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Bristol Civic Society response to St Philips Marsh masterplan consultation round 1

July 2025

1 Introduction

The Society welcomes the opportunity to comment on the masterplan at a relatively early stage in its development.

We respond below to the aspects of the masterplan presented in this first consultation, but we are conscious that good placemaking includes much more. We look forward to the consultations in the autumn when more detail will be added. The Civic Society is keen to engage in a wider conversation with regard to Bristol Temple Quarter and the St Philips Marsh area.

2 General comments

Clearly the material presented in this first of three consultations is not the full analysis required for an effective masterplan. We urge that you present to the public the strategic approach to this masterplan, the bigger picture which underlies the options presented in this consultation. Such a strategic approach needs to recognise St Philips Marsh as a key part of the emerging Bristol Temple Quarter, where there is an opportunity to stand back and reassess its role and function, responding to its location on the edge of the City Centre and to the land use requirements emerging from the Bristol Local Plan modifications, ie the need to provide more new homes and retain and intensify business activity. There is an opportunity to develop a new urbanism of medium height mixed-use development all set within a highly accessible greenspace and movement framework.

This consultation presents a selection of simplified options in order to gauge the drift of general public opinion. We start with some general comments that draw attention to the complexities that are missed in the simplified presentation.

The analysis for later drafts of the masterplan should include:

- the relationship of St Philip's Marsh (StPM) to the wider city and adjoining neighbourhoods, such as Paintworks and Avonmeads
- some recognition of the current development reality, for instance the student accommodation high-rise blocks between the river and Albert Road.
- heritage assets, including locally listed structures, as well as the Feeder canal itself
- employment provision in StPM in the context of total employment space across the city, an issue that was challenged at the recent Local Plan Examination
- ownership boundaries, including opportunities of Council-owned land
- the constraints on development arising from existing underground services

We also expect the masterplan to consider:

- delivery and funding mechanisms

- an incremental development plan that considers the area in five, ten, fifteen years, etc

3 Response to the consultation

Our response is structured using the page number (1-19) references from the online survey information.

3.1 Constraints and opportunities (pages 3 and 4)

Barriers to permeability form a key starting point for the masterplan, as St Philips Marsh has so many! The Marsh is an island surrounded by water on 3 sides, with road entrances via constricted railway tunnels and bridges.

In addition, the Feeder Canal, and the east/west railway line and maintenance yards split the area into three parts. These are massive barriers between the north and south areas. Across both the railway line and the canal, there are only two north/south permeability routes.

Possible remedies:

- the maintenance yards could be moved to a location out of the city. We understand that the maintenance depot may need development to cater for new electric rolling stock, so now may be a good time for it to be moved.
- despite the barrier it creates, we think that the railway line should be retained for its occasional use as a reserve route, and its potential for future use.
- it would be ideal to add another north/south walking route under the railway line to connect the north and south residential areas
- more could be made of the walking route from Three Lamps, using the railway bridge. Although not accessible for disabled users, it is on a desire line from Totterdown to St Philips and could be better signposted.
- an additional pedestrian bridge over the Feeder Canal has been mooted - from The Iron Works development (Silverthorne Lane plots 2 and 3), but it does not appear on the diagram. It would give a direct link to Kingsland Road and thence to Old Market.
- a second pedestrian bridge could be built across the river from Paintworks, from the western end of Paintworks, connecting through to Albert Crescent.
- a pedestrian bridge from the new university building through to Avon Street has been mooted for years. It is key to onward walks from the new east station entrance towards Silverthorne Lane. We understand it is still planned, subject to funding, but it does not appear on the diagram.

3.2 Land use areas (page 5)

The land use areas seem acceptable as an initial conceptual guide. That is: a mixed-use area close to the University hub and Temple Meads (which is ideal as the highest level of non-vehicle movement would be expected there), quieter residential development in the somewhat isolated southern area, and industrial to the east, with good access to the spine road.

However the divide between 'intensified industrial' (east of Albert Crescent) and mixed-use (west of Albert Crescent) represents a form of hard zoning, which may not be appropriate given the many forms of modern industry that may locate there. The forms taken by modern industry may be better able to blend into mixed-use areas than the older industrial uses, in which case the divide could be more nuanced. Roads are not an ideal separator of "zones", and a hard divide would not work well

for Albert Crescent. Indeed, we note that the revised Local Plan Policy DS3 already emphasises modern industry and mixed-use:.

“North east St. Philip's Marsh This location will be developed for mixed residential and workspace uses, including small-scale manufacturing and maker-spaces.“

The allocations of space are predicated on intensification of industrial use into smaller areas than at present. Although possible configurations for achieving this are presented, we suggest they remain somewhat theoretical. We also wonder how the transformation from the current spatial arrangement of industrial sites and uses to the future configuration will be achieved, and what sorts of employment uses will be pushed out to other areas. Further strategic definition of how it will be delivered should be incorporated into the masterplan.

3.3 Local Centre options (page 10)

It seems obvious that the main local centre should be in the larger northern half of the area, i.e. the Feeder Road or Albert Crescent options.

Either of those locations [FR or AC] would work. On balance, we think it would be better for the main local centre to be located at the heart of the St Philips area, but we are also conscious that the Feeder canal will provide an attractive setting for cafes etc if it was a pedestrianised centre.

