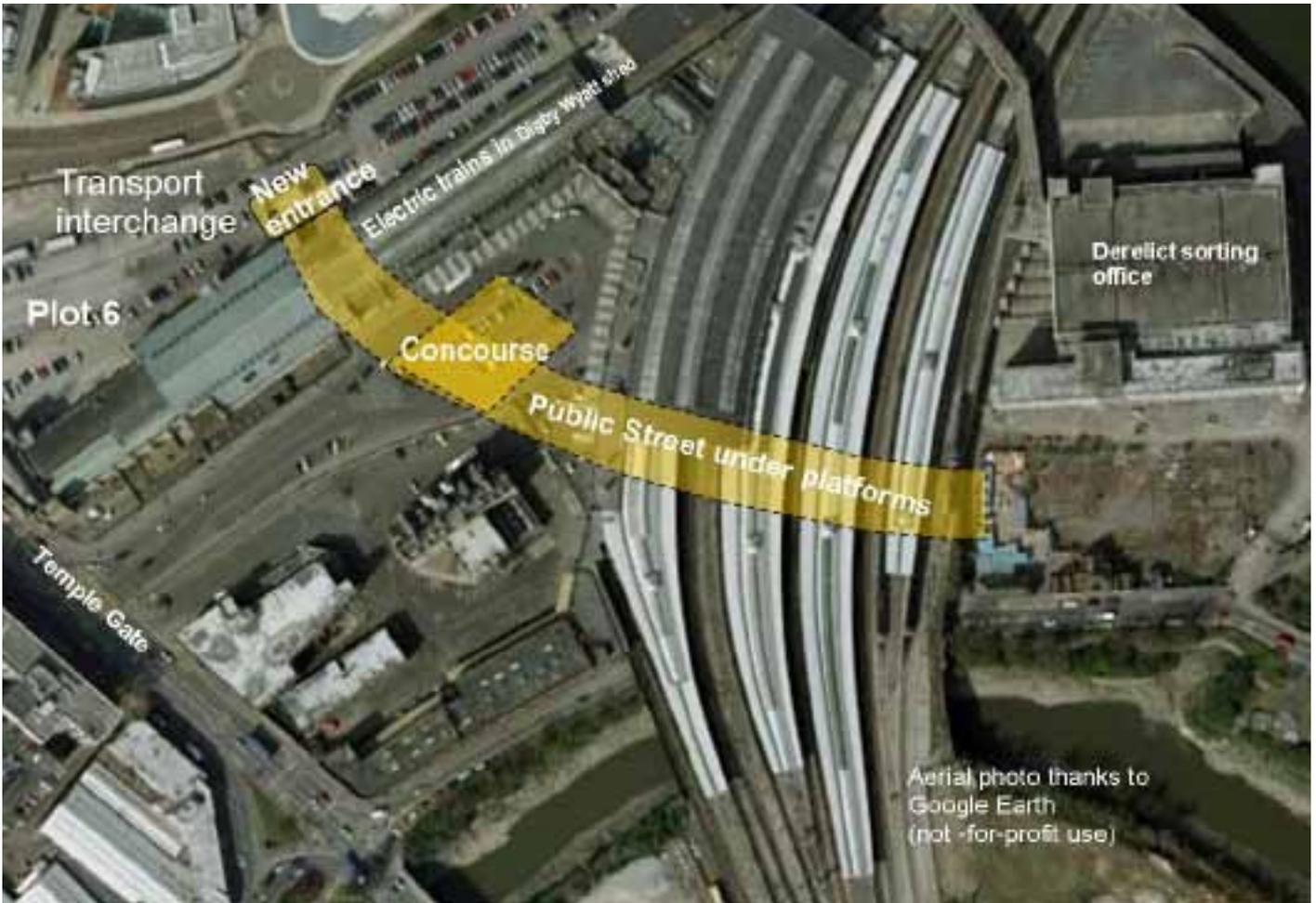
Same with residents parking: George Ferguson's calculation is that, come election time, everyone will kinda like it. Or at any rate won't hate it with the unalloyed savagery that some are currently displaying.



Eugene Byrne  
email: [eugene.byrne@gmail.com](mailto:eugene.byrne@gmail.com)

# No business like train business

*Dave Cave finds ambitious plans to develop Temple Meads station show those in control are now singing from our song sheet*



“One’s playing One’s Tune,” as the Queen probably never said, on hearing the National Anthem for the millionth time. But it makes a good Private Eye/Spitting Image joke.

But we are encouraged that at last those in control of developments at Temple Meads station seem to be singing from our song sheet.

In the last issue of Better Bristol we described the golden opportunity that now exists for an integrated passenger transport hub on Plot 6, next to the old Brunel station. There now seems to be an emerging consensus that this is a good idea.

At the Bristol Temple Quarter Enterprise Zone summer event 'Delivering the Vision', that took place on July 4, the great and the good, plus numerous representatives from groups such as Bristol Civic Society were assembled inside Brunel’s very same train shed to hear a report on the progress of the Enterprise Zone. And exceedingly good news it was, too. Temple Meads Quarter is the place to be, apparently. Bristol is

seen as “a hotbed of innovation”, and “vibrant” and “dynamic”. It’s almost breathtaking.

Nearby, work is to start on a £35million development at Glass Wharf, the first major speculative development for over four years, and Phase 3 of the Paintworks site, bringing new commercial and residential space. The Arena site has £11.5m pledged for a bridge. Temple Studios (the former Bristol & Exeter House) will be full by Christmas.

Meanwhile, Bristol City Council has acquired the old Brunel station and, with the University of Bristol, will be investing to turn it into a high-tech business space, already employing 170 people. Within the zone, the creation of 4,000 new jobs is expected in the next five years.

But it was with the station itself that the most exciting part of this heart-warming event came. “There’s no business like train business,” seems to be the message from Network Rail, announcing plans for the station.

