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Introduction

A liveable city is a city that’s good for people; in terms of transport, this is a city free from congestion, as well as air and noise pollution; a city that’s accessible for people of all ages and abilities, and where people want to live, work, play and visit. Bristol has ambitions to be a city with inspiring and vibrant public spaces, enabling communities and high streets to come alive and thrive; where people walking, riding a bike and using public transport are far more common, sharing space with people driving slowly.

Bristol is consistently ranked among the most liveable cities in the UK, thanks to the high quality of its urban environment and culture. But there is far more that can be achieved, and the benefits to the city and its economy would be profound. Designing streets for people works both socially and economically – customers that can reach shops on foot and by bike are more likely to visit and return and spend more over time, whilst retailers and businesses benefit from the flexibility and attractiveness of their surrounding area.

Bristol has a long tradition of reclaiming public space. Queen Square, a popular green space in the heart of the city, was closed to traffic in 1992, and it’s hard to imagine now that a road ran across College Green in front of Bristol’s magnificent cathedral. These are now Bristol landmarks which have improved the city centre and created high quality public places for people to gather and enjoy.

In the Old City around Corn Street and St Nicholas Market, management of traffic to reduce traffic volumes has created spaces that prioritise walking and cycling and enable local businesses to thrive. Special events which turn a street into a temporary park (‘Park on Park Street’) or restrict traffic on a Sunday (‘Keep Sunday Special’) enable people to see the potential of the city’s streets to be used and shared in different ways. The Council’s ambition is to further reduce traffic in the Old City to improve the public realm and enhance important pedestrian routes. Streets and spaces throughout the city centre will be green and attractive, designed to meet the needs of people using them, rather than primarily as travel corridors. These streets will become the beating heart of Bristol where people work, meet, shop, socialise and celebrate.

And it won’t just be the city centre. Improving public space in communities and neighbourhoods throughout the city will extend liveability to all parts, helping local businesses and communities to thrive, and improving health and wellbeing for all citizens.

Images showing the impact of restricting traffic in College Green and Queen Square
Case Studies

Reducing driving speeds

Driving with excessive speed and illegal driving are threats to health, especially in deprived areas. In addition, speeding traffic is the issue that tops the public’s list of antisocial behaviour (Poulter and McKenna 2007).

Reducing traffic speed in Bristol is a key policy response which also enjoys wide public support (a survey showed that 65% of Bristolians support 20 miles per hour (mph) on residential streets and 75% on busy streets such as shopping streets) for its role in enhancing liveability. The top three reasons put forward by residents in Bristol for supporting 20mph are:

• fewer serious accidents;
• children playing more safely;
• streets becoming more pleasant to live in.

2015 has seen the ongoing roll-out of 20mph speed limits (equivalent to 30 kilometres per hour) across most of Bristol’s streets, with the last of eight areas launched in September 2015. The objective is to reduce speed and road danger, ensuring people of all ages and abilities can enjoy their streets more. The roll-out follows evidence of the effectiveness of a pilot in two areas of South and East Bristol during 2010 which saw 65% of roads benefiting from a reduction in mean speeds of 1.4 miles per hour, meaning average speeds decreased to 23mph or under, between 7am and 7pm. Approximately 90% of Bristol’s roads are now covered by the 20mph limits, including many sections of main roads in the city centre and where there are shops, schools and housing which generate walking and cycling activity.

Before and after monitoring of speeds, casualties and user perceptions is being undertaken. Statistically significant casualty trends are not yet available with the new 20mph limits in place, but speeds are reducing and public perceptions from phase 1 are very positive.

Lessons learned from the pilots include the need for clear communication in delivering a successful project, particularly when implementation is through signage rather than physical changes to streets. Communication is important firstly in making the case to the public of the merits and the impact of 20mph prior to delivery, and secondly to support a culture change when the speed limit is in place by encouraging compliance and empowering people to drive within the speed limit.