We note that there are Council-owned plots on Albert Crescent halfway between the Feeder and the Albert Crescent railway bridge. This could be the best location for establishment of a centre and provide retail and community facilities at the start of development – also adjacent to the existing nursery school

Each option identifies 3 or so 'social amenity' sites away from the local centre, but do not recognise the need for at least a corner shop away from the local centre. The South West quadrant will need at least a corner shop because of its disconnection from the north of the Marsh area. Also an appropriate location in the NE industrial quadrant should be considered.

The local centre should be more than linear, along a street: it should act as a local destination, with dwell space and scope for outdoor refreshment opportunities etc., a public plaza of some sort.

3.4 Open space options (page 11)

Central and inner areas of Bristol have very little open space per person. The emerging local plan suggests that this will get worse, with a 36% decrease to 7.75 sq metres per person in the centre and a 12% decline to 11.53 sq metres in inner urban areas, compared with Natural England's target of 30 square metres per person (currently achieved city-wide). The 12% decline in inner areas assumes there will be an increase in open space in a few areas, as set out in the Parks and Green Spaces Strategy. These include the St Philip's Marsh area. The existing park provision (Sparke Evans) at circa 2 hectares is inadequate for a population of 7,500.

Scenarios 1, 2 and 3 offer various options. The options are presented to provoke discussion, not as either/or options, and we suggest a pick and mix from the three scenarios. There should be multiple open spaces of different types: a new main park, a river corridor, green streets, smaller open spaces and play areas – all of them.

We suggest options for the '*main*' open space to be *within* the St Philips Marsh area, not at its edge, so as to make it easily accessible to more people. The riverside route or the canal should not be the '*main*' space (scenario 1), as that would favour certain leisure uses too much.

We approve of the proposal for a 'large' central park (scenario 2), for multiple uses. It needs to be a significant park that will add resources, focus and identity to this new community and help mitigate the inevitable density of development. There is a question of how it relates to the town centre which is likely to be competing for the same location or be adjacent. Reserving space for this now is critical, or it will never happen.

We support the proposal for greening the corridor loop (scenario 3), in addition to the park(s).

The revised Local Plan Policy DS3 says: "Sparke Evans Park will be enhanced to serve the wider area and provide space for recreation;" , and in the current soon-to-be-replaced Local Plan it was one of 73 'Local Historic Parks and Gardens'. But we do not think that the location of Sparke Evans Park is ideal. It is not currently well used. It does not have any housing adjacent. Successful parks invariably have housing overlooking them to ensure "natural surveillance", and the masterplan should look to introduce housing near the Park. However, it is bounded by the river and Albert Road and St Philips Causeway, and this will limit the amount of housing that can be built nearby within the StPM area, unless the railway depot is relocated. It does however provide open space for residents from Paintworks and possible future developments immediately south of the river, via Sparke Evans Bridge.

Overall the package of open space and other infrastructure should be set out for all developers to contribute to as part of the overall visions for a great new place. BTQ should consider the best delivery method for such infrastructure

4 Movement options (page 12)

The options are largely about which roads to pedestrianize, with the proposed bus route and HGV access almost the same between the 3 scenarios.

The chosen routes for pedestrianisation lead to the chosen location for a local Centre - part of Feeder Road alongside the canal (scenario 1), Albert Road south of the railway (scenario 2), Albert Crescent (scenario 3). Scenarios 1 and 2 create New Albert Road, a realignment of part of Albert Road south of the railway.

It is important to respond to and create pedestrian desire lines. Hence our proposal to consider adding another north/south route under the railway line between the North residential area and the South residential area, and a second pedestrian bridge across the river from Paintworks.

We do not see why a restriction to single-decker buses need be a problem . European cities are served well by single-decker buses.

The masterplan should include more information on the ultimate destinations of the bus routes serving the Marsh area, after consultation with First Bus and others.

If the train line through the area is retained, consideration should be given to the feasibility of using it to serve the St Philips area. A station in the centre of St Philips Marsh would provide easy access to the rail network, perhaps even as part of a future tram-train network. Access might also be provided for goods traffic too.

The new access road for HGVs to the industrial zone in the north-east of the Marsh area will span the railway and will be costly to construct, and will involve difficult Network Rail development control processes. We ask whether modern industry operations require HGVs to the same extent, and whether the new road might be an extravagance.

We note that Avonmeads Retail Park is a significant area on the edge of the Marsh area. This development was designed largely for vehicular access. It should ideally connect well with the new developments for active travel modes. (We recognise there is an actual pedestrian link to the Cinema from Barton Hill via the Silverthorne Lane narrow Canal Bridge and onward under the Spine Road, but better and far more salubrious connectivity is needed.)

5. Conclusion

The Civic Society is keen to engage in a wider conversation with regard to Bristol Temple Quarter and the St Philips Marsh area to ensure that this area of significant change is planned with placemaking at its heart, is predicated on engagement of existing and future generations and key stakeholders and that recognises the contribution this area can make to the growth of Bristol. We urge that you consider the lessons from successful urban extensions in Europe which have place making, infrastructure planning and long term stewardship at their heart.