The railways are now busier than they have been since the 1920s. Passenger traffic is set to grow by 41% up to 2019, and freight traffic by 60%. Temple Meads is one of the busiest stations in the country, but also seen as one of the most congested, and more space is needed to handle the growing passenger numbers.

So excited is Network Rail about the prospects that it has appointed Alan Baxter & Associates to come up with ideas for improvements (without damaging the Grade II-listed structures).

The station won't be just a boring old place where you catch a train. Temple Meads itself will be a destination, and "a 21st-century transport experience".

Plans are for a 'public street' running right across the station under the platforms. The centrepiece will be a new concourse on

the forecourt in front of the existing main entrance. This public street will run from the new main entrance through to the east side, where the derelict sorting office will hopefully be redeveloped. Buses, taxis and parking would all be moved to the new main entrance.

Speakers from both the platform and the floor emphasised the need for a Public Transport Interchange, a successful one providing "a seamless end-to-end journey between all modes of transport". Not quite the full bus station that many might wish for, but at least movement in the right direction.

Dave Cave  
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## Society Visits Historic MV Balmoral

*£350,000 must be raised*

Dave Bassett of the MV Balmoral, kindly hosted a visit by 35 society members on September 21

To most Bristolians the MV Balmoral seems a permanent feature in the docks opposite M-Shed. But, as Dave Bassett explained, unless the Waverley and Steam Navigation Company Limited can raise £350,000 the MV Balmoral will disappear from the Avon.

Currently the ship is undergoing a refit in order to retain its passenger certification, but if a ship of the size and capacity of the MV Balmoral is to be viable, it is essential that navigation infrastructure such as lock gates, pilot skills, piers etc., be maintained. It takes very little time for silt to block rivers, but the passage of a passenger ship with twin screws keeps the channel open.

The MV Balmoral belongs to a long tradition - begun 125 years ago - of providing day trips for Bristolians to Clevedon, Ifracombe, Lundy Island, Cardiff and the Gower Coast. Just like an old building, the ship contains a living record of its history. What is now the forward lounge was, before the introduction of drive-on/drive-off ferries, a car deck.

Sadly, the shipyard which built MV Balmoral in 1949, John I Thornycroft, is no more, although Bristol still has a dry dock of suitable size.



MV Balmoral Bristol Docks 2007

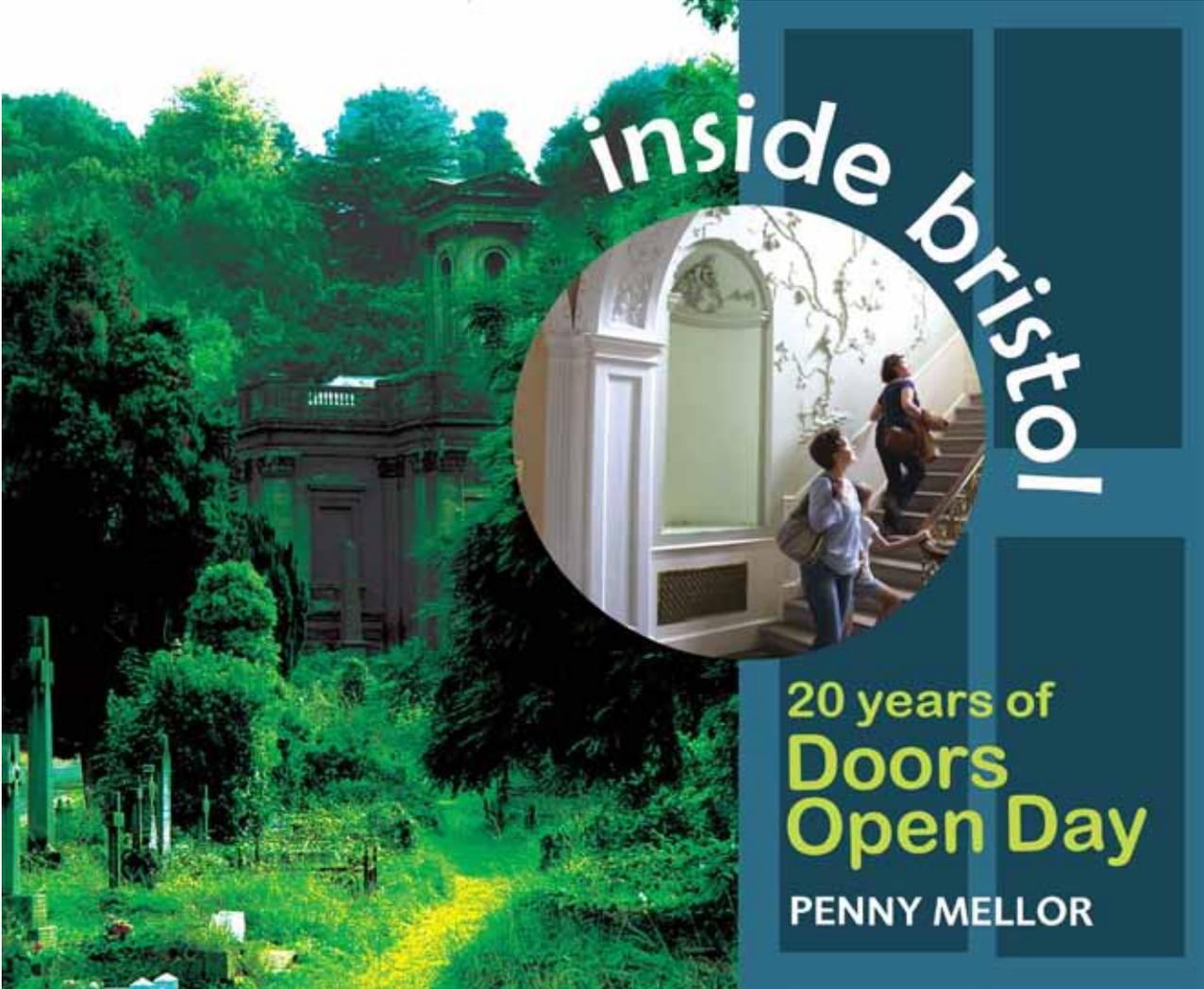
As Nic James, the MV Balmoral Fund Director said, the Balmoral is about much more than day trips. It is as much a part of our heritage as a Grade I-listed building. "It is vital we raise £350,000 to carry out a major refit in the winter of 2013/14."

