



an independent force for a **better Bristol**

Manifesto for Bristol

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

Our vision and our role

1) Bristol has distinctive features that make it special to us: for instance, its waterways, harbour, green spaces, hills, position, maritime history, industrial history, buildings, streets, spaces, and architectural design that history has left us, and the vibrant communities that inhabit them. We wish Bristol to live up to its status as a regional capital, reflected in its cityscape, cultural activities and economic life, to be a place its citizens are proud of, and a place that people want to visit, especially through its buildings, facilities and public spaces.

2) We encourage successful blending of the new with the old: to recognise Bristol's assets and to implement change through good planning and design. We want to add to the beauty, character and diversity of the city, and to revitalise areas and improve the quality of life for all across the city. We want places of tranquillity to complement the dynamism and vibrancy of city life. We want the best for Bristol.

3) As a civic society, we focus on the impact on people, place (the built environment) and planet. Well-designed homes, places to work, and outdoor spaces for play, enhance civic pride and sustainable communities.

The climate and ecological emergencies

4) We share the One City Climate Strategy's ambition of a carbon-neutral and climate-resilient Bristol by 2030. We choose approaches that minimise carbon emissions and energy use in the longer-term, such as measures to reduce total car journeys and facilitate other modes of travel.

5) We recognise the ecological emergency and we support action to promote biodiversity. We support action to clean the air. Bristol will be more vulnerable to flooding, and well-designed flood defences can improve the availability of open spaces for people and wildlife.

Citywide planning

6) We take an interest in any issues of cross-Bristol significance, for example the plans for how Bristol should grow across the different parts of the city. We take an interest in West of England Combined Authority plans, and the plans of the local authorities neighbouring the Bristol City Council area, where they affect Bristol.

7) In-city development can make use of existing public transport infrastructure, and allows shorter journeys on foot and cycle. We should look for suitable brownfield sites within the city boundary before considering green-field urban extensions.

8) We recognise there is a housing crisis, and that new homes need to be built in sustainable locations, making good use of brownfield sites. Bristol struggles to meet its demand for new housing, and we recognise that some careful review of the large area of Green Belt in the West of England may be needed, whilst still maximising sustainability objectives.

9) We need to make better use of existing buildings, bringing back into life vacant and underused buildings. Employment opportunities need to be retained alongside new housing to stop the haemorrhaging of skilled and semi-skilled jobs to unsustainable locations. The regeneration of less thriving neighbourhoods must be a priority.

10) New building should be prioritised to be near public transport routes that link centres of services and amenities. This minimises traffic congestion and carbon emissions.

11) Suburban centres should have a sufficient mix of uses and a density of nearby housing to maintain an active life and reduce car journeys – the 20-minute neighbourhood. The city centre and the suburban centres need people living in them, not just commercial activity. They need a mix of tenures and housing types, suitable for both families and single people. We need to promote the social, economic and cultural regeneration of our deprived neighbourhoods as a priority.

Designing buildings and spaces

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

13) In recent years, our city's experience too often has been workmanlike architecture that has failed to respect its context or add beauty. We believe, in line with national policy, that the creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Achieving good design is not though just a question of aesthetics. Well-designed buildings should be sustainable, in construction and use, and respect established principles of urban design. They should work for the people that use them.

14) Visual design matters, but equally important is that buildings and spaces work for the people that use them and are fully accessible and welcoming to all, including people with disabilities, parents with children, and older people; that they are safe and secured by design, and that they facilitate activities - for instance, ground floor frontages of large blocks that are welcoming to street life.

15) The spaces between buildings are as important as the buildings. Public areas help establish a sense of place, and high quality design encourages their use. Access to nature, green spaces and tranquil spaces has been shown to be important for personal well-being. No new development should be planned without outdoor space, and family housing should be provided with space for children to play safely. We should ensure there is space, and connected spaces, for nature to recover.

16) We recognise the importance of higher density development in making good use of scarce land, especially near transport nodes and near centres of shops, services and employment. This does not in our view automatically require a tall building. In general, we support 'gentle densification', which is generally understood to mean density that is achieved at street level, with homes more sensitively placed in the townscape and designed to foster a sense of belonging. Where tall buildings are built, it is important to protect key views across the city.

17) All major developments should be 'liveable' in the following ways:

- provide a mixture of accommodation for different household types and lifecycle stages, including family units.
- provide a suitable mixture of social, affordable and market value homes
- avoid single-aspect units, include angled windows for wider views, provide external balconies
- provide outside space for children to play
- provide good communal facilities for the occupants
- be well-maintained and support residents with caretaking or concierge services

18) We support developments that achieve the highest sustainability standards, as measured by the various industry standards. We support developments that are net zero in development and in use. We support re-use of buildings and materials as an alternative to re-build.

Streets and transport

19) To reduce carbon emissions, air pollution and traffic noise, we support initiatives that encourage sustainable transport choices, whilst maintaining accessibility for those with reduced mobility. We support measures that facilitate active travel for shorter urban journeys, including high quality walking and cycling routes, and improved public transport, including dedicated road space to reduce delays from congestion and to make services more reliable.

20) The street environment matters. They are places where we meet and they provide both backdrop and context for buildings. Given their importance, too many of our streets are unappealing and even alienating. We support initiatives to keep our streets clean, safer to use, and free of unnecessary clutter and unsightly tagging. We want well-cared for streets that are welcoming to everyone.

How we seek to influence

21) As new development evolves, we campaign to improve it, working proactively and constructively within the system, both at the city-wide strategic/policy level and at the level of individual developments. We base our views on the principles we have set out and founded on our fund of experience and expertise. If we believe that a development would be detrimental, we will challenge it.

22) We work with other groups. The Society is a member of the Bristol Neighbourhood Planning Network – a network partnership of planning and amenity groups across Bristol, and we work with a network group whenever there is a common interest.

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