Whilst enjoying wide public support, there is also some vocal opposition to the introduction of 20 mph in Bristol. One way Bristol will be tackling this is by implementing a campaign reinforcing the presence of the 20 mph zones, engaging the people of Bristol in creating a social norm of driving more slowly. Based on an approach that harnesses the tendency of people to be influenced to behave in a certain way if those around them are, and evidence that people care more about what happens locally than across the city or nationally, the campaign will engage with community groups, formal and informal, to raise awareness of the 20mph limits and the benefits to local communities of people driving more slowly.

"It definitely feels that 20 mph has reduced the speed of people driving in Easton. When it came in, if I drove at 20 mph, people drove up close behind me, but it’s not happening so much now as people are more used to it. When people drive more slowly, it’s so much easier with kids. It feels easier to get them across the road - you have a bit more time to walk at a child’s pace, rather than ‘panic stations!’ and having to run. I am less anxious when cars are going past if we are walking and when they are on their scooters.

I feel really positive about 20 mph. It makes the area feel more civilised, there is no acceleration noise and everything feels gentler.”

Clare Smith, Easton
Major street closures for events

Introduced in 2013, ‘Make Sunday Special’ has seen major roads in the city closed to motor traffic, opening them up as public spaces to the people of Bristol and providing a whole new perspective on city life. Taking place on the first Sunday of the month between May and September, the idea is to change residents’ perceptions of their city, showing them how public space, like roads, which are often hidden in plain sight, can be transformed into vibrant shared places. Park Street, for example – a busy, steep road – was transformed into a giant water slide for the day.

Image credit: Bristol City Council

In 2015, Make Sunday Special extended beyond the city centre for the first time, seeing road closures and street events and markets organised by local groups and residents in the area, giving a taste of what makes the different areas of Bristol so vibrant and special, celebrating and showcasing local communities.

Closing streets for children to play out

Playing Out, a Bristol based charity, has pioneered the process of closing streets to motor vehicles for short periods of time – typically for two or three hours, once a week - to let children play out on the pavements and streets outside their homes. This is a novel experience for children – most parents understandably do not feel this is safe ordinarily because of traffic, and would usually take children to a local park, or encourage them to play in the garden (if they have one) or indoors. The aim is to change people’s perceptions of the space outside their front doors, and to encourage them to embrace and use it as a valuable part of their local community, rather than as just a place for people to travel through.

Playing out not only benefits children, but encourages residents to socialise outdoors, often meeting neighbours for the first time. For many, this changes their perception of the local area, strengthening people’s sense of community.

Many parents also perceive a change in awareness and engagement with issues of road safety and traffic awareness amongst children as a result of the scheme, since they were able to experience their local street in a safe way, rather than being warned that it was ‘off-limits’.

There are some challenges too, particularly in getting the support of neighbours that might be opposed to the schemes because they perceive local community and the use of streets in a different way, and indeed a number of schemes failed to get off the ground as a result of objections from local residents or created tensions when they were introduced. Conflict can be minimised, but not always eliminated, by applying an inclusive and flexible design and implementation process.
Empowering communities

Engaging with communities to develop and deliver effective programmes that help residents overcome local barriers to sustainable transport has involved two full-time Community Active Travel Officers encouraging people to travel sustainably, reducing the use of cars by lone drivers and promoting the use of local facilities and shops.

The officers are funded through the Local Sustainable Transport Fund, a fund established by the UK government to enable the delivery by local transport authorities of sustainable transport solutions that support economic growth while reducing carbon, which is due to end in March 2016.

“...I think the whole social aspect of getting to know your neighbours, so for example babysitting and basically if your kids feel comfortable seeing other adults and it means we can all watch out for each other’s kids they become more comfortable with other adults that are local and it provides that. Because we do live in a society that people go to school they come home and everyone shuts their doors, and I think playing out provides that ‘ok let’s get out and mingle’ and it is really good.”

(Female participant)

Events have played a big part in involving communities. Officers take travel information stands and free bike maintenance sessions to popular community events across Bristol to support local residents to travel more sustainably. They have also organised their own events, including the Hallowe’en themed Pumpkin Chase in Eastville Park, and the Easter Egg Hunt in Manor Woods Valley, raising the profile with local communities of green spaces in their neighbourhood.

