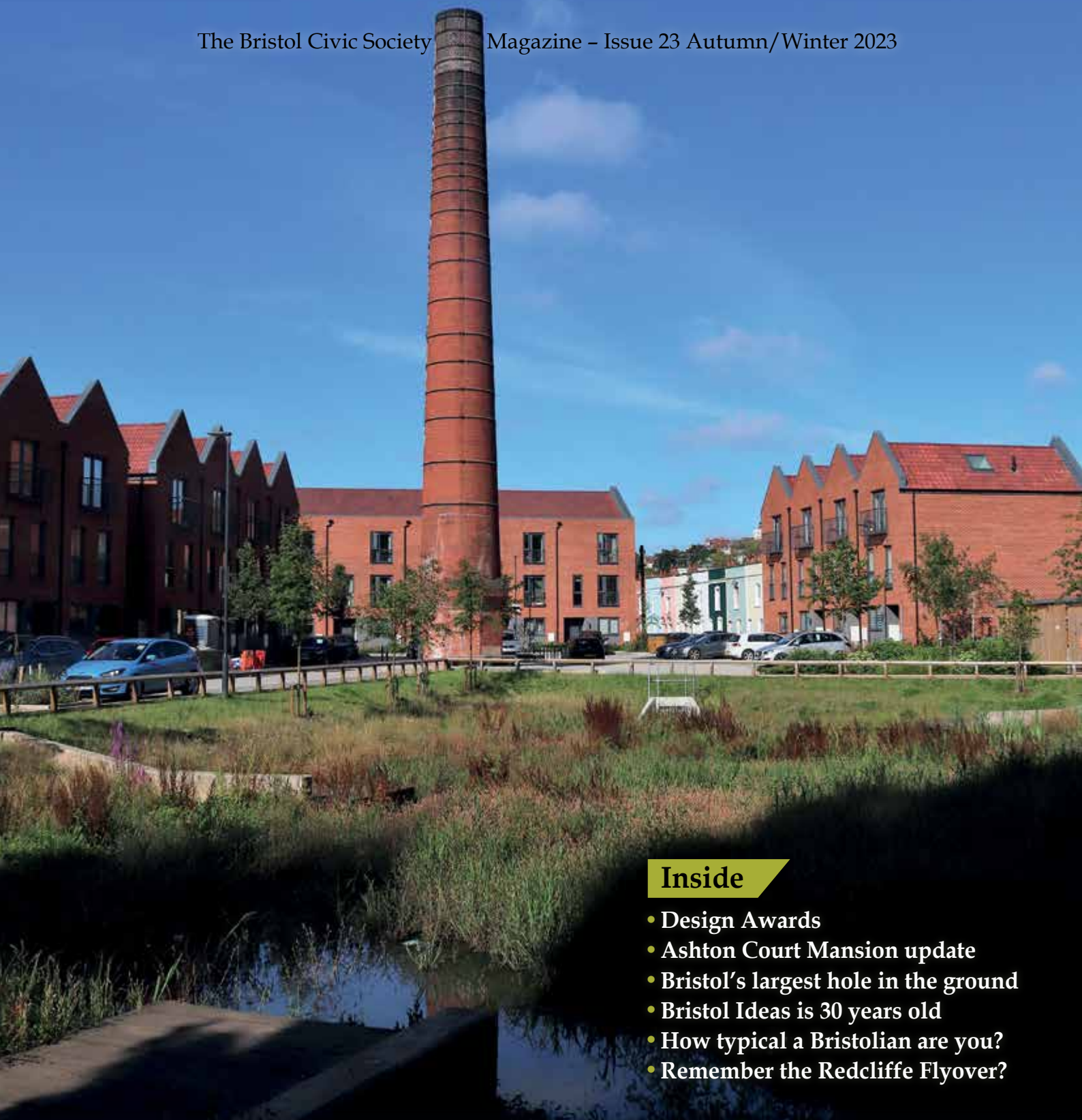


Better Bristol

The Bristol Civic Society Magazine – Issue 23 Autumn/Winter 2023



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- Bristol's largest hole in the ground
- Bristol Ideas is 30 years old
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- Remember the Redcliffe Flyover?



an independent force for a **better Bristol**





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Brooks Dye Works
Photo: Michael Manson.

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From the Chair

Simon Birch reports on a growing and influential Bristol Civic Society.



In the last edition of *Better Bristol*, we discussed the important role of the Bristol Civic Society in a city facing intense development pressures. In this edition we launch a challenging new initiative and report on how our recruitment is progressing.

In June we held our AGM at SS Great Britain. Chief Executive Matthew Tanner introduced the next exciting phase of development at this much visited Harbourside attraction. Members enjoyed a guided walk around the Albion Dock and were able to view this fascinating project at close hand. Following the formal business of the AGM we listened to a summary of all the Society's wide-ranging activities - from the team leaders - solid evidence of the enthusiasm and professionalism of our volunteers. Presentations covered the Major Sites Group (John Payne), Transport & Place Making (Alan Morris), Blue Plaques (Gordon Young), *Better Bristol* (Mike Manson)



The judging panel scoured the city to unearth three outstanding projects.



Merry Hill.

and Events (Nic Billane). Treasurer John Jones told the AGM that the Society has a sound level of reserves and is well placed to meet future demands on its resources. Membership Secretary David Giles gave a similarly upbeat report on membership, which is now just over 600.

I was able to briefly note progress on the Society's new initiative on Ashton Court Mansion - see pages 8-9. We are working on a launch planned for early September.

The annual Design Awards presentation was the next Bristol Civic Society event, held once again in The Mount Without. The Panel scoured the city to unearth three outstanding projects, again the subject of a more detailed article - see pages 4-5.

So - a growing and influential Society, getting involved in key issues in Bristol, attracting active members. If you have ideas or specific proposals please get in touch. A number of you came up to me after the AGM and the Design Awards expressing interest in getting more involved. This is extremely heartening. Keep it up.

Our recruitment drive has already resulted in the appointment of a new

co-chair for the Major Sites Group and Peter Ellis is already playing a key part in the work of this important Society group. We are also pleased to welcome two architects to the Group - Ian Jenkins and Willie Harbinson.

Since the last edition of *Better Bristol*, the City Council has appointed a new Director of Planning, a most significant role in the development and planning of the city, and we have arranged to meet up with Simone Wilding in mid-August. The Society wishes her well in her new post.

As previously noted, in just over a year's time (May 2024) the city will move from having an elected mayor to a committee system. We continue to debate how this will affect the Society's activities - what will be the implications for planning, transport and all the other Council services? Will decisions be made in full consultation with residents and with the wider community? We will of course continue to engage whatever the outcome.

Simon Birch

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Not already a member? Why not join TODAY!

See page 27 for more details...

Design Awards 2023



**Andy Reynolds
and Chris Leeks.**

The Mount Without was once again the venue for the Society's ever popular Design Awards Presentation on 25 July. And, of course, it was the recipient of an Award in 2022, now proudly displayed outside the doorway to the crypt.

For 2023 there was a total of nine firm nominations – several projects being postponed for consideration to 2024 as they weren't wholly completed.

The judging panel visited all the projects and assessed them in terms of their design quality and their contribution to the appearance of their neighbourhood. In terms of eligibility for an award nominated projects need to be completed (and ideally occupied) by the end of the previous calendar year, they need to be easily visible from public viewpoints and need to be of clear design quality.

This year there were seven panel members, all Society members with an interest in their city. We look to refresh the panel membership every couple of years so please put your name forward if you are interested.

There were three award winners this

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Top, Brooks Dye Works. Particularly pleased to see families using the public spaces.

Above, Tom Dickason-Palmer, Design Manager of Acorn Property Group, receives an award for development of the former Brooks Dye Works.

year and the developers or owners were asked to make a presentation about their scheme. These are available on the Society's website – and well worth a visit.

Brooks Dye Works St Werburghs

Tom Dickason-Palmer, Design Manager of Acorn Property Group, introduced the approach adopted to the development of the former Brooks Dye Works. The factory closed in 2007 and there were several proposals for the site. Acorn Property Group working with Galliard Homes have now built a scheme of 105 units – some two-bedroom apartments as well as two, three and four bedroom houses. This total includes 24 affordable homes. The architects were gcp and Ferguson Mann. The scheme reintegrates the site with the surrounding residential streets - mirroring the terraced houses of Southey Street and completing the

corner of Servier Street. It sits at the intersection of St Werburghs, St Agnes and St Pauls and successfully links them together. It also links to Mina Park and - most noticeably - preserves the iconic Brooks Dye Works chimney with its white brick lettering visible across Bristol.

In its citation the Panel was particularly pleased to see families using the public spaces and to witness the permeability of the site towards the park and the adjacent streets. They also welcomed houses being built in central Bristol at high density, close to local amenities and contributing to local communities. Hopefully this is a model that other developers will follow.

Clayton Hotel Broad Street

Robin Gray, a Director of Alec French Architects introduced this project on behalf of Artisan Real Estate Developers and Dalata Hotel Group plc.

The Clayton Hotel is a significant development in Bristol's historic centre. In this development, two very different buildings have been brought together to create a surprisingly harmonious whole comprising, a 250-bed hotel, 23 flats, six serviced apartments and a small number of offices. The presentation described the complexity of the site, with numerous buildings, several entrances and public through routes. It was a challenge to orchestrate all the different demands and to create a viable end product.



The Clayton Hotel is a significant development in Bristol's historic centre.



Merry Hill, Lockleaze. This is a 100 per cent affordable project, aimed at self finishing by residents.

The main body of the new development is the rather ugly pre-existing NatWest building. The reworking of this at street level with tiling and attractive windows, transforms John Street from a dismal lane into an attractive thoroughfare. It complements the beautiful Everard's Printing Works facade.

A Bristol landmark since 1900, this forms the glorious entrance to the hotel on Broad Street. The rest of the development, with its colourful windows, murals and sunken garden all contribute to significantly to the public realm, in what until recently felt like a neglected and underused part of the city.



Robin Gray, a Director of Alec French Architects receives an award from Simon Birch for the Clayton Hotel development.

Merry Hill Lockleaze

The final award winner had a very challenging history. Originally granted to Bristol Community Land Trust by the City Council the development proved unusually challenging and complex and was transferred to Brighter Places. Sally Gilbert, Homes Director of Brighter Places and Edward Romaine gave a fascinating presentation on the Merry Hill development.