Campaigners have already raised £70,000 of the £350,000 needed and Bristol Civic Society has recently donated £100 to the fund.

Volunteers are always needed to help with fund-raising, help the crew and for maintenance work. Please contact Dave Bassett (Tel: 07868 421338; email: bassettdave@yahoo.co.uk; or visit [www.mvbalmoral.org.uk](http://www.mvbalmoral.org.uk))

John Gillett  
Tel: 07779 798328  
Email: [webmaster@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:webmaster@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk)

# New book reveals 20 years of opening doors



**I**nside Bristol marks the 20th anniversary of the highly successful Bristol Doors Open Day, during which venues not usually open to the general public welcome visitors on one day each September. Twenty-eight buildings participated in the first event in 1994, when the organisers were overwhelmed by the public’s enthusiastic response.

Twenty years later, the event’s popularity continues to grow, with 60 venues participating in each year. In 2012 there were an extraordinary 50,000 visits. Over the intervening years, 180 different doors have opened. Venues have ranged in time from the 3rd-century remains of a Roman villa to Bristol University’s Centre for Nanoscience.

Visitors have marvelled at behind the scenes visits to such venues as Bristol’s Museum and Art Gallery, peered down the tracks of the

disused Clifton Rocks Railway, inched their way through Redcliffe caves and viewed the city from the top of some of its tallest buildings. This latest Redcliffe Press book tells the remarkable story in more detail.

Doors Open Day organiser for all 20 years, Penny Mellor sets the scene in an introductory chapter and discusses a sample of 31 venues. All are beautifully illustrated in colour.

INSIDE BRISTOL - 20 Years of Doors Open Day, by Penny Mellor  
ISBN 978-1-908326-42-3  
£10 - Published by Redcliffe Press Ltd of Bristol

Further information from John Sansom  
0117 973 7207; info@redcliffepress.co.uk

## Centre manager, Christine Davis, unveils exhibitions and events making up the new season

**W**e've been delighted to see many Bristol Civic Society members at our events and exhibitions during the last six months. We have a varied autumn/winter programme coming up alongside further other opportunities to get involved in our work.

### Opportunities: Doors Open Day and Young Ambassadors

The 20th anniversary of the much-loved Bristol Doors Open Day was celebrated in September. We're excited to announce that the Architecture Centre will be taking over organising this event from 2014, following the retirement of coordinator Penny Mellor.

Penny's will be a hard act to follow but we are looking forward to building on the success of the past two decades. We welcome suggestions for future development and will also be looking for volunteers to help us make it happen.

Our Bristol Ambitious City Young Ambassadors programme, supported by the Ove Arup Foundation, will empower young people to have a say in shaping their city. We will be developing the programme from this autumn and we would welcome help from anyone with place-making enthusiasm and expertise.

### Autumn/winter highlights

**High-Rise (Oct 9 – Nov 17):** Exhibition by artist Peter Bobby, with related events including artist talk and film screening.

**Lectures and debates:** Include Graham Stirk of Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners (Oct 16) and panel discussion 'Shaping Schools: Designing for the Future' (Nov 6).

**Half-term family activities:** We'll be joining the first UK Family Arts Festival, including the Big Draw on November 2.

**Christmas Design Temporium (Nov 26 – Dec 22):** Visit our festive pop-up design shop in collaboration with Made in Bristol and Room 13.

**(Feb - Mar 2014) RIBA International Awards** exhibition and related lecture series with a focus on housing.

For more information on these and other events visit [www.architecturecentre.co.uk](http://www.architecturecentre.co.uk), subscribe to our e-newsletter, and follow us on Twitter at @ArchCentre.

### Architecture Centre Friends

If you share our passion for great buildings and places, why not consider joining as a Friend? From just £10 you can enjoy a range of benefits while supporting our work. More information at [www.architecturecentre.co.uk/friends](http://www.architecturecentre.co.uk/friends)



Architecture Centre, Harbourside

Photo: francesgard.com

To find out how you can participate, or for programme updates, contact the Architecture Centre at [info@architecturecentre.co.uk](mailto:info@architecturecentre.co.uk).

[www.architecturecentre.co.uk](http://www.architecturecentre.co.uk)



We are delighted to introduce Tom Eddington, the the Bristol Civic Society's award winner from the Architecture and Planning Degree Course at the University of the West of England.

Tom is now working with Atkins in Bristol for two years, he will then complete his studies. He is also involved with AEOB - Abolish Empty Office Blocks.

Tom will give a talk to the society on February 4, 2014.

During the academic year, Wendy Pollard, who established the student award 10 years ago, and I attended student critiques at UWE, getting to know the students and their work. At the final degree show, we chose Tom's project for its viability and presentation.

Heather Leeson



Wendy Pollard

Many thanks to Wendy for her many years supporting Bristol Civic Society as a Newsletter Editor, Executive member, Environmental Award group member and organiser of the UWE Student Award

## UWE student award winner 2013



### How children can blossom thanks to secret bit of Earth

**Sensory garden and respite care centre for children with special educational needs.**

**Churchfields Industrial Estate, Salisbury**

When Mary Lennox asks "might I have a bit of earth?" in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*, it symbolises the changes in her understanding of the world she occupies, her attitudes toward the people in it and a move to engage with it. The garden offers a hidden space for sensory exploration and personal growth.

Through access to it, Mary is able to develop, becoming healthier and more sociable. Her first-hand experience of nature provokes a greater response in her than of any human contact hitherto. The greening of the garden serves as a metaphor for the formation of friendships and the blossoming of her character: a transition from solitary misfit to a happy sociable child.