Officers supported the setting up of a children’s bike exchange for used cycles, which has helped the many families who struggle to afford new bikes as their children grow.

The children’s bike exchange is run by the Ape Project (a non-profit making organisation working with children, young people and their families in Bristol). The Community Active Travel Officers helped the Ape Project secure funding to set up the exchange, and linked them to Sustrans schools officers who helped put Ape in touch with the right people to set up bike exchanges in schools.

The officers have also supported community groups in applying for Active Neighbourhood Transport Grants. The kind of initiatives funded includes:

- Cycle training for black and minority ethnic communities in the inner city, working with the Inner City Health Improvement Team
- Trialling Bristol’s first on-street bike hangar with the Eldon Terrace Residents Group
- A shopping trail in Brislington to encourage local shopping
- Improving entrances and signage in underused green spaces in Brislington Brook and Snuff Mills
- A tourist/visitor walking map of the old city, involving businesses and local artists
- Street enhancement schemes in local high streets
- Local walking maps aimed at older residents
- Family cycling project offering access to bike seats and trailers for young children, with the Wellspring Healthy Living Centre
The officers also helped Ape to secure suitable premises, tools and work-stands, and the scheme now has a manager and two apprentices, with a training programme to support the ongoing sustainability of the bike exchange. There’s been a lot of interest in the scheme and a number of successful bike exchanges have been set up in schools.

**Reclaiming streets for residents**

Bristol introduced some of the first home zones in the UK, based on Dutch design principles. As the name suggests, home zones are places where the streets outside people’s houses are treated as an extension of their homes, with play areas for children, trees and green spaces, and where the space is suited to people walking, riding bikes and playing. People who drive do so at very low speeds, giving priority to other users of the space.

The Dings home zone was developed in an established community just north of Bristol’s main railway station, Temple Meads. The community, together with experts from Sustrans, redesigned their streets, putting people at their heart and making them safer and more attractive places to live. Artists were invited to join the design team to work with residents to create unique and distinctive elements integrated into the new street layouts, such as gateways, seats and surface finishes.

Whilst very effective at changing people’s perceptions of residential streets, retro-fitting to this standard is expensive. Learning from this experience, Sustrans has developed many different approaches to working with communities to redesign their streets at lower cost.

During 2015, a partnership of Bristol City Council and Sustrans trialled Sustrans’ newly-developed, flexible, modular ‘street kit’ in 15 communities around the city. Inspired by the form of a bike chain, the kit is able to bend and shape to suit any space, and is ideally suited to trying out different street arrangements on or off the road, adapting to local constraints, such as existing street furniture. In Bristol it is being used to create temporary public spaces, to trial proposed build-outs from the kerb at junctions to slow traffic, and to test different approaches to prioritising access for people riding bikes and walking, rather than for people driving.

Constructed using recyclable plastic (polyethylene), each link unit is hollow and water-fillable, which means it can be both lightweight to aid transportation and assembly but is very stable when filled forming a robust structure for busy urban settings.
European Green Capital is a prestigious annual award designed to promote and reward the efforts of cities to improve the environment. Bristol is the first ever UK city to win the award.

European Green Capital is run by The European Commission, recognising that Europe’s urban societies face many environmental challenges – and that sustainable, low-carbon living is vital to the future of our cities and our people.

The award was first won by Stockholm in 2010. Since then, Hamburg, Vitoria-Gasteiz, Nantes and Copenhagen have carried the torch. Bristol will hand over to Ljubljana at the end of the year.

**THE BRISTOL METHOD**

The Bristol Method is a knowledge-transfer programme aimed at helping people in other cities understand and apply the lessons that Bristol has learned in becoming a more sustainable city, not just in 2015 but in the last decade.

Each module of the Bristol Method is presented as an easy-to-digest ‘how to’ guide on a particular topic, which use Bristol’s experiences as a case study. The modules contain generic advice and recommendations that each reader can tailor to their own circumstances.

The Bristol Method modules are published on the Bristol 2015 website at www.bristol2015.co.uk/method

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