The Panel noted that this is a 100 per cent affordable project, aimed at self-finishing by residents. The design is a contemporary take on traditional terraced housing with coloured panels and timber cladding. It manages to

reflect those typically Bristol coloured terracing. The Panel welcomed this project as providing good quality, fully sustainable, family friendly, affordable accommodation.



Merry Hill. Family friendly.

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Major developments in Bristol

John Payne and Simon Birch review a selection of important proposals.

Premier Inn, Haymarket

The informal proposals were for the demolition of existing buildings on this site and their replacement by two buildings, the tallest reaching 28 storeys. The Society objects to this proposed development.

The Society is concerned about the carbon emissions arising from new development and would ideally wish to see the retention and reuse of the existing building. We are concerned that more than just lip-service should be given to Bristol's ambition to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030.

In our view the proposed replacement buildings are far too tall for this site and, indeed, for any site in Bristol. We do not accept that any development should be any higher than the existing Premier Inn. There will be significant adverse impacts on adjacent buildings, on the immediate locality of the St James Barton Roundabout as well as on more distant views of historic buildings. The elevational treatment of the proposed towers is bland and lacks any distinguishing features. We would expect a much higher quality of architecture in such a prominent location.



Rupert Street car park. The Society objects strongly to the height of the new building and its impact on the wider townscape.

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Premier Inn. The proposed replacement buildings are far too tall for this site and, indeed, for any site in Bristol.

We accept that there will be improvements at ground level, especially in relation to access to the Bus Station. There will also be an enclosed space between the two buildings, with ground floor activity, protecting people from the noise and pollution of the traffic on the roundabout. However, these improvements do not outweigh the substantial concerns we have.

Demolition of Rupert Street car park and redevelopment

Bristol Civic Society members mostly wish to see the redevelopment of this site and a remodelling of the streetscape and facilities at ground floor level. Some of our members, however, value the design of the car park and its contribution to twentieth century architecture. Although the proposed redevelopment would improve the quality of the environment at street level, the Society objects strongly to the height of the new building and its impact on the wider townscape.

This proposal would add to the ever-increasing accumulation of tall buildings in the city which is eroding Bristol's very special urban character and topography with its fine heritage of landmark buildings and the mid-rise historic townscape in which they have sat. It is entirely inappropriate and undesirable for this townscape. Yet another tall building will encourage further proposals for others. More

and more tall buildings will deprive residents of glimpses of the surrounding countryside which help to contain perceptions of the extent of urban development. Instead, residents will be surrounded by an intensely built-up, claustrophobic and brutalist urban environment that has lost touch with human scale possibly to the detriment of their physical and mental health.

Temple Island

Bristol Civic Society was disappointed with the proposals for this important site. We cannot support the pre-application plans as they stand.

Temple Island will be the gateway to the commercial centre of Bristol on the approaches from Bath on the A4 and Wells on the A37. The Society feels strongly that the proposal, as presented at this stage, fails to live up to this important role which would require an outstanding development. Instead, the site is to be laid out with a series of buildings of varied height but mostly tall.

Despite some architectural relief, these buildings are largely orthogonal in nature and located around the periphery of the site. The Society would prefer a far greater sense of enclosure and intimacy at ground level and we feel that the proposal's aspiration of creating a square in the centre will not work well with the proposed layout.

The Society believes that Bristol



Above left, Temple Island. An unwelcoming gateway to the commercial centre of Bristol. Above right, Raleigh Road. The layout could be revisited to produce a much more appealing and greener environment.

deserves a response to this important location which accords with national policy to produce beautiful architecture. We strongly urge the applicants to address this.

Raleigh Road, Bedminster

The Society broadly welcomed the latest proposals for this site and considered them to be a big improvement on the earlier scheme which was shown to us. We had some concerns and suggestions but generally liked the scale, design and type of houses proposed.

The height of the proposed houses was largely sympathetic to neighbouring buildings and the character would fit in well. We raised one or two issues which, we felt, could improve the proposal. In particular, we felt that there would be a danger of rat running along the new streets unless through movement of car traffic were prevented. We also suggested that the layout could be revisited to produce a much more appealing and greener environment.

Land north of Freestone Road, St Philips Marsh – amended scheme for purpose built student accommodation.

Bristol Civic Society noted that the previous five storey proposal departed from the development framework for the area in terms of its height. However, we felt that the site adjacent to the railway could accommodate the proposal although we considered that the severity of the design, as it would appear above the railway embankment, should be relieved with architectural features to give the elevation some variety.

The latest proposal is for four 8/9 storey buildings as opposed to five 5 storey ones. Glazed corridors connect the individual buildings at each floor level. The Society cannot support this

upward extension of the proposal. It would protrude much further above the railway embankment resulting in a grim, grey wall when viewed from the north and from trains approaching or departing from Temple Meads.

Although we had some reservations about the brickwork and fenestration of the previous scheme, we nonetheless felt that it was an interesting design. The move from five blocks to four taller buildings undoes that. We consider that this proposal would dominate Freestone Road and create a series of sombre grey structures unrelieved by lighter architectural features.

Three Six Zero, Marlborough Street

The Society broadly welcomes the proposals for the change of use from office use to student accommodation. We are pleased to see that the building is going to be retained, saving carbon and praise the owners for this move.

We strongly suggest that another look at the design of the ground floor areas should take place. The ground floor spaces should be used to enhance the street scene. This is particularly important in this area as there have been ongoing issues with antisocial behaviour and graffiti and at times people feel vulnerable walking around the streets both in the early evening and at night.



Left, Three-Six-Zero. Broadly welcome the proposals for the change of use from office use to student accommodation.

The area around the Bearpit is likely to become the centre for more large-scale development (see Debenhams and Premier Inn proposals) therefore we would request that the detailed city centre development plan is realised early to avoid the apparent disjointed and unplanned way in which the area appears to be developing.

22/03924/P | Application for Outline Planning Permission. Broadwalk Shopping Centre, Broad Walk Bristol BS4 2QU

The Society did not support this planning application and registered very strong objections to this proposal. Despite our objections and those of the local community Planning Committee resolved to grant planning permission (see page 18). At the time of going to print consideration was being given to challenging this decision.

The Society supports the principle of the redevelopment of the Broadwalk Shopping Centre. This is a large and outdated development comprising extensive retail, parking and servicing areas, all of which are no longer appropriate for modern use.

Our key objections to the current proposals concern the building heights and overall density of the development due to the greatly increased amount of

housing in the current application. It is totally inappropriate in the context of the largely two storey residential area surrounding the development.

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Ashton Court Mansion

Simon Birch reports on Bristol Civic Society's new initiative to provide a solid future for this important building.



Although most of the present mansion is of nineteenth century construction the building is wrapped around a much earlier core.



Most of Ashton Court Mansion has been closed since 2017. Approximately two thirds are derelict.

We are not interested in producing yet another report but in finding a solution! This will involve new uses and a sustainable business plan will be required. Not an easy challenge.

In the past Bristol Civic Society was interested in Ashton Court as early as

1960. Management agendas (now in the Records Office) speak of the challenge faced by the City Council when acquiring the Estate and the Mansion. Not very much has changed since.

Most recently Bristol Civic Society was represented on the Steering Group for the comprehensive study produced by consultants Purcell. This resulted in a final report *Ashton Court Mansion – towards a sustainable future* published in 2019. The study includes an in-depth assessment of the condition and

prospects for the Mansion together with an assessment of possible options for future uses. This work needs to be revisited and to be updated.

Many of you will recall that the Society held a public meeting in November 2017 in the Mansion. This was organised jointly with City Council. Over 100 attended and we invited a speaker from Save Britain's Heritage (savebritainsheritage.org) to provide examples of successful restoration projects elsewhere in the country. We followed this up with a second public meeting to mark completion of the *Purcell Report*. Again, this was organised with the City Council and was held in City Hall in June 2018. Niall Phillips, the report author, gave a summary of the report's findings.

In summer 2021 The Prince's Foundation became involved and held a series of *visioning* events at the Mansion which generated fresh ideas. However, this initiative faltered when the Prince became King.

Bristol Civic Society has not lost sight



Without a use the Mansion will run the risk of continued deterioration.

of the pressing need to find suitable uses for the Mansion. Without a use the Mansion will run the risk of continued deterioration. Following further discussion and research we decided on a new approach.

In Spring 2023 we approached Bristol City Council with an offer. A copy is included below. This has been welcomed by the Council and by Historic England and we have been given the *green light* to proceed. We will be producing regular updates as our initiative gets underway. Please get in touch directly if you have ideas, enthusiasm and energy to work with us.



The crumbling mansion and surrounding estate was purchased by Bristol City Council in 1959 for £103,000.

Ashton Court Mansion

There has been a manor house here since the thirteenth century. The current mansion sits in 830 acres of softly sloping parkland. The house overlooks Bristol as well as having extensive views of the rolling hills to Bath. Directly across the valley is the hilltop village of Dundry with its landmark church tower. The deer park, formed in 1392, is reputed to be one of the oldest in the country.

The Ashton Court Estate came into the hands of John Smyth, merchant, landowner and former sheriff and mayor of Bristol, in 1545. The estate stayed with the Smyths for 400 years – the last Smyth to live here died in 1946.

The Smyths owned much land in south Bristol and beyond. They struck lucky in the nineteenth century when it was found that their estate contained rich coal seams.

Although most of the present mansion is of nineteenth century construction the building is wrapped around a much earlier core. At its heart is a fourteenth/fifteenth century great hall. And that may well sit upon prior foundations

The west end of the commanding south front, which overlooks the lawn, was built in the seventeenth century. To the east of the central tower the building is of early nineteenth century construction.

The stables, with their fine cast iron stalls, once housed the horses and carriages of the Lord Mayor of Bristol. It is now a tea room.

The crumbling mansion and surrounding estate was purchased by Bristol City Council in 1959 for £103,000.

MAY 2023

An offer to Bristol City Council (BCC) - our proposal

What Bristol Civic Society offers – what we can deliver

We propose that we lead a year of study, debate and conversations. Possibly September 2023 to 2024. We think it will take this long to explore all opportunities. It's a complex challenge. If it was easy, it would have happened already.

We offer to hold events, talk to all those having an interest, explore all

possible avenues. Generate publicity, excitement, ideas. We undertake to circulate regular updates so that everyone knows what is going on – no surprises.