Drawing on themes in *The Secret Garden*, 'A Bit of Earth' proposes a garden and interior spaces to offer sensory experiences for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN). The garden lies hidden from view within a public

green space, enclosed and protected by foliage and the surrounding landscape of the Harnham Water Meadows in Salisbury.

The town seems to be well provisioned for local education but appears to be remote from similar highly specialised or diverse function respite facilities.

The garden has been designed to include a wide range of stimulating features and areas of calm secluded from the active spaces, achieving both cases using the natural landscape and artificial spaces such as sensory rooms hidden within the garden.

The main building provides spaces for indoor sensory activities and education as well as physical therapy rooms including a hydrotherapy pool, catering and an overnight respite centre.

This building acts as a barrier to the public areas of the Churchfields site permitting only those that access the scheme to know the secrets of the spaces beyond the garden wall.

The need for purpose built care centres is increasing, the ability of national healthcare to ensure the survival of premature births has risen dramatically since the end of the 20th century and because of this the number of children with disabilities has also risen. In January 2012 there were approximately 13,000 school pupils (around 19% of the total) in Wiltshire that could benefit from specialist facilities, 1,700 of which



are the responsibility of the local councils to provide for. Factors such as these have led to the introduction of the Children and Families Bill 2013 which will see significant changes in local and national councils' responsibilities for education, health and care plans for people aged 0 to 25 with SEN. Increases in provision of affordable childcare services and facilities will be required if the aims of the Bill are to be met, which will promote the development of many similar schemes to this project.

A project of this type demands a high level of understanding of the end user needs, which are incredibly diverse over a wide spectrum of SEN. As a Part 1 Architecture student this was

very overwhelming but valuable in learning to recognise the shortfalls of the design and formulating and understanding of how to better it.

I am very grateful to family and friends who provided a wealth of professional knowledge without which the outcome would have been immature.

Tom Eddington  
Email: t.eddington@me.com1

## Heritage Group

# Can we make the Old City a gem for Bristol?

**T**he Heritage Group marked its return in May with the successful workshop about Know Your Place with Peter Insole, archaeological officer at Bristol City Council. Following on from this, another meeting was held in September to discuss what we could do to help people rediscover the heritage of the Old City.

We are keen to help people discover the walk inside the Old City walls, but would also like to hear of stories, ideas and, of course, any help our readers could offer to improve the area in general.

**Our next meeting, where we will discuss the Old City and more, is on November 19 at 6pm, at the The Famous Royal Navy Volunteer, 17-18 King Street.**

We are keen to continue promoting Know Your Place as the tool that binds together the heritage stories of different places in Bristol, and we hope to meet those interested in our city's heritage so please find details of our events opposite.

For further information and contacts,  
email [heritage@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:heritage@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk) or call  
Mariateresa Bucciante on 07962 832654

### **Know Your Place, Participation in Heritage Thursday, October 24, 9.30am - 4.30pm**

**Venue, The Pavilion, Harbourside (above Jack's Brasserie)  
– free event but booking is essential.**

An opportunity for members to learn about these three initiatives: Our Place, the community character mapping toolkit; Heritage Eye, the new smartphone app that enables the public to carry out building at risk surveys; The Local List, a new record of locally important heritage assets. For all bookings and information contact Pete Insole, [Pete.Insole@bristol.gov.uk](mailto:Pete.Insole@bristol.gov.uk)

### **Bristol's Heritage Buildings: Relics or Legacies? Venue: John Wesley's New Room in the Horsefair**

An invitation to those involved in rescuing, reusing, reinvigorating, regenerating or restoring Bristol's Heritage Buildings to be involved in mounting an exhibition and to attend a free networking event.

Exhibition: October 21 - November 23  
Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm, the New Room

### **Networking Event: Saturday, November 16, 1.30-5pm**

For information on the events contact  
[jamesgibbs@btinternet.com](mailto:jamesgibbs@btinternet.com)



# ENVIRONMENTAL AWARDS 2013

Our awards team met in June to select from 18 nominations to meet our broad criteria:

- Environmental improvement for a new building;
- Improving an existing building;
- Improved landscaping.

Once again the membership were neither shaken nor stirred to produce nominations and we rely still on our 'outside' regulars to produce the goods. From a wide range of very interesting but rather unpromising offerings we have chosen:

### 1. The Bristol Art Gallery & Museum

A cleverly installed new lift has created increased use and circulation to the upper floor. (Architects Alec French working with the Museum Conservator)

### 2. Corner Pipe Lane opposite the Colston Hall

Student Flats by CSJ Planning Consultants Ltd and Urban Creation developers.

### 3. Lakeshore Hartcliffe new Development

Flats by Urban Splash and architects Ferguson Mann.

### 4. Whiteladies Road

New development/public realm by Greater Bristol Bus Network team and City Design Group

### 5. Ambra Vale, Clifton Wood

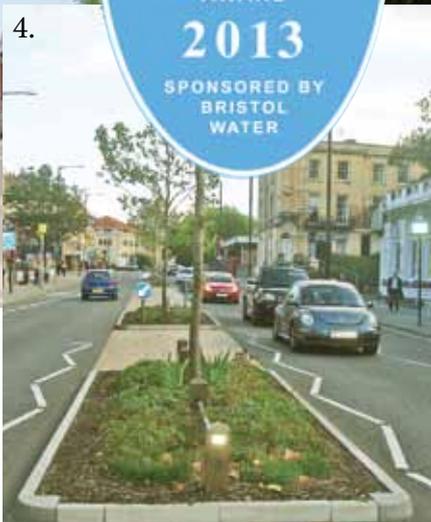
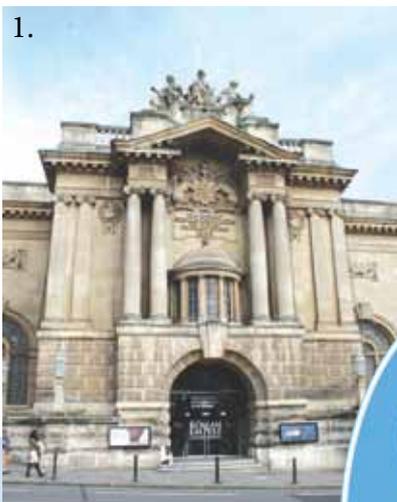
Four- and two-storey buildings both enhance the corner off Hotwells Road and are designed by architect Mike McKee.