We plan to hold quarterly open events to maintain momentum, exchange views, report on progress, and generally to generate publicity.

There is a precedent for this proposal. We held serious talks with the Church Commissioners about taking St Michael's on the Mount Without (prior to the fire) with aim of opening up the building, holding events and generating interest in its long-term restoration and reuse.

What we ask from BCC

In return we ask BCC to grant us an agreement for 12 months regarding the future of Ashton Court Mansion. And letting us have access to relevant information, such as finances. And with no cost to BCC.

The Challenge

The Mansion has been owned by Bristol City Council since 1959. Most of it has been closed since 2017 and approximately two thirds are derelict.

Bristol City Council clearly doesn't have the funds or resources to tackle

the restoration of even part of Ashton Court Mansion.

Time for action

At the moment there is no clarity over the long-term future of Ashton Court Mansion. This needs sorting before there is further serious physical deterioration or even a disastrous fire. Sorting out the long-term future of Ashton Court Mansion is challenging and needs proper thought and discussion; a city wide conversation. There should be extensive debates and investigations, exploring both old and completely new ideas and initiatives. Time is needed to explore and to develop potential partnerships.

Why Bristol Civic Society (BCS)?

Bristol Civic Society is not the answer for the future of Ashton Court Mansion. The Civic Society can't tackle such a significant project. But BCS can stimulate and facilitate debate. We are good at this. An honest broker. With resources and enthusiasm to sort out the future of Ashton Court Mansion.

We have been involved with Ashton Court Mansion since the 1970s and helped organise two public meetings – in 2017 and 2018. We were also on the stakeholder group for the major study of the Mansion – Ashton Court –

Conservation Management Plan. We have a very longstanding interest.

The Outcome

The most positive outcome would be a report to BCC setting out a sustainable plan for the future of Ashton Court Mansion. We don't know if we will be able to achieve this, but our plan gives the best possible way of achieving progress.

Let us have the opportunity.

*Simon Birch Chair,
Bristol Civic Society, 1 May 2023*

BS3 beyond 2025: 7400 more homes

Stef Brammar from Action Greater Bedminster (AGB) writes about concerns for the future and asks what the BS3 neighbourhood will look and feel like from 2025.

With a significant projected population increase south of the river in BS3 over the next 10-20 years, a much-needed detailed look to the future and its opportunities as well as threats has been raised in local discussions. Will there be enough school places? Will our libraries and swimming pool be able to cope? What will the extra footfall mean for our parks and green spaces?

A 35% increase in cars is predicted. Our roads are already congested, and parking is impossible. Will Windmill Hill residents ever come to terms with losing their city views? Can our over-stretched GP surgeries manage such a major increase in patients? How much Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) will come from the developments? And the biggest question of all: what can we who live here do about any of it?

Against a backdrop of local social media alive with concern, road diversions and closures, construction traffic and

a skyline of cranes, Action Greater Bedminster (AGB), with funds from Quartet and Bristol City Council, embarked in March 2023 upon a ten month series of public meetings aimed at ensuring local people have the correct information, and encouraging them to come together in building confidence and cohesion around a future vision for their neighbourhood. An asset mapping exercise would run alongside, to identify resources and skills of individuals, groups and organisations within the BS3 neighbourhood. This would explore linkages, duplication and gaps to provide a springboard for building on existing capacity and potential.

Public meetings were organised to discuss the impact of the projected growth in population on health services, schools, transport, parks, environment, parking and local retail.

BS3 beyond 2025 is a series of in person events and discussions, aimed at encouraging participation in decision-making for the future, and establishing a BS3 asset map.

Armed with a new logo and some thought-provoking placards sponsored by local design company Out of Hand,

working closely with the Council's Regeneration and Community Development teams, councillors from the three BS3 wards and local organisations such as Windmill Hill City Farm, BS3 Community and the Bedminster BID, public meetings were organised to discuss the impact of the projected growth in population on health services, schools, transport, parks, environment, parking and local retail. An on-line questionnaire is gathering people's questions, thoughts and ideas.

As the project gathered momentum in church halls and community centres, it became clear that the vision agreed by AGB's founding partners was being delivered: 'to support and listen to residents of Greater Bedminster, creating opportunities for discussion, networking and practical action/learning opportunities. To work together with local councillors, service providers, business, organisations and residents to make a positive difference in our community by raising awareness of important local initiatives & opportunities'.

The first event was designed for people to 'drop in' and gain access to Council Officers from the departments involved, look at maps and get some much-needed answers. In April,

representatives of Watkins Jones, the developers and the architect of the main student block at Bedminster Green, presented their designs and answered questions from a packed room. The designs were examined and explained in detail and some fears were alleviated - some not. We learned that discussions are taking place around a new RPZ (Restricted Parking Zone) for Windmill Hill, and that students would not be relying on our GP surgeries but have access to their own service.

In May 2023, MP Karin Smyth focused on the impact of the population growth on Bristol South's economy, and an 'On the Move' event, following recent announcements of local bus cuts, gave local people access to managers from GWR, Firstbus and Sustrans. Two workshops hosted by AGB and convened by the UK Government's High Streets Task Force gave local people the opportunity to discuss how recommendations from their recent report on East Street can be actioned. Participants ranked the eleven recommendations in priority order, selecting the top five for further discussion. Unsurprisingly these mirrored some of the recurring themes from AGB's previous meetings: 'Community Ownership' and 'Walking, Cycling and Public Transport Connections' 'A Voice for all' and 'Supporting the Existing' 'A heart for the Community' and 'A High Street for people' Discussion focused on the practicalities of putting these ideas into practice. The following extract from the report echoes much that was discussed and agreed at the 'On the Move' event:

'Enthusiasm was high but hope was low for developing a better functioning and better integrated network for active travel



Factory No.1, East Street, Bedminster is a new residential development. Formerly the first tobacco factory of W.D. & H.O. Wills.

on and around East St. The poor state of local bus services, the topography of the area, a perceived lack of infrastructure (including criticism of the current contraflow on East St) were all felt to be significant barriers to encouraging more people to avoid car use. There was however a broad consensus that if developed, an active travel network could encourage a wider group of people to visit and pass through East St from across BS3's broad demographic range. Walking, cycling and public transport connections would make regular visits to East St a possibility for a diverse group of people, including those with mobility and/or other access needs and help retain its function as a regularly used and useful local high street. To be done well, participants noted that all demographics must be included in the design and promotion of services, and that liveable neighbourhood principles such as legibility and a feeling of safety must be at the heart of designs. Enforcement came up as a priority for both workshop groups, firstly the importance of enforcing current traffic restrictions on East St in order to keep those walking and wheeling safe, and secondly to better enforce Bristol City Council's low car policies in relation to new developments coming forward. People wanted to see cycling infrastructure improved but in

a way that integrated sensitively with the existing streetscape and did not add to 'clutter'.

Meetings to discuss the future protection and sustainability of our urban wildlife and the maintenance of our parks followed in July, with some interesting suggestions about the design of buildings to enable birds and other creatures to live alongside us.

Perhaps the issue that concerns most local people is that of healthcare. On 20 July, a lively meeting chaired by AGB's chair Ellie Freeman heard that the predicted population growth can only add to the challenges of an ageing population, more complex health needs, an NHS backlog, and

the transfer of work from secondary to primary care (hospital referrals to GPs). James Ingham, Executive Manager, and Dr Andrew Pratt GP and Primary Care Network Clinical Director from the local Clinical Commissioning Group Bridge View Medical presented a detailed view of their current position and plans for the future to create a health and wellbeing destination at the centre of the community - a one stop 'shop' - focusing on prevention and wellbeing as well as acute and chronic illness This will require working with partners such as pharmacies and community groups, and a review of existing surgery locations and accessibility by public transport as well as car parking space.

A summer break will allow the AGB steering group time to review the meeting notes and questionnaires, and plan for a presentation in autumn of the key findings from the project. The plan is then to work with the BS3 Councillors and Bristol City Council to identify and agree priority actions to ensure the best possible outcomes for the BS3 neighbourhood, not least in the spending of the £10.3 million plus of CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) that will be paid by the developers.

Notes from all the BS3 beyond 2025 meetings can be found at: www.actiongreaterbedminster.org.uk

www.bristolcivicsociety.org.uk



Above left, The poor state of local bus services and a perceived lack of infrastructure were all felt to be significant barriers to encouraging more people to avoid car use. Above right, An active travel network could encourage a wider group of people to visit and pass through East Street.

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Bristol Ideas, formerly known as the Bristol Cultural Development Partnership, is 30 years old this year

Eugene Byrne talks to former director Andrew Kelly about its work and how it played its part in putting the city on the UK's cultural map.

Bristol nowadays is seen by locals and outsiders alike as a cultural destination, a place – current economic circumstances notwithstanding – where interesting things happen in the arts, museums, music, theatre and much else.

Anyone who was living here 30 years ago would probably agree that things have changed greatly.

Not that Bristol in 1993 was a cultural desert, far from it – we had the Arnolfini, the Old Vic, the Watershed, Artspace and more. Street Art was very much a thing by then, and the first stirrings of the so-say 'Bristol Sound' were already apparent. Massive Attack's hugely influential *Blue Lines* had come out in 1991, and *Venue* magazine told you what was on locally for arts and entertainment.

From the 1990s the city went on to become a cultural powerhouse, and something which many Bristolians would have found implausible at the time – a tourism and weekend break destination.

Some of this change was thanks to the Bristol Cultural Development Partnership (BCDP), a body which has often operated in the background and which has done more for the life of the city than most people realise. A small part of this may be down to the fact that BCDP is now Bristol Ideas.

BCDP was founded in 1993, originally involving Bristol City Council, Arts Council England South West and Business West. Both universities have joined in more recent years.

BRISTOL CIVIC SOCIETY

Much of the early impetus for BCDP came from businessman John Savage and the Bristol Initiative, which aimed to get the private sector more involved in the life of the city. But the public face of BCDP from the start, and for much of its history, was Andrew Kelly.

As he took up his role, a profile in *Venue* in March 1993 called him 'Bristol's Mr Culture.' To a generation of local artists, promoters and cultural entrepreneurs it might be more accurate to describe him as Santa Claus.

This was the guy you went to if you needed money for a creative project, and quite often he could either raise it for you, or advise you on how to do it.

To list all of the achievements of BCDP/Bristol Ideas, and all of the initiatives it's been involved in, would require several pages.

From the 1990s the city went on to become a cultural powerhouse, and something which many Bristolians would have found implausible at the time – a tourism and weekend break destination.

From the start it played a big role behind the scenes in setting up We The Curious. Another piece in the docks regeneration jigsaw was the 'Centre for the Performing Arts' / Harbourside Centre, failed, but no-one here is to blame. It brought together supporters from across the board, but was stymied by a change of government and a change in funding. So Blame Tony Blair.

While this was a disappointment, there were spin-offs, such as Bristol Legible City – the (mostly) blue maps and signposts around the place.

Much of the work goes on in the background – raising money, getting projects together, assembling partnerships, marketing events and programmes because, says Kelly, 'Quite often it's about letting organisations and individuals get on with it.'

'Our philosophy has always been let's do the work that others can't do, free



Above left, Naomi Miller: 'We have presented opportunities for Bristol to come together to celebrate, to commemorate and to question itself and the stories we tell about our city.' (Photo: Jon Aitken).



Above right, Andrew Kelly, 'Bristol's Mr Culture' (Photo: Jon Aitken).



Bristol – a tourist and weekend break destination.



Illustration by Tony Forbes for a graphic history of Bristol's council housing, 2019. One of BCDP's innumerable projects.

them up to do the things they really want to do.

'We have done lots and lots of things people won't associate with us. I remember John Savage telling me 'let's



THE OAK TREE PLANTED IN JUNE 1919 BY THE LADY MAYORESS WHEN CHRISTOPHER ADDISON CAME TO VISIT SEA MILLS BECAME KNOWN AS ADDISON'S OAK.

make sure everyone else takes the credit and we'll take the blame when things go wrong,' which I think was a very noble thing to do.

'It meant you could establish these

partnerships without threatening any of the other partners.'

BCDP spearheaded Bristol's bid for European Capital of Culture for 2008. Yes we lost, but we also made the shortlist (which silenced a lot of sceptics at the time), and a lot of things came out of it due to what Kelly calls 'our strategy for disappointment'.

Initiatives have included a massive celebration of the bicentenary of Brunel's birth in 2006, a similar though smaller celebration of Charles Darwin in 2009; BAC 100, marking the centenary of aerospace in Bristol (because science and technology are 'culture' too); Bristol 2014 looked at the city's part in the First World War.

For ten years the Great Reading Adventure made a different book each year available to get everyone reading and talking about it, from *Treasure Island* to Andrea Levy's *Small Island* all the way to a specially commissioned graphic history of Bristol, *The Bristol Story*.

More recently the Bristol Festival of Ideas has done what it says on the tin, bringing world class speaker and thinkers to town. There's the Festival of the Future City (next one up this autumn) to get us talking about the kind of place we want to live in. There's been a celebration of the centenary of council housing in Bristol and lots more, including this year's Bristol 650 celebrations.

'I think the case has been made for Bristol's cultural sector which is very different now to what it was,' says Kelly.

'The rhetoric on culture is strong, the universities sell Bristol partly on its culture, the Mayor talks up culture, it's seen as an important part of the city.'

'I think we have positioned Bristol nationally as a centre for discussion and debate for ideas, and the Festival of the Future City is unique to Bristol.'

There are challenging times ahead, though. Acting Director of Bristol Ideas, Naomi Miller, says: 'Funding is the obvious challenge, for us as well as so many others in the cultural sector and small businesses.

'We rely on a mixed portfolio of private investment, public funding and earned income, largely through ticket sales and sponsorship. These ratios are in flux and are all harder to achieve.'

Mayor Rees in July announced that arts funding decisions were to be deferred until next year, and given the dire state of public finances it is possible that Bristol City Council will have little or no money for culture in years to come.

It's a grim scenario, but Kelly sees glimmers of hope. 'There's some really good work taking place by people like Emma Harvey of Trinity and Latoyah McAllister Jones with St Pauls Carnival, and with WECA in terms of culture and cultural funding

'If you were inventing BCDP now you'd do it in the way that's been done by people like Emma and Latoyah - think of culture as bottom-up, and perhaps based around the west of England as a whole, and not just a city-based approach.'

'You can't divorce culture from the wider economy, the cost of living crisis, for example. Sharing culture across the city is one of the big challenges for those communities which aren't participating or are can't participate. We have to find ways of doing that.'

'I think fairness is critical, which is why some organisations are moving towards a model of pay-what-you-feel so you might pay nothing or you could pay more than you might normally do.'

If there are challenges in the future, and Kelly concedes that culture is probably not as high on Bristol's civic agenda as it was until quite recently, there's still much to be proud of.

Naomi Miller says BCDP has 'illuminated, reflected and facilitated the character of the city to itself.'

'We have presented opportunities for Bristol to come together to celebrate, to commemorate and to question itself and the stories we tell about our city; we have encouraged and demonstrated multi-partner, citywide working; we have grown appetites and audiences for spaces of public deliberation and ideas.'

www.bristolcivicsociety.org.uk

Broadwalk Shopping Centre – the negative impact is immense

Suzanne Audrey highlights concerns about the impartiality of planning committees.

A planning committee is an important shop window for the council and plays a crucial role in providing democratic and transparent decisions on sometimes controversial issues', according to the Local Government Association.

Because of this, it is important that planning committees operate well.

But there are increasing concerns that these principles are not consistently followed in Bristol.

Bristol Civic Society supports the principle of the redevelopment of Broadwalk (see page 7). But we cannot back the current planning application and have registered our strong objection to this proposal.

Matters came to a head recently when an application for a hyper-dense development at Broadwalk Shopping Centre, Knowle, was unanimously refused at one meeting, and narrowly approved by the same committee a few weeks later.

The fact that all of the Labour councillors on the committee apparently changed their minds, supported by the Tory chair who used his casting vote to push the application through, led many to question what had taken place outside of the planning meeting to reverse the decision.

To add insult to injury, local residents who had campaigned against the proposal were advised by a senior officer that the purpose of the second meeting was "to confirm the wording for the reasons for refusing this application" and "while technically the Committee could reverse their decision on 31st May, I think that this is unlikely". This led them to believe that they need not



Bristol Civic Society supports the principle of the redevelopment of Broadwalk. But we cannot back the current planning application and have registered strong objection to this proposal.

attend, while the team representing the developer's interests were there in force.

Many observers felt the committee had not acted fairly or openly, and that some councillors appeared to be subject to a party whip.

In his 2022 State of the City Address, Mayor Marvin Rees indicated: 'Some have raised concerns that we have got involved in planning. We have.'

What are the implications of that involvement?

There had been some cause for optimism when Bristol's Urban Living Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) was adopted in November 2018 'to ensure we have quality places and homes people want to, and can afford, to live in.'

In the forward, the then Cabinet Member for Spatial Planning and City Design, wrote: 'I am particularly keen that high quality homes are built in this City; good places to live for the young and old, including families'. A quote from Nye Bevan was intended to sum up the spirit of the document: 'We shall be judged for a year or two by the number of houses we build. We shall be judged in ten years' time by the type of houses we build'.

But have these aspirations been side-lined?

Recent schemes are characterised by features that the Urban Living SPD sought to avoid: single-aspect dwellings, poor natural light, insufficient outdoor space, failing to demonstrate 'design excellence', undermining local character, and unable to provide a pleasant, healthy environment for future occupants.

The worry is that pressure to reach targets, combined with the mantra of 'getting stuff done', is threatening the integrity and impartiality of planning committees.

There are examples across the city in which material planning considerations seem to be given inadequate weight or where there is inconsistency in their application, including: loss of light and overshadowing; overlooking and privacy; design and appearance; residential amenity and living conditions; character of the local area; local planning policies; loss of trees and landscaping; environmental concerns; traffic and parking issues, and; impact on listed buildings and conservation areas.

What can be done?

Some overbearing, poor quality developments will be the legacy of the current administration. But Bristol has voted to remove the elected mayor system in favour of a new committee system, and the local elections in May 2024 offer an opportunity to rebuild trust if both candidates and residents make it clear that the conduct of planning committees, and the decisions they make, are significant election issues.

In the meantime, a petition (<https://you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/loss-of-confidence-in-bristol-s-planning-system>) has been set up urging the Mayor, cabinet members, and councillors of all parties to consider the harm done when residents no longer have confidence in the impartiality of officers and members of planning committees, and when decisions are made that will cause long-term, if not irreparable, harm to Bristol's neighbourhoods and city centre.

So how typical a Bristolian are you?

The results are in! The 2021 census has some interesting revelations about the state of Bristol. So how typical a Bristolian are you? Eugene Byrne will tell you.

The findings of the 2021 census have attracted comparatively little attention, partly because the data has been released piecemeal since last year. The relative lack of media coverage is surprising both locally and nationally is surprising (though it seems to have happened with every UK census ever taken). Surely everyone is interested in this stuff?

Jayne Mills, Research and Statistics Specialist and Assistant Census Liaison Manager at Bristol City Council, is interested. She's spent a lot of time looking at the data.

The headline for her is that "Between 2011 and 2021 Bristol was the fastest growing Core City in England and Wales with a population increase of 10.3%."



Bristol. Looks quiet but there are over 470,000 people hidden in this picture.

On Census Day (March 21 2021) there were **472,500 people** living within the boundaries of the city of Bristol.

At the time of writing we're not certain how many people failed to return their census form. Given factors such as the Windrush scandal, the "Hostile Environment" towards immigration, Brexit, and broad levels of distrust in the government (yeah thanks, Boris), it's likely that many folk will have failed to fully fill in their forms or may have evaded the census altogether.

Census Day was during a period of lockdown, and it's possible the pandemic might have skewed some results, too, though this was taken into account at the time.

"For the majority of people, the coronavirus pandemic would not have affected where they considered themselves resident," says Jayne Mills.

"However, for some students and in some urban areas, ONS (the Office for National Statistics) have found evidence

that the coronavirus pandemic did result in changes to where people lived. To mitigate these issues and to get the best possible estimates of the student population, ONS took steps to ensure that students had specific instructions through their university and higher education providers on how they should complete the census if they had a term-time address.

"Other topics potentially affected by the pandemic are labour market and travel to work topics."

Let's look at some of those findings in detail:

It's mostly due to babies

Jayne Mills says it's a common misconception that population change is mostly down to migration. "Actually in Bristol population growth over the decade 2011-2021 was mainly due to there being more births than deaths, i.e. natural change. Of the total increase in population over the decade, two thirds (63%) was due to natural change and a third (37%) due to net migration."