The awards continue to be generously sponsored by Bristol Water and our very striking oval plaques are produced by Wards of Bristol as efficiently as ever.

**The awards ceremony on Tuesday, October 22 at 11am, will be generously provided by the Art Gallery on the first floor of the Museum and Art Gallery, Queens Road BS8 1RL in the Teaching Room.** As there is limited space and the winners will naturally take up the numbers I would ask any members to please ask me first so we can book a place.

We look forward to seeing visitors and members.

Charles Fox - Awards Organiser Tel: 0117 927 9578  
Email: cfox868@btinternet.com





## PRIDE AT RETURN TO A WORTHY WINNER

*Designer of Civic Society award winning sheltered housing development returns to find a strong and vibrant community is blooming*

It is with some trepidation that an architect returns to one of his buildings three years after completion, and so it was when I returned to Waverley Gardens to review the 2010 Civic Society Environmental Award winner.

How had this development of 66 very sheltered housing apartments developed and matured? How had it integrated into the community? And how was it performing environmentally?

The scheme was developed by Brunelcare to provide assisted living opportunities to local elderly people. Residents live independently in their own apartments, but can call on additional care and support when needed.

Demand for apartments at Waverley has been strong, and although the care needs of the residents has been higher than expected, there is no sense of the scheme turning into a care home. The courts have developed into friendly supportive communities, with shared gardens and bright sunny internal atrium spaces for residents to meet and chat.

The landscaped courts are maturing well. Some changes have been made, a small raised fishpond is now a raised flowerbed, and the large pond is now the fishpond, with a multitude of fish, enthusiastically fed by the residents each day. Each courtyard has a different theme, and these work well to aid orientation.

Each of the ground floor apartments has a small garden space and the residents tend these with pride.

Waverley Gardens was constructed under a design and build contract and some teething problems have been encountered, mostly associated with the services. Poor quality light fittings have had to be

replaced, and there have been issues with the under-floor heating in some apartments. Although this system provides excellent levels of comfort, when faults are encountered, they have proved challenging to resolve. Overall it has proved an economic and environmentally sustainable scheme.

The external walls are faced in timber, and this is ageing well where the sun has bleached the surface, but it is less successful on north-facing elevations. The green roofs are establishing themselves well, thanks in some part to the liquid sunshine of the British summer!

The communal spaces continue to be popular. The cafe provides meals to residents and visitors, there is a busy hairdresser's, and the lounge provides a comfortable meeting place. The cinema has regular film nights, and the laundry and spa are well used. The only casualty has been the shop, initially operated by the residents themselves.

NOMA are proud of the design of Waverley Gardens. It was recognised with a Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) Building for Life Gold Award, and it won best Extra Care Scheme from the Elderly Accommodation Council. But it is the community that has grown up within that is a testament to the hard work of the residents and the Brunelcare team.

As the links spread into the local community its reputation has grown. It has been a worthy winner of the Bristol Civic Society Environmental Award.

Steve Davis, Director, NOMA Architects  
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Ursa - by Jamie Gillman

# STRONG FUTURE FOR BEARPIT THANKS TO WEAK THOUGHT PLANNING



*This is no wishy-washy concept, says Henry Shaftoe. Regeneration is based on determined vision that is flexible to adapt to changing needs*

**A**fter three years of behind-the-scenes effort from a dedicated team of volunteers (several of them Bristol Civic Society members) working closely with Bristol City Council, visible improvements are gradually emerging at the “Bearpit” (the formerly desolate sunken space at St James Barton Roundabout – just north of Broadmead).

“Gradually” and “emerging” are terms used advisedly, as the Bearpit Improvement Group is engaged in a radical urban regeneration experiment.

The approach being taken is “weak thought planning” – a concept developed by the French urban sociologist Yves Chalais. He was concerned by the high failure rate of “master planning” (with all its totalitarian and misogynistic undertones). Many “masterplans” either do not get implemented (there have been at least two masterplans to transform the Bearpit that never

came to fruition) or they do not work out as intended (with plenty of examples in Bristol to choose from).

Master plans are generally fixed in advance and therefore cannot adapt to changes and emerging needs that become apparent as a new piece of urban fabric is built and subsequently used.

“Weak thought planning” is not a wishy-washy concept – its “strength” is that it takes an incremental, organic approach to design that can be adjusted to the everyday reality of use and demand. It still offers an overarching vision for a place; the difference is that the vision is achieved gradually and flexibly.

The vision for the Bearpit is to achieve a place that is “welcoming, safe, diverse and inclusive” and everything being tried there aims at one or more of these goals.

So, for example, the fruit stall is not just a place where you can buy your ‘five a day’. It also makes the Bearpit feel safer and more welcoming by generating activity. The ping-pong table, meanwhile, means that anyone from any background can engage in a bit of healthy, outdoor sport.

Not everything works out as intended but, because they are relatively low-budget, ‘failures’ can be modified or replaced.

The Bearpit Improvement Group is organised along a number of workstreams: art, play, trading, greening, heritage and physical changes. The biggest transformation (if it goes ahead, which is looking likely) will be to reclaim part of one of the vehicle lanes on the roundabout for pedestrians and cyclists. This, along with surface-level crossings, will enable people to access or circumnavigate the Bearpit without having to use the subways – a key factor in improving the sense of safety there, particularly at night.

If you think that weak thought planning is too “weak” to use in Bristol, it should be noted that this approach has been influential in the urban regeneration of Brussels and reconciles well

with the New York-based Project for Public Space philosophy of “lighter, quicker, cheaper” which has been used to transform numerous public spaces worldwide.

And, a little closer to home, Gabriel’s Wharf (on London’s South Bank, just a little east of the National Theatre), is a highly successful low budget space regeneration project that has incrementally evolved over the last 20 years under the management of a community association.

The Bearpit Improvement Group needs more helpers; if you would like to get directly involved please contact Alan Morris of the Bristol Civic Society at [enquiries@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk) or call 07766 442495.



Relaxing in the Bearpit



Sports in the Bearpit



# PLANNING APPLICATIONS GROUP

## *A review of the group and its campaign against objectionable signage and adverts*

Our group is concerned with the effect that various proposed developments would have on:

- Bristol’s unique natural features;
- Its treasured buildings;
- The attractive spaces between the buildings;
- The individual characters of its different areas.

We submit objections when we consider that a particular planning application would have a harmful impact on these.

Hence, we have joined with other groups in mounting a strong resistance to Bristol Zoo’s recent application to continue using part of The Downs off Ladies Mile for an overflow car park. Although the Zoo secured another temporary permission, it was for three years for a maximum of 45 days per annum, and not the five years and 60 days for which it applied.

We have to balance different issues. For example, we recognise that student accommodation is needed in Bristol, and that it is a suitable use for a number of redundant office blocks, particularly in the centre.

By having blocks of student accommodation in the centre, some of the pressure on housing in the inner suburbs is relieved. However, poor conversions, which would result in overcrowded buildings with virtually no outdoor space or places for storing bikes and bins, can drag down the appearance and quality of their surroundings. The Group has objected to a number of such applications in and around Whiteladies Road.

Similarly, some increase in population density in residential areas can be beneficial in reducing pressure on open land and, if suitably located close to good public transport routes, cutting the demand for car journeys. However, such developments must be of good quality, and be in keeping with the scale and character of the surrounding area.

In shopping areas, too, particularly outside the principal shopping districts, there can be a conflict between wanting to encourage use of empty shops, but recognising the risks of permitting undesirable uses – for

example take-away food shops.

### Signage and advertising

Bristol has some wonderful buildings and spaces which give great pleasure, including the cathedrals, St Mary Redcliffe, numerous other churches, the Clifton Suspension Bridge, the Wills Building, the Royal Fort, Cabot Tower and the ss Great Britain. The views of these major features are particularly fine at dusk, when many of them are silhouetted against the evening sky, but their beauty is extremely vulnerable to egregious and unnecessary advertising signage.



While this term can cover everything from large hoardings to small signs outside cafes, the society has no wish to oppose small-scale informative signs and adverts which cause no harm. Indeed, Bristol City Council can only refuse planning permission to signs and adverts which would harm the amenity of the area surrounding them or which could impair public safety (usually to do with road safety).

Within these constraints, however, the group is determined to fight against signs and adverts that would harmfully affect wide areas and compete with major landmarks, especially:

- Unnecessarily bright, high-level or large signs;
- The insidious march of “Corporate Branding”;
- Advertising hoardings;
- Digital or LED advertising screens.

Most signage does not need any illumination for it to be informative, but many companies want it to be illuminated as

brightly as possible. This often crosses the boundary between informative signage and objectionable advertising. If signage needs to be illuminated, then we prefer it to be restrained, generally using external lighting, rather than being internally illuminated.

### High-level signs

High-level signs are generally superfluous. Virtually all hotels are now booked in advance by internet or phone, rather than visitors wandering round scanning the skies for hotel signs. Satnavs, smartphones and taxis are used to locate hotels when first-time visitors arrive.

Similarly, persons needing solicitors, for example, are unlikely to look to the tops of buildings for suggestions, nor use rooftop signs to find the location of their offices.

Yet the city centre has at least three hotels and a solicitor’s office with internally illuminated signs high on their tall buildings.

### Corporate branding

Some multi-site national organisations seem particularly focussed on installing the brightest, most intrusive, signage and branding that they can get away with; for example Lloyds Bank’s recent rebranding exercise has resulted in some really objectionable applications, and the society has had some success in helping the council refuse them.

### Advertising hoardings

Advertising hoardings provide relatively high incomes for the owners of the buildings or land involved, as well as the advertising agencies. While they can sometimes bring brightness to run-down areas, they are often intrusive, and can make cities look common and down-market.

Many of them are also concerned with ‘corporate brand awareness’, of no benefit to people who live near these adverts, or who have to pass them regularly. We cannot control individual advertisements, but we can object to new poster sites, and we do so.

### Digital or LED advertising screens

A recent development in advertising is the

# MAJOR SITES GROUP

## *New uses for empty buildings*

introduction of 'digital' or 'LED' advertising screens. These are the size of hoardings, but are composed of an intensely bright array of thousands of tiny 'LED' lights, like the ones in the rear lights of modern cars.

Such screens can be seen alongside the M4 near the Chiswick flyover, and by the M5 and M6 in the West Midlands. The advertisements either move or change frequently, and are very distracting – which is what the advertisers intend!

These screens are bright during the day, but can be dazzling in the evenings and night when ambient light levels are lower. They can completely overwhelm the surrounding area at such times, and be a real nuisance.

There have been a couple of applications for them in Bristol so far, and the refusal of one has been upheld at appeal. We will continue to encourage the council to reject all future applications, as we see such signs as being entirely harmful to the quality of life in our city.

Peter Brown  
Email: [peterbrown2001@gmail.com](mailto:peterbrown2001@gmail.com)

### **New members of PAG welcome**

If you are interested in these sorts of issues and can spare a couple of hours every third Monday to attend our meetings, please come and join us. You don't need professional expertise, just enthusiasm for maintaining and improving the quality of Bristol's unique townscape and urban character.

Our meetings are informal and relaxed, and normally followed by a chat in a nearby hostelry. If you would like to come along to a meeting, please contact John Payne at [johnpayne997@btinternet.com](mailto:johnpayne997@btinternet.com) or call 0117 924 0634.

To survive, old buildings must have new uses but change ought to be sensitive and respond to the local character. Student Castle, a company that builds student accommodation, has two developments in Bristol to bring the Pro-Cathedral and the former St Mary's Hospital back to life and ensure their long-term futures as part of Bristol's fabric.

### **The Pro-Cathedral**



The Pro-Cathedral faces on to Park Place beside Waitrose in Queen's Road; it is Grade II-listed. Construction began in 1830 but a history of major design changes followed caused by financial difficulties aggravated by stability problems. By 1876, the roof was complete and the Narthex-facing Park Place added.

Much of the building has been vacant since 1973 when the Church moved to the new Catholic Cathedral in Clifton. The Pro-Cathedral was on the Listed Buildings at Risk Register because of its poor state of repair.

The conversion will provide 230 student beds. The new apartments inside the nave show off the elegant Hanson timber frame. The new external residential blocks will step down from the Pro-Cathedral. To replace the current car park that leads from Park Place there will be a new entrance square. The photograph does not do justice to the quality of the restoration of the exterior. The society has supported this development that delivers a substantial conservation gain.

### **St Mary's (lately Nuffield) Hospital**



The hospital closed when its services transferred to the Chesterfield in Clifton. Access is from Upper Byron Place, just off the Clifton Triangle. Brandon Hill forms the southern boundary.

The society supports conversion to student accommodation so close to Bristol University. The developer will retain the west elevation of the original building, which employs classical and Italianate decorative elements. The society does not object to the demolition of buildings behind the façade. None of the original interior detail survives hospital use, while the rear extensions are ugly.

The society has told Bristol City Council and the developer that, unfortunately, it objects to the proposed scheme. The society objects to the proposal to build a new floor on top of the existing attic floor. The extension would unbalance the elevation and make it look top-heavy. The scheme also proposes a new building to the south of the existing building. The additional building would cut into and erode the setting of Brandon Hill.

The society considered that, overall, the development would create an excessive mass that would overbear and overdevelop the site.

For more information about the Major Sites Group, contact John Frenkel  
0117 924 0853; [johnfrenkel@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:johnfrenkel@blueyonder.co.uk)



**CIVIC VOICE**  
talking civic sense

Civic Voice is the national charity for the civic movement which leads and supports civic societies as a national movement for quality of place, with people actively improving their towns, cities and villages, and promotes civic pride.

Bristol Civic Society is one of the 290 civic societies that belong to Civic Voice; BCS members are invited to attend the fourth Convention and AGM of Civic Voice to be held at Liverpool Town Hall and the Bluecoat Gallery on **October 25-26**, in partnership with Merseyside Civic Society. There will be BCS members at this event.

#### **Civic Day: Saturday, June 21, 2014**

It is now time to start thinking about how BCS will celebrate Civic Day 2014. Let us have your ideas.

See [info@civicvoice.org.uk](mailto:info@civicvoice.org.uk) for full details or phone 0151 708 9920.  
Civic voice new address: 60 Duke Street, Liverpool L1 5AA

## *Join us*

**Bristol Civic Society**  
- an independent force for a better Bristol  
- is a registered charity.

**A large part of our income,  
which comes from membership subscriptions,  
is spent on producing this magazine.**

**If you are not already a BCS member and would like to  
support us and have Better Bristol magazine  
delivered to your address, please consider joining us.**

**Individual membership for the first year is £10 if you set up a  
standing order and £20 annually thereafter.**

**Contact Maureen Pitman, Membership Secretary**  
• [membership@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:membership@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk)  
**0117 974 3637**

**[bristolcivicsociety.org.uk/membership/membership-form](http://bristolcivicsociety.org.uk/membership/membership-form)**



## Who's who in the society

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You can sign up to the society's e-bulletin at  
[www.bristolcivicsociety.org.uk](http://www.bristolcivicsociety.org.uk)  
Past copies of the e-bulletin and the  
magazine are also available to download.

**Bristol Civic Society, Registered Charity No: 244414.**

BETTER BRISTOL magazine  
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The opinions expressed in this magazine do not  
necessarily represent those of Bristol Civic Society

**Saturday, November 9, 11am**

### 'Beside the still waters to Lollypop Be-Bop',

*A sculpture walk in central Bristol led by Francis Greenacre.*

The walk starts at the heart of Medieval Bristol, then to

Castle Park for the largest programme of sculptures in SW England, onto Broadmead and St James Barton and finally Lollypop Be-Bop!

To book a place, phone 07535 074296 or email [walks@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:walks@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk)

Members £3 non-members £7

**Monday, November 11**

### BIG EVENT – FREE High water in Bristol?

*How will we cope with the city's tides, rivers and water waste in the age of rising sea levels?*

Recent studies undertaken by Bristol City Council (BCC) in partnership with the Environment Agency have shown that the centre of Bristol faces many flooding challenges. These challenges are predicted to become very significant as climate change causes sea levels to rise.

Such flood risks have important implications for development in the city. BCC, with its partners, is developing a long-term strategy to manage flood risks to the city. This public presentation and debate will update you with the latest news on these issues, and enable you to have your own views heard by the city's policy makers.

The event begins at 7pm at Colston Hall No.2 (doors open 6.30pm). After an hour of individual presentations the speakers will then form a panel on stage for questions and debate. Event closes 9-9.30pm. The event is free and no booking is needed.

See page 3 for full details

**Saturday, November 16, 11am**

### Bristol's gateway to the Maritime world

*A stroll around the Cumberland basin, led by Ed Hall*

A view of the workings and developments around Jessop's grand works of 1805-1809 to tame the tides that twice daily

disrupted and cleansed the great port of Bristol from Saxon times. A stout pair of shoes is recommended as we may stray off the beaten track.

To book a place, phone 07535 074296 or email [walks@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:walks@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk)

Members £2 non-members £5

**Monday, December 2, from 7.30pm**

### Social Evening

*The Famous Royal Navy Volunteer, 17-18 King Street*

Everyone welcome, come along for a chat and a drink, meet other BCS members.

**Sunday, December 8, 10am**

### A guided bike ride

With Peter Weeks and Bristol Cycle Campaign around

some of Bristol's new buildings and places that have won a BCS Environmental Award.

Easy pace, cafe stop. Meet 10am Arnolfini, Harbourside.

Free - no booking necessary.

**Wednesday, December 11**

### European Green Capital 2015:

*How Bristol won and the next steps - Darren Hall*

The European Green Capital Award was set up in 2008 to reward cities that consistently achieve high environmental standards and are committed to further environmental improvement and sustainable development.

In this talk, Darren Hall will answer the question "How on earth did we win"? He will introduce us to the Green Capital Partnership – its

history and journey to date - outline the next steps towards Bristol becoming a "laboratory for change" and talk about potential incompatibility between conservation of the built and the natural environment.

As Manager of the Bristol Green Capital Partnership since 2011, Darren Hall was instrumental in winning the Green Capital Award for the city.

The event begins at 7.30pm in the Upper Meeting Room at Friends Meeting House, Hampton Road, BS6 6JE. Members £2 (voluntary); non-members £6. Booking is not required.

**Thursday, January 9, 2014**

### **What the Tudors did to Bristol - Stuart Hammond**

The social and political changes wrought by Henry VIII and Elizabeth I had a dramatic effect on the city of Bristol, and the lives of its people.

In this talk, Stuart Hammond will focus on how the 'big ticket' episodes of the period affected the geography, politics and economy of our city. How did such diverse events as the English Reformation and the Spanish Armada affect the daily lives of 16th-century

Bristolians? And how much of that impact has left its mark on the urban geography and society of Bristol to the present day? Stuart Hammond is a purchasing and supply chain consultant, currently engaged in obtaining large-scale funding for a variety of green and zero carbon energy systems. He also writes historical thrillers. The first, 'Minion', is set during Elizabeth I's visit to Bristol in 1574. Its sequel, 'Serpentine', is in preparation.

The event begins at 7.30pm in the Upper Meeting Room at Friends Meeting House, Hampton Road, BS6 6JE. Members £2 (voluntary); non-members £6. Booking is not required.

**Tuesday, February 4**

### **Old Market regeneration, Ashton Court update and Student Award Winner 2013-14**

**Leighton Deburca, Peter Weeks and Tom Eddington**

Old Market has been a vital gateway and marketplace for the best part of 1,000 years, shaping the city of Bristol as it grew. Like much of post-war Britain, it suffered from poor urban planning. A key feature of Old Market Quarter's regeneration is the review and revisioning of both its built environment (particularly its road layout and transport system) and its neighbourhood boundaries. Leighton De Burca is Old Market's Placemaking Director. He will explain the regeneration strategy, tell us what has been achieved, and what is yet to come.

Ashton Court has been the subject of much attention during

2013 with a major study and public consultation to examine how to restore this Grade I-listed, derelict, 400-year-old house and bring it back to life. Peter Weeks has represented Bristol Civic Society on the Working Group steering this project for many years. He will bring the story of Ashton Court right up to date and describe the plans for its restoration and future use.

Tom Eddington is the current holder of the society's Student Award, worth £200, given every year for an outstanding piece of work by a final-year Architecture and Planning degree student at the University of the West of England. Tom will explain his project to create a garden and interior facilities to offer sensory experiences to children with Special Educational Needs (SEN), on a site close to Salisbury Cathedral.

The event begins at 7pm at The Architecture Centre, 16 Narrow Quay, BS1 4QA. Members £2 (voluntary); non-members £5. Booking is not required.

**Sunday, March 2, 10am**

### **Bristol at War – a walk led by Eugene Byrne**

Memories of the First World War tend to focus on the horrors of fighting in the trenches, but the Home Front has a fascinating story to tell. Eugene Byrne, author of a forthcoming book about Bristol's

part in the Great War, looks at some city centre locations associated with the city's war effort and has some surprising tales to tell.

To book a place, phone 07535 074296 or email [walks@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:walks@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk)  
Members £2, non-members £5

**Thursday, March 13**

### **Biophilic Architecture - Dr Mike Wells**

More than 50% of Earth's population currently lives in cities. Although high-density living in compact cities reduces carbon footprints, pollution and damage to the countryside, there is near total separation between people and the ecosystems that support them. So what is going to make living in the concrete jungle bearable? Can this tie in with adaptation to climate change?

In this talk, Dr Mike Wells will propose that greening our living space by using "biophilic" or "vegetated" architecture is a prerequisite for successful urbanism in the 21st century. He will add some thoughts about how this might apply to Bristol.

Dr Wells is the author of many papers and articles on ecologically informed design and co-authored the UK's guidance on ecological impact assessment. As Visiting Research Fellow in Ecologically Informed Design and Masterplanning at the Bath School of Architecture and Civil Engineering he has been teaching green infrastructure design for more than 15 years.

The event begins at 7.30pm in the Upper Meeting Room at Friends Meeting House, Hampton Road, BS6 6JE. Members £2 (voluntary); non-members £6. Booking is not required.

**Saturday, April 5, 11am**

### **University Precinct, ancient and modern**

*– a walk led by Angela Nutbrown*

This area north-west of the historic centre of Bristol includes 80 listed buildings. The walk around the heart of Bristol University will cover the history and development of Tyndall's Park, St Michael's Hill, Royal Fort and the university. Also, the interesting architecture

for which the university is responsible. Mostly flat and downhill walking, around two hours.

To book a place, phone 07535 074296 or email [walks@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:walks@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk)  
Members £2 non-members £5