Between the 2011 and 2021 censuses there were almost 62,000 births in Bristol, against 34,000 deaths.

Bristol remains relatively young compared to the national average, with more residents aged 0-15 than over-65s. As is the case elsewhere, there are slightly more females than males because women live longer.

Some places are more populous than others

If you've not noticed 10% more people in your neighbourhood since 2011, it's because Bristol's population growth is unevenly distributed.

Well over half of council wards experienced below-average growth, including Cotham (where the population went down a tiny bit) and Clifton, where it rose by only 0.4%. Growth in Clifton Down and Redland was also small,

Continued on page 18 ►

A crowd of Bristolians in 1951. There are even more Bristolians now. And they're in colour. (Bristol Post)



◀ From page 17

likewise Westbury-on-Trym & Henleaze. Stoke Bishop increased by 10%, maybe because someone built a load of old people's homes there, or because Stoke Bishop is so lovely that nobody there has died for ten years.

This wasn't just about affluent areas. Places like Southmead, Easton and Stockwood saw relatively low increases, too.

So where did all that population increase go? No prizes for the right answer. It's ...

... The middle of town!

The population of the Central Bristol ward grew by nearly 50% between 2011 and 2021, with many new arrivals piled up vertically in tall buildings. Students? Yes, loads of them, although many of the almost 18,000 people living in the ward on Census Day were not students, but normal grown-ups who put out their recycling boxes and pay Council Tax.

The numbers in Harbourside and Hotwells rose by nearly 30% (all those waterside flats), with growth also in Ashley, Bedminster and Southville.

In general, the population of central Bristol is rising much faster than that of outlying areas. This is a wider trend across the western world in which city centre neighbourhoods, where there were once factories, warehouses, big shops and working-class housing (though not so much in the case of central Bristol), have been colonised by well-paid, well-educated professionals, pushing the blue-collar classes out to peripheral areas.

We're the smartest

Over 42% of people aged 16 and over have a degree or higher qualification, compared with the England & Wales

Harbourside and Hotwells – 30% more people than 10 years ago.



The largest growth in population is in central parts of the city, often neighbourhoods which formerly had no residents at all but which have seen extensive redevelopment.

average of 33.8%, higher than any other England & Wales core cities. The most educated ward is Redland at 67%.

In two wards, however, more than a quarter of people have no educational qualifications at all: Hartcliffe & Withywood (30.4%) and Filwood (28.2%).

Unsurprisingly as it's a city, Bristol's population is younger than elsewhere. The median age of people living in Bristol is 32.4, compared to 40.3 for England & Wales overall. The age profile is skewed downwards by massive numbers of students, with full-time students accounting for 13.4% of the population aged 16 and over – nearly twice the national average.

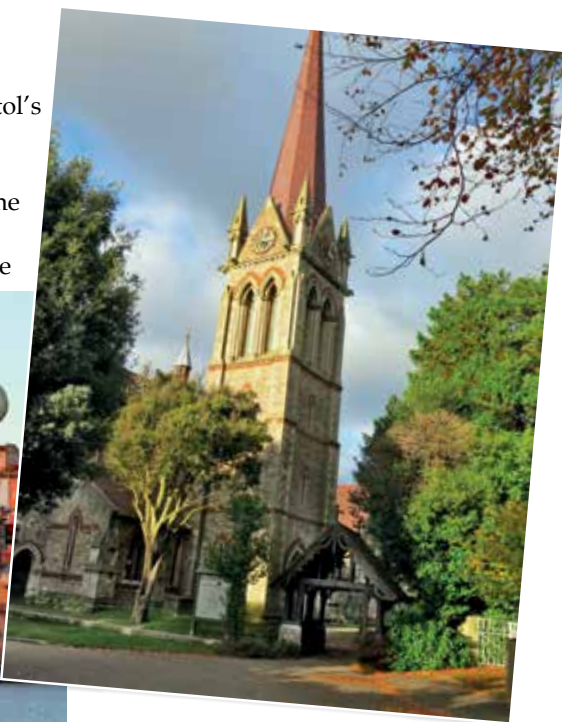
We're very diverse

On census day almost 19% of Bristol's population were born outside the UK, which is slightly above the average for England & Wales. Some of these will be students on long-term visas or EU citizens who have

since returned, but the general trend is definitely upwards. In 1991 the Black, Asian & Minority Ethnic population accounted for 5% of Bristol residents; in 2001 it was 8.2%, in 2011 it was 16%.

Jayne Mills says: "Bristol ... includes more than 287 ethnic groups, more than 45 religions, more than 90 main languages and more than 185 different countries of birth.

"The largest minority ethnic groups in 2021 were Somali 9,167 (1.9%), Pakistani 9,103 (1.9%) and Indian 8,371 (1.8%). In Bristol, the three most common non-UK countries of birth were Poland, Somalia and India.



St Mary's Church, Stoke Bishop. People declaring themselves Christian are now a minority in England & Wales. In Bristol they are heavily outnumbered by those who say they have no religion at all.

"Italy, Spain and Romania all entered the top 10 non-UK countries of birth.

"Strikingly, those who listed Romania as their country of birth increased by 544% over the decade, from 587 in 2011 to 3,782 in 2021, an increase of 3,195. This was driven by working restrictions for Romanian citizens being lifted in 2014."

Sexual orientation and gender identity

"For the first time in an England and Wales census, questions were asked about sexual orientation and gender identity," says Jayne.

"The questions were voluntary and only asked of people aged 16 and over but for the first time we have sound estimates of these population groups."

Some 23,650 people identified as lesbian, gay bisexual or other, 6.1% of the city's population and almost twice the national average.

Some 3,220 people said their gender identity was different to that registered at birth – 0.8% of over 16s.

Home truths

On Census Day, there were 191,638 households in Bristol, more than half of which (110,132 households) were single family units. Nearly a third were one-person households and the rest were multiple family or other household types, such as shared houses and student accommodation. The proportion of one person households was the same as the England and Wales average.

Almost 64% of Bristol households had no children although there has been a 5.5% increase in the number of households with dependent children in Bristol since 2011 due to an uptick in the local birthrate, which has since gone down again.

There are 2.4 people in the average Bristol household. Where do you keep your 0.4 of a person?

Bloody traffic

We've long told one another that Bristol has the highest rate of car ownership of any English city. It's true. Nearly three quarters of all households have access to a car or van, a slight increase on 2011.

Car availability varies widely, with well under 50% of households in many central areas with no car, while it's very high out in suburban areas.

Losing our religion

One of the few findings from the census to attract media coverage last year is

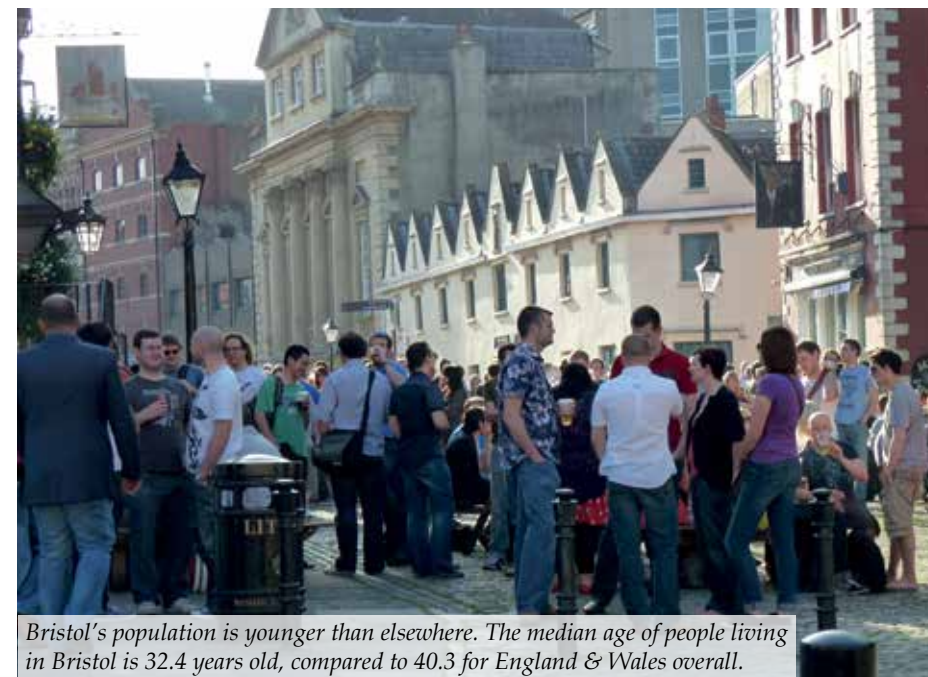


The pandemic may have distorted some census figures on work and travel to work, so we've not taken too much notice of those.

that for the first time, less than half of respondents in England & Wales described themselves as Christian – 46.2% compared with 59.3% in 2011.

People didn't have to answer the question about religion, though 93% of Bristolians did. Just under a third described themselves as Christian while 31,776 Bristolians (6.7%) are Muslim. Less than 3% were of other faiths, including Hindus, Sikhs and Jews.

The key finding, though, was that Bristol is one of the least religious places in the country. Just under a third of people described themselves as Christian, but 51% stated that they have no religion at all.



Bristol's population is younger than elsewhere. The median age of people living in Bristol is 32.4 years old, compared to 40.3 for England & Wales overall.

Bristol - less New-Agey than you think

With just over half of Bristolians claiming no religious allegiances, we are in truly uncharted territory historically. The city was always a major centre of conventional and nonconformist religious faith. Think of the Methodists, Baptists, Quakers and others in the past (and which obviously are still around) all the way to those alternative and hippy religions and belief systems that flourished here in the later 20th century.

The numbers of the latter nowadays are small. We have a few hundred pagans and Wiccans and 148 Rastafarians. There are also 114 self-declared Satanists. Alongside a few hundred adherents of ill-defined and sometimes home-made belief systems, there are nine Scientologists and a single Moonie.

Followers of the more New-Agey philosophies tend to reside exactly where you'd expect to find them - in Southville and Montpelier.

We're very dense

The ONS says that if you divided England up into football pitches and divided the population among them, there would be three people living on each.

However, if you divide Bristol into football pitches there would be 31 on each. So more of a rugby pitch, then.

For all the census statistics you could possibly want, see www.ons.gov.uk

For a more detailed summary of Bristol figures, see tinyurl.com/2y7ztcn3

Bristol's largest listed

Saving the Albion Dockyard is a monumental undertaking, writes *Paul Chibeba*.

The Grade II listed dry dock – the largest in Bristol – is not only impressive architecturally, but its stories reveal the city's shipbuilding past and those of the people who contributed to the incredible global impact that Bristol-built ships pioneered.

An ambitious project, put together by the SS Great Britain Trust, to preserve the historic harbour landscape is being put before the City Council planners later this year

For the charity's CEO, Matthew Tanner, it feels like a once-in-a-generation opportunity to make a real difference in conserving Bristol's unique harbour heritage:

'The Albion Dockyard Project brings together plans to save the dock itself, relaunch a working modern shipyard operation, develop a rich heritage visitor experience around and within Bristol's pioneering Paddle Steamer Great Western, and add to the harbour's ecology and wildlife habitats. The project will also deliver STEM learning providing a diverse and positive future for maritime engineering careers in the West of England. It sounds ambitious but, as part of the team taking the project forward, I know it can happen. The city can't lose sight of any element of this sort of project if we truly want a thriving mixed-use harbour as a thriving regional destination.'

To date, the SS Great Britain Trust team has been listening and engaging with

Albion Dockyard seen to the right of the Great Western Dockyard. Photo: Mo Malik for the SS Great Britain Trust.



1917 photo of the Albion Dockyard with the dry dock just out of shot on the far-left and the Boston City launching from the slipway. Photo: Bristol Culture.

a range of people including the Bristol Civic Society. Matthew adds:

'A range of project partners and local support is essential to making this possible. Conversations not only with Bristol Civic Society but also with harbour users, local residents, historians and specialist conservation and maritime experts is proving invaluable as we develop the proposals. And I am incredibly grateful to Bristol Civic Society for their enthusiasm, expertise and counsel.'

Dug in 1820 and originally spanning the entire swathe of land between the Floating Harbour and the New Cut, the Albion Dockyard was a major employer in the city through the nineteenth century, two world wars and up to the 1970s when the Miranda Guinness was launched. Bristol shipwrights built, launched and repaired many thousands of vessels; ships that sailed down the River Avon to trade in North America, Portugal, Africa, India, China and Australia.

In recent years, the SS Great Britain Trust has held several open days, welcoming visitors on free tours of the Albion Dockyard to see the size of the dry dock for themselves. Visitors have frequently shared their own stories about family links to the city docks. It is these personal recollections that combine with historic records and photographs to tell Bristol's incredible story.

Chris Lynch now works for the Albion Dock Company as Technical Manager. His first encounter with the Albion

hole in the ground

Dockyard was decades earlier when his father worked there:

'My life is steeped in the history of the harbour, I went into shipbuilding because my Dad made ships, it was as simple as that, it was a huge part of my childhood. I remember the launch of the Miranda Guinness from the Albion in 1977. Crowds of people lined the harbour to watch. I started as an apprentice there, and my Dad worked there too as a boilermaker welder. There are still a few master tradesmen, real masters. But the skills are dying out.'

Continuing ship repair on the Floating Harbour is essential. There are large vessels berthed on the harbour that can only be surveyed and repaired in the Albion Dry Dock. Thekla – Bristol's floating live music venue – memorably came into dry dock in 2019 for major repairs to her hull. Others like the elegant tall ship Pelican of London bring new business to the Floating Harbour when they dock for maintenance and repair.

The SS Great Britain Trust and the new Albion Dock Company have brought the current shipyard operation into the twenty first century while also maintaining traditional elements of their work and investing in the original dock infrastructure. Through apprenticeships with local colleges, seasoned dockyard managers like Chris Lynch are training the next generation of ship builders. This includes Flynn Dolan, who is currently completing training with the Albion Dock Company on fabricating and welding steel ships. Over the last year he has been getting to grips with the world of ship building. Flynn said:

'I think most people would be surprised at how we do things here, that we certainly use elements of modern technology, for example lasers are now used to guide ships in over the blocks. Before I started my apprenticeship, I had no idea how they'd get a ship in, operating the pumps, setting out blocks accurately... it looks like a massive undertaking from the outside. It's wonderful thinking how many years the dry dock has been used, and that it's still operating now, it's a great thing to be a part of.'

Back in the late 1800s, the Albion Dockyard comprised the huge dry dock

which by that time had been extended to accommodate two ships end to end, along with adjacent slipways for building and repairing timber vessels. Inventory records show that a range of buildings and lean-tos housed carpentry workshops, sawmills, timber stores, a smithery, tar mills and ropemaking. The dockyard was a gigantic operation and a pivotal focus of the city docks.

It is that rich heritage which will be restored and reinstated as part of the Albion Dockyard Project. The Albion Dockyard clock tower from the 1800s (seen in the 1917 photo to the left) no longer survives. It will be recreated as old photographs show it, to be a striking and beautiful element of the heritage landscape. The interior will provide further exhibition space with the small tower providing views of the harbour and dock.

The project plans are informed by expert research into the historic environment of the Albion Dockyard and the neighbouring Great Western Dockyard. The evidence of historic plans, descriptions, paintings and photographs will inform the recreation of an immersive dockyard experience where visitors can see, smell, hear, and interact with real history. In addition to the clock tower, roughly-built lean-tos will house workshops for demonstrations of traditional crafts which were once essential to shipbuilding in the two dockyards. New living history workshops around the dockyard are likely to include rope-working, carpentry and smithing in a purpose-built shed adjoining the working dock.

Showcasing the rich heritage and skills in the context of a museum experience introduces new audiences to these



Pelican of London in the Albion Dry Dock. Photo: SS Great Britain Trust.

Albion Dry Dock - James Beck for the SS Great Britain Trust

fascinating and sometimes challenging stories. The Trust's ongoing work with community researchers and ambassadors engages more people from more communities so that they feel welcome. Matthew Tanner sees this as a pivotal element of the project:

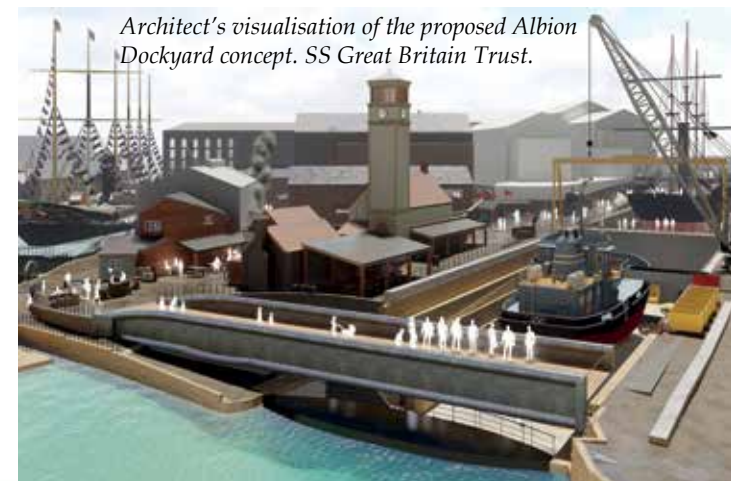
'This project puts people at the very heart of what we're proposing. It shares stories about those who contributed to the construction of extraordinary pioneering Bristol ships including Brunel's PS Great Western. It's about the people who crewed and travelled aboard vessels that set sail for global ports and the impact and relevance of migration stories both historically and today. The heritage experience we create will offer new opportunities for learning and discovery as well as fun and relaxation.'

Recreating and interpreting the industrial heritage site for new generations will include the proposal to restore and rehome the Brunel swivel bridge, currently under the Plimsoll Bridge. This bridge, which was built to Brunel's designs at the Albion Dockyard, is a significant part of the Brunel legacy in Bristol, and needs to find a long term sustainable future where it can be cared for, and made visually and physically accessible to the public.

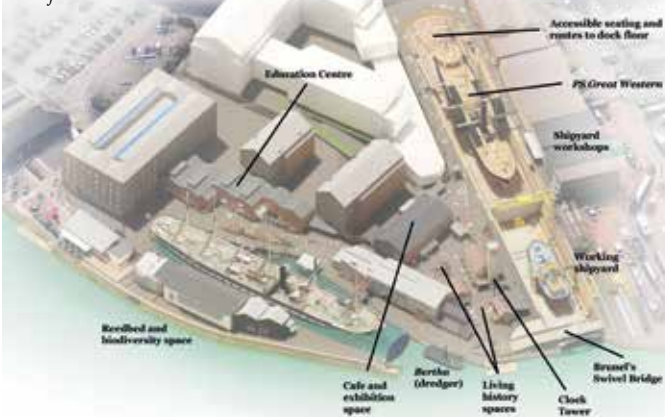
The project also involves the creation of new habitats for wildlife enhancing the ecology and biodiversity of Bristol's Floating Harbour. Installing a new reed bed will be a starting point, providing opportunities for people to learn about the ecology of the waterway in partnership with Avon Wildlife Trust.

This is a project that matters to a great many people. The conservation and renewal of the dock itself will keep the city's maritime industry alive, along with inspiring and educating future generations. It contributes towards a thriving heritage and mixed-use harbour – a place for employment, cultural exchange and wellbeing.

Find out more and give your views on the project plans at ssgreatbritain.org/albion



Architect's visualisation showing plans for the Albion Dockyard Project. SS Great Britain Trust.



My half century in changing Bristol



Peter Floyd reflects on his career in architecture and planning.

It was once said that when Bristol knocked at the door of No10 it would be opened. The Second World War (WW2) destroyed buildings, but also marked the beginning of a change in Bristol from an independent and successful commercial city, mostly owned and run by Bristolians, to one controlled by government funding and run by a City Council often riven by political differences and developed by remote business with little interest in the city. Independently minded citizens had other ideas.

After the devastation of WW2 there were proposals to rebuild a modern city centre. Bristol City Council (BCC) abandoned initial grand plans and decided on a smaller but radical plan to move the pre-war Wine Street shopping centre to a more spacious Broadmead. A new Civic Centre was proposed on the old Wine Street site but, by the early 60s, when I was a student at the RWA School of Architecture, it hadn't happened. It was discovered BCC was selling off the High Street end of the site. Some of my architect lecturers were part of the resistance and I helped them produce an animated protest film called 'Dead Centre', showing that not everyone agreed with the authorities and were prepared to produce other ideas.

BRISTOL CIVIC SOCIETY

Planning

Rebuilding war damaged cities demanded physical town planning skills. Having qualified as an architect and added a post graduate course in town planning, in 1964 I was offered a post in BCC's Engineering and Planning Department - attending the opening of the Cumberland Basin Bridges scheme on almost my first day. Bristol was getting on with it! In Design Section we served the Council under senior officers with whom one did not argue. I found myself working with John Totterdill, (Hon. Sec. of Bristol Civic Society) - astonishing - since staff were not supposed to speak to the public!

Our small group of architects were responsible for design advice to all the planners and engineers - of which there was a great deal. In 1966 BCC was to produce its first, non- statutory plan for the city centre, called the City Centre Policy Report (CCPR) and I found myself leader of the small design team. We produced CCPR in-house, in 10 frantic weeks (without public consultation) but we had to plan around the City Engineer's massive road proposals which would have destroyed much of the inner city, to which we and everyone else reacted violently and which thankfully were never completed.

I finally left local government in 1972 joining a well-known local practice with a range of work from town centres to building conservation. Moxley and

Jenner had both taught at the RWA School of Architecture and were part of Bristol Architects Forum trying voluntarily to improve city planning. I was there as town planner and became involved at the bottom of Christmas Steps. BCC had driven the Inner Circuit Road from The Centre through to Broadmead, removing the buildings that enclosed The Steps, causing yet another debate. The promised replacement took many years during the 1980s through five different building contracts.

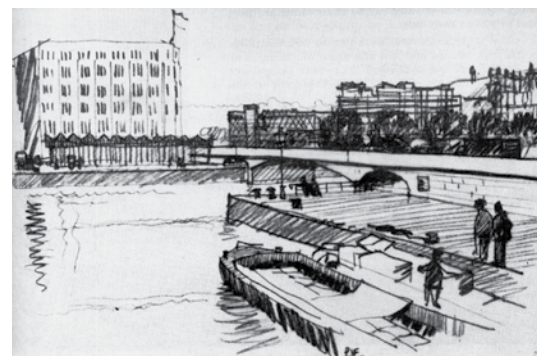
Almost no street trees had been planted in the city centre since before WW2, so following death of elms in the 1970s I helped Bristol Civic Society launch a campaign 'Trees for Bristol's Streets'. Bristol Civic Society collected money from the public, offering it to BCC if they would buy, plant and maintain the trees. Frank Kelf, with whom I had worked at BCC, charmed the engineers into accepting new street trees and was supported by BCC because it often had 'inessential' funding cut - but not if donated by the public! Over several years we planted 2000 large street trees around the city centre which are now fully grown. One of the most successful schemes was along Narrow Quay which had become a post- industrial car park following the 1967 closure of the City Docks. I approached the frontagers who paid for planting large trees all along the quay transforming it almost at once into a pleasant harbourside walk.

Bristol Civic Society continued to take action countering often poor development and in 1980 I contributed the background introduction to The Fight for Bristol describing what it had achieved - a story yet to be continued. I also joined The Bristol Chamber of Commerce and Initiative (BCCI) in the 1990s, hoping that business as the providers of Bristol's jobs might be listened to more readily by BCC. The riots of the 90s had moved business to take more care of the poor surroundings

in which most workers lived and members of the Chamber created 'The Bristol Initiative', led by John Savage, persuading business to fund joint initiatives with BCC which produced dozens of public /private partnerships, many concerned with the built environment. This began



Bristol Civic Society continued to take action countering poor development.



An urban expressway was to cut through historic Queen Square, and cross the docks by Bush House (now the Arnolfini). Thankfully never completed.

with the Broadmead Board to clean up the shopping centre; the eventual development of Canons Marsh and many of them continue, for example: Visit Bristol, The Festival of Ideas and Bristol Music Trust, creating a positive public role for the private sector in support of the Council.

Transport

After completing the City Centre Policy Report, I left BCC in 1967 for Hong Kong. There I wrote a thesis, called unsurprisingly, 'Planning in Practice: Bristol' looking at the city centre in its city and regional context and considering how the city might grow. Having completed it, I received a letter out of the blue from BCC inviting me to join a government team producing the Severnside Study, looking at the potential for development on both sides of the Severn Estuary. I came back. The report was completed - but the government changed and it disappeared. The study had stimulated my interest

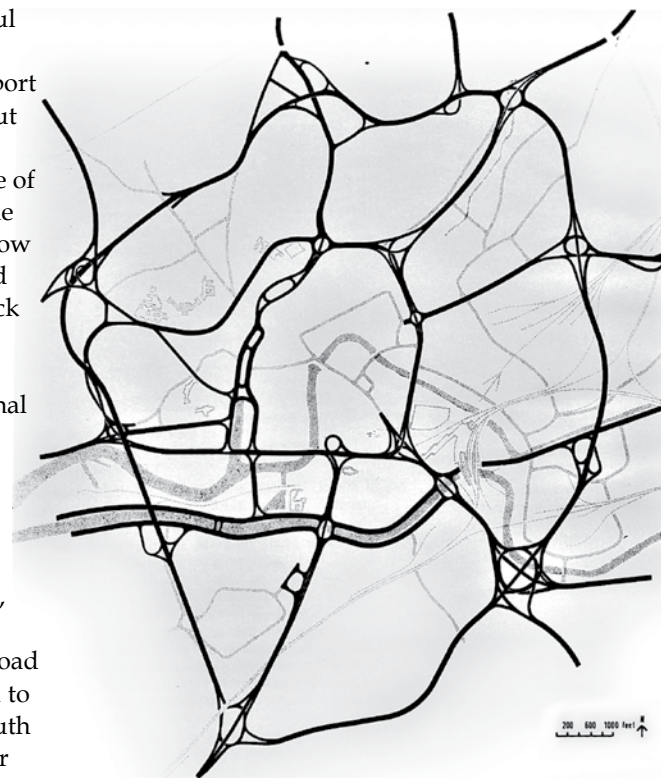
in how successful cities grow - by following transport systems - without which they are trapped. The use of the motor vehicle had begun to grow before WW2 and in 1930 Sir Patrick Abercrombie produced the

Bristol and Bath Regional Plan suggesting a new ring road system for ancient Bristol. The plan was adopted and amazingly by today's bureaucratic standards, the western half of the proposed outer Ring Road from Patchway around to The Downs and the south

eastern half of the Inner Circuit from St James Barton around to The Centre were both completed - before WW2 stopped everything in 1940. Post war traffic continued to grow, as BCC forecast in the 1966 City Centre Report and roads continued to be built for a while, though many were abandoned when government money ran out.

The eastern section of the Ring Road from M32 to Hicks Gate was eventually completed, narrower than planned. The route of the next section of the Ring Road west from Hicks Gate across south Bristol to the A38 had long been reserved on the 1952 Development Plan - but which BCC proposed to cancel.

Primary Distributor Roads
District Distributor Roads



A plan of the proposed Inner and Outer Circuit Roads illustrated in the Bristol City Centre Policy Report 1966.

The route offered an alternative road around the city centre and access to disadvantaged areas of South Bristol. BCCI mounted a campaign and with added support from North Somerset Council and the Airport, it was recently completed as the 4.5 mile South Bristol Link. While the motor vehicle will remain a vital part of the transport system, once the M4 and M5 were built across the northern and western sides of the city, most efforts to complete a planned road system for Bristol stopped - with the overloaded motorways taking the local traffic for which they were not intended. The main political objective today is on public and personal transport with public transport still trapped on existing roads by lack of government funding.

Conclusion

After the post war blast of re-planning and new transport infrastructure, the last half century has seen the city move on, while the waste of resources in political argument and abandoned plans has produced less and less planned direction. Town planning now seems only to be public control of private development - a process which grinds terribly slow, whilst Transport planning seems trapped by lack of funding. Structural change takes many years, so there must be political consensus and funding if any system once begun is ever to be completed.



One of the most successful tree planting schemes was along Narrow Quay.

www.bristolcivicsociety.org.uk

A plethora of plaques

- three in as many weeks!

Gordon Young

Canon Percy Gay MBE 1891 - 1975

Certainly, the vicar of St George's, Brandon Hill deserved recognition for his valiant fight to save the church from closure in the 1960s. Canon Percy Gay also was influential in establishing a new use for the building as a concert venue. Much was made of these topics at the unveiling ceremony.

And we should acknowledge the significance of the building in our townscape - such a landmark with its four noble columns. When architect, Sir Robert Smirke finished the church 200 years ago he went straight to London and, inspired by his work here, he designed the British Museum in the same Greek Revival style with 44 columns on its south front. Similarly, John Nash designed Blaise Hamlet in 1811 for retired employees of Blaise Castle House. He went on to design Buckingham Palace and Marble Arch!

Seems like Bristol is a fertile testbed for architects . . .

Sgt Maurice Albert Wyndham Rogers VC 1919 - 1944

To give you a flavour of just who we were honouring in Redland, here is the soldier's citation:

In the breakout from the Anzio beachhead, a battalion of the Wiltshire Regiment was ordered to attack enemy-held high ground. They advanced under intense fire and they sustained casualties. The platoon, checked by the intensity of machine-gun fire, took cover some 70 yards short of their objective. Sergeant Rogers continued to advance alone, and penetrated 30 yards inside the enemy's defences, drawing their fire and throwing them into confusion. Inspired by his example, the platoon began the assault. Sergeant Rogers was blown off his feet by a grenade, and wounded in the leg. Nothing daunted, he ran on towards an enemy machine-gun post, attempting to wipe it out. He was shot and killed at point blank range.

BRISTOL CIVIC SOCIETY



Dr John Black, the instigator of the plaque, flanked by regimental buglers.

Major Steven Bowkett of the Wiltshire regiment explained that 'Maintenance of the Momentum' is a 'Principle of War' for the British Army and is achieved by fire and movement. Sgt

Rogers will have known from his training how dangerous it can be for troops to stall in the attack. When this happens, it is the duty of the leader to get things moving and regain



The plaque acknowledges the building's transformation

momentum even at the risk of his own life. Lt Col 'H' Jones found himself in a similar situation in the Falklands campaign in 1982, for which action he also won a posthumous VC.

It was a deeply moving experience to stand in Brighton Road, with residents, neighbours and uniformed military personnel. Even the Amazon van-drivers stopped, reversed and respectfully took another route.

Sir George White 1854 - 1916

In late 2016 the Panel was approached about a plaque for Sir George White. He lived for most of his retirement in Cotham House, at the top of Cotham Hill. It's now the university's department of philosophy.

The Panel had no hesitation in approving the application. We were honouring Sir George's achievements: Britain's first electric tram service and first aircraft factory, and his philanthropic funding of medical facilities.

First things first - get permission to stick a plaque on private property: the university were in full agreement. Next - funding. Plaques are expensive, they are very durable and outlive us. We approached Airbus at Filton and made the point that their facility occupies land on the flank of Filton Hill where Sir George built Box Kite aircraft. Thus there is an exclusive, unbroken lineage linking 1910 biplane production in his little bus depot at his Filton tram terminus with their current world-leading wing manufacturing as well as adjacent advanced engineering, aerospace and defence facilities.

The persuasive prose did the trick - they immediately agreed to pay for a plaque.

We settled on the wording and got production under way. Then scaffolding went up and work started on fixing the roof of Cotham House. Then the plague hit. Finally, in May we gathered at Cotham House to pay due respect to Sir George White.

Was it worth the wait? Well, decide for yourselves:

In 1867 George White started work as a junior clerk with a firm of solicitors

in Corn Street. They had him dealing with bankruptcy cases. Just imagine him, at the age of fifteen, keen to learn, and he's immersed in insolvency - how not to run a business! Such work laid a solid foundation for his career.

When George was twenty, the legal practice established the Bristol Tramways Company with young

George as Company Secretary. He was now working with some of the richest and most influential men in Bristol.

And our city was expanding - countryside was turning into suburbs and here was George involved in an exciting project which began with just a few miles of track with horse-drawn

vehicles, but would go on to link new suburbs with the city centre and work destinations. In his lifetime, the population of our city grew by more than a quarter of a million inhabitants.

George was eager for those in working-class districts like Bedminster and Horfield to see the benefits that trams would bring.

But he didn't get it all his own way... affluent Clifton feared trams would bring undesirable visitors and depress property values. Here's a vitriolic letter from the Bristol Mercury, October 1878:

Sir, is it not something terrible and most wicked that the disgusting tramway is to bring the nasty, low inhabitants of Bristol up into our sacred region? We have nothing common or unclean amongst us at present. Poor people do not walk about on Clifton streets . . . and now here are those money-making plebeians of Bristol talking of running tramcars through our beautiful and lovely Clifton! Why is it to be? Why must the common people be allowed to walk about here? They would feel more comfortable, surely, among their own houses and streets than here.

The council rejected the Clifton extension plans and Clifton was only ever served by horse omnibuses.

Then, in the 1890s, tram development really took off with electrification. Bristol was the ideal place to start - electric trams could ascend our hills. In 1895 the Old Market to Kingswood route was the first in Britain. George cast his net wider, with motor omnibuses, charabancs and taxis. And his tram empire grew - he acquired networks in Gloucester, York, Dublin, Middlesbrough, Reading and much of west London.

Then he entered the aviation business. In 1909 on a visit to south-west France for health reasons, Sir George watched an early French aviator flying a biplane. Inspired, he formed the British & Colonial Aeroplane Company with a production line at Filton. Sir George



Sue Partridge, Head of Airbus Filton, outlines future ambitions for the historic site.

foresaw the future of aviation - speed in the air promised limitless possibilities. Within a year of its founding in that bus depot, we could boast the world's biggest aircraft factory and the first launched on a proper financial footing.

The Bristol Box Kite and subsequent more advanced models were recognised as among the First World War's outstanding aircraft.

And if Bristol inspires architects to gravitate to London to work on ambitious projects, then it stirs businessmen to invest here in their city. Sir George raised £50,000 in three years for the BRI's Edward VII memorial wing and topped up the sum himself. HH Wills, the tobacco baron bequeathed even more to the BRI some years later.

We have plenty of Bristolians to celebrate.

www.bristolcivicsociety.org.uk

Remember the Redcliffe Flyover?

You almost certainly do if you were living in Bristol anytime between 1967 and 1998. As we mark 25 years since its passing, *Eugene Byrne*, our man in the driving-seat assuring his terrified passengers that it's as safe as houses, reports.

For 31 years, Bristol's drivers and passengers had a free fairground white-knuckle ride in the form of the Redcliffe Flyover. You'll remember it well if you ever travelled over it, particularly as a front-seat passenger.

It took you hurtling over a flimsy-looking metal bridge, the equally delicate-looking barriers just a few inches away, and rising ever-higher over the roads below. The experience, according to your own nerves and the competence of the driver, could range from unsettling to terrifying.

In the 1960s, the road traffic coming through Bristol was constantly increasing and congestion was getting worse. The junction of Temple Way, Victoria Street, Temple Gate and Redcliffe Way was a particularly troublesome spot. It was the meeting of the main road from/to Bath and Keynsham, Temple Meads station, the main routes to the City Docks and the city centre.

The solution in place nowadays is wider roads and a multi-lane system controlled by traffic lights.

But in the 1960s, widening the road was too complicated. There were too many buildings in the way, plus the rail line from Temple Meads to the Docks. Flyovers were fashionable at the time, and it was decided to build a single-



The flyover shortly after opening in 1967 (Bristol Post).

lane one-way "bridge" from Temple Way to Redcliffe Way. Traffic heading east to west would thus be carried over the vehicles below.

The cost was £120,000 and work on the 1,000ft long structure by contractors Nott Brodie was completed in five weeks. It opened on September 11 1967 with Gervas Walker, chair of Bristol's planning committee, driving across in his car. He followed three lorries with a combined weight of 70 tons which had gone over first to demonstrate the structure's strength.

The Bristol Evening Post's front-page report quoted traffic engineers' warning that motorists would feel "a certain strangeness the first few times they go across."

The assumption was that a more permanent arrangement would do

away with the flyover in eight or ten years, because at the time all manner of gargantuan road schemes were being planned, including the one which saw a big chunk of Totterdown demolished a few years later.

But the flyover was still there in 1990s, by which time everyone wanted it gone. The Bristol Development Corporation, a private company with planning powers to regenerate a large area of the city's south-east, wanted to pull it down, as did Avon and Bristol councils. Said one councillor: "It isn't really acceptable ... to have one of the major gateways into the city being this rickety old construction."

The last car travelled across at 7.30pm on Friday June 12 1998. The very last vehicle was a 1962 Austin Healey driven by Ken Johnson of

English Partnerships, the organisation which had inherited some of the Development Corporation's work.

And in the passenger seat was Bill Spring, the former lorry driver who had been the first person to drive across it on the day it opened.

Left, Pictured in 1992 (Bristol Post).



Bristol Civic Society membership

Your Civic Society needs YOU!

Bristol Civic Society is more than 100 years old. It is a non-party-political body which campaigns for what is best for our city. Joining the Society is inexpensive and it is open to all. The bigger and more diverse our membership, the stronger we can be.

As a Society member you're also on the invitation list to a range of events and benefits, from serious campaigning through to expert talks and social evenings and outings.

Bristol Civic Society is:

- * Saving the best of Bristol's past
- * A powerful voice in Bristol's future
- * Campaigning on issues that affect us all - and the generations to come
- * A great way to make new friends (and maybe re-connect with old ones!)

Find out more about the Society and its work at bristolcivicsociety.org.uk



Joining is easy

There are three ways to apply. You can do it via the website: bristolcivicsociety.org.uk/get-involved/join-the-society where you can join using PayPal, or download an application form. Or fill out, cut out or photocopy, and return the form below.

Have you considered leaving something to the Bristol Civic Society in your will?

Membership application to join Bristol Civic Society

Membership (Annual)	Rate	✓
Individual	£20	
Joint living at the same address	£30	
Student	£10	

Please return to: Membership Secretary, Bristol Civic Society, 17 Bathurst Parade, Bristol, BS1 6UB. Cheques, if not made by standing order, made payable to Bristol Civic Society.
Enquiries: Tel: 0117 927 6991.
Email: membership@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk

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Events

Autumn and Winter 2023

The football season is now getting underway, the World Cup Rugby kicks off in Paris in early September, Donald Trump will probably be running for President, inflation is still with us and the Events Team is working on the Autumn/Winter programme of activities for the entertainment of the society's expanding membership.

We aim to provide opportunities for members to both exercise their legs and enjoy stimulating topics for the mind. All in support of the overall objective of the society *to improve Bristol's built environment and to celebrate it.*

Our Autumn/Winter programme will involve walks, visits to local places of interest, a seminar or two related to issues within the city, the odd film from the archives and monthly interactive Zoom presentations as the dark evenings draw in.

As usual much of the programme is yet to be confirmed and some events are opportunities which arise at fairly short notice, well after the publishing date of this issue of *Better Bristol*. Please check Bristol Civic Society's website (www.bristolcivicsociety.org.uk/events) for updates and details of other new events.

We usually notify members via email of upcoming events, particularly where booking is required. We take bookings on a first come first served basis. Some events will have a small charge payable, in most instances by card. Keep a look out in your in-boxes for information on new events.

SEPT Monday 4 September 2023, 6.00 pm on zoom.

Ashton Court Mansion - a new initiative.

This is an initial event designed to 'kick start' the Society's new initiative - see separate article, pages 8-9, for details.

Wednesday 27 September 2023 at The Mount Without.

"The only way is up?"

Is high rise development in Bristol



Is high rise development in Bristol inevitable?

inevitable, as some say? This event will explore alternative approaches to accommodating additional housing in a city where there is limited land with potential for development and where every site seems to have complex constraints.

Speakers and timing to be confirmed

OCT Wednesday 18 October 2023, 7:30pm, Zoom.

The management of bus services.

Talk by Professor Graham Parkhurst.

Bristol's Housing Crisis. A focused event, in preparation with Bristol City Council, to be held in mid-October.

The challenges of delivering affordable housing and meeting the increasing needs of residents.

Redcliffe Walk. Gordon Young will lead a walk round this historic but often overlooked area. Details to be announced.

Coming up

Walks exploring areas of industrial or social history.

More visits to sites of interest.

Monthly Zoom events on culture, local history and infrastructure.

Archive films, light hearted looks at where we have come from.

If you are interested in helping organise *Bristol Civic Society* events why not volunteer and join our team. events@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk