

# Better Bristol

The Bristol Civic Society Magazine - Issue 12 Spring 2018

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BRISTOL  
CIVIC  
SOCIETY

an independent force for a **better Bristol**





Front Cover: Bristol City Centre. Reconfigured and Metrobus ready. Photo: Jeff Lucas.

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*All articles are the opinion of individual authors and don't necessarily reflect the views of the Bristol Civic Society.*

## Chairman's piece Simon Birch considers the role of the Bristol Civic Society at a time when City Council finances and services are under pressure.



### The Challenge

Financial and service cut backs are continuing to bite on an unprecedented scale. Public services which we have all taken for granted are being cut back or stopped completely. Public parks will no longer receive the same level of revenue funding; libraries and public toilets are being closed and reduced in number; services for adults and children are also being closely managed. The changes are substantial and significant, impacting in many ways on the lives of Bristolians.

### The Civic Society

Since its foundation in 1905 the Civic Society has operated as an outsider, challenging, holding to account, and certainly not a part of delivering public services. The emphasis has been on the appearance of the City, of ensuring quality new development and enhancement of the historic. The Society has generally been reactive, very occasionally pro active. There have occasionally been "one off" projects.

### Recent developments

We have recently taken over running the Blue Plaques scheme from the Council and this is proving successful, popular, and self funding. But not exactly a major Council service! At the present time it's heartening too that Walk Fest is going forward this May outside the Council.

The Civic Society is currently working on a possible bid for Ashton Court Mansion - see page 14. The Mansion is not a priority for City Council but clearly important in itself. We have made a similar approach to saving St Michael's Church - see page 16. In the past we have carried out significant amounts of tree planting especially in the City Centre.



Ashton Court Mansion - a possible bid by the Bristol Civic Society?

### New structures

There is much discussion and research at the present time about the possibility and feasibility of foundations and trusts, an option perhaps for running the City's parks, even taking responsibility for the management of street trees. Yet financial resources will be needed, regardless of the structure.

Moving assets into arm's length trusts is working well for Colston Hall (Music Trust), Arnos Vale Cemetery and Underfall Yard and there may be further scope. The development of community asset transfers is in its infancy and further assessment is needed of its potential future impact.

### City Council Services

Is it realistic to talk of other organisations (apart from the private sector) taking over ongoing City Council services? Is running libraries, public toilets, street trees a possibility? Or are these just too big? There are of course local groups supporting individual local libraries and park groups for most of Bristol's parks.

There is a good reason why we have

local authorities - to deliver local services. There is a strong argument that it is only so far that volunteers can take over services at a time of major cut backs. A key question is where will the funding come from if not from local government? I have been in meetings where mention is made of wealthy local residents supporting services but is this a real option? Personally I have doubts. Will charitable funds be another possibility? Perhaps, although the demands will be immense if this approach takes off across the country. Funding for specific projects may be easier to attract, projects which have clear objectives and a definite end date, in contrast to funding for ongoing services whose scope may only increase and which are never ending.

Or am I being too negative? What do you think? Should the Civic Society be doing more, being more imaginative in its response? I look forward to hearing from you and to discussing your ideas.

**Simon Birch**

Email: chair@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk



**Not already a member? Why not join TODAY!**

See page 27 for more details...

# Tackling Bristol's housing crisis

**Bristol needs many more houses. Bristol is getting many more houses. Eugene Byrne looks at the Council's massive house-building drive, and the implications for the future.**

The headline campaign promise of Marvin Rees when standing for election as Bristol's Mayor was 2,000 new homes a year.

Two years on from taking office in May 2016 and all the signs are that the pledge on the campaign literature is to be fulfilled.

Well, sort of.

Apparently we weren't supposed to get the idea that 2,000 homes would be erected in year one of his term, followed by 2,000 each in the years following. No, the 2,000 a year – 800 of which would be "affordable" – was the target for 2020, at the end of the Mayoral term.

The good news is that by 2020 Bristol is on target to build more than 8,000. So evened out over Rees' four-year term we will have had an average of more than 2,000 per year. The planning applications are now flowing in as homes are built by private developers and the council.

In the year just ended, just over 1,900 homes should have been built. The current year should see 2,000, and between April of 2019 and March of 2020 it's reckoned that around 3,500 homes will be built. Just over 1,000 of those will be classed as affordable.

These will either be old-fashioned council houses, or homes built for social rent, usually through housing associations.

That Bristol has a housing crisis goes without saying. Recent years have seen a dramatic growth in the city's population. While between 2010 and 2015 the Council had notable success bringing empty



House prices have risen in response to growing demand.

Photo: Eugene Byrne

properties back into use, relatively few new homes were being built.

At the same time, house prices and rents have risen dramatically in response to growing demand, while changes to the benefits system left many people homeless.

Anyone walking through central Bristol can see the scale of the homelessness crisis for themselves. But the unprecedented numbers of rough sleepers are only the tip of a massive iceberg. Many more people who are technically homeless are prevailing on the hospitality of friends and relatives, or living in hostels or other temporary accommodation.

What is also highly visible on the streets

of central Bristol is the boom in student accommodation. Huge developments have sprung up because providing student homes is a highly profitable and risk-free business. These blocks occupy sites which might otherwise have been used for housing permanent residents. None of the actual or planned homes in the Council's figures are for students; student accommodation is counted separately.

The Rees administration's focus on housing is led by Cllr Paul Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing, who emphasises that the overall strategy is not just about building: "The house building is only one of my four main responsibilities, the other three are

provided by the local council, by private providers or housing provided at 80% or less of the local market rent and it is in the first instance aimed at people on the local housing register or waiting list. In Bristol affordable rent is currently defined as the local housing allowance level – i.e. the maximum rent a tenant can claim benefits for.

It's further complicated by the question of who gets priority when it comes to a scarce supply of affordable homes. Some authorities, e.g. in London, desperately need key workers living there, while others might want them for people on low incomes. But do low incomes include being rented and intermediate housing, provided to eligible households whose needs are not met by the market?"

Generally, affordable housing is defined as rented accommodation

## Bristol's population – booming after a long decline

The population of Bristol nowadays is only slightly larger than it was at the end of WW2.

The number of people living within the Bristol council boundaries was something over 440,000 in the 1951 census. In the 2011 census it was less – 428,000 – but according to Bristol City Council estimates (September 2017) it is now around 455,000.

Between 1951 and 2001 the population actually fell; from the 1980s to the turn of the century it was below 400,000. This was due to a number of factors; chiefly increasing affluence and car ownership prompting many families to move to towns and villages outside of the city boundaries to commute to work. At the same time, Council planning policy actively opposed residential development in the central area of the city.

The population of the Bristol local authority area was still falling in the

1980s and 90s when Bradley Stoke, one of the biggest housing developments in Europe at the time, was being built just beyond the city border.

The return of Bristol's population to 1951 levels is a very recent phenomenon; the headline population figure only overtook the 1951 figure two or three years ago.

Family homes are now the exception. Of the 194,000 households in Bristol around 50,000 have dependent children. By contrast here are 60,000 homes occupied by just one person. Relatively few people lived alone in 1951.

There are several factors in the dramatic rise in Bristol's population in recent years. In the decade from 2002 there were large numbers of arrivals, particularly from Eastern Europe and Somalia.

But while many might want to simply put it down to immigration, there are other factors at work. Large numbers of 1940s-1960s-born "Baby Boomers"

are living longer than their parents or grandparents would have done, and they are often living alone.

We have also had more than two decades of redevelopment of central Bristol. Thirty years ago, hardly anyone lived in central Bristol and no-one lived in the City Docks. These are significant swathes of the local authority area which are now uninhabited which never were before.

While net migration to Bristol has stalled, we have seen more recent population growth due to a major upswing in the local birth-rate in the years to 2012.

If recent trends continue, says a Council report, the "the total population of Bristol is projected to increase by 103,100 people over the 25 year period (2014-2039) to reach a total population of 545,600 by 2039. This is a projected increase of 23.3% which is higher than the projection for England of 16.5%."



Left, 1948 a new street of houses on the growing Lockleaze housing estate  
Photo Bristol Post.

Right, The former Brooks site, St Werburghs, has permission for 102 residential units.  
Photo: Mike Manson



regulating the private rented sector, management of council housing and reducing homelessness."

It's a demanding role. "I seem to have at least one breakfast meeting per week," he tells Better Bristol. "Then into formal council meetings, meetings with developers, informal meetings, reading the latest abuse on social media and an evening with residents' groups or Labour Party meetings. Some days I have lunch."

The strategy required a major shake-up in how the Council approaches housing.

Unused or derelict Council-owned land which might otherwise have been sold was taken off the market. The Planning Committee has become less amenable to new student developments and some of the buildings being permitted are taller than might have been allowed in the past.

The Council has also sold off outdated council houses on the basis that the proceeds could be used to build more than one home elsewhere.

There has also been pressure on developers, who regularly try to evade

commitments to include affordable housing in projects by claiming that they would otherwise be unprofitable. In one case last year it turned out that one firm was claiming a margin of less than 20% was "unprofitable."

The next two or three years should see a lot of changes. Paul Smith: "In central Bristol the skyline will start to change, in outskirts derelict spaces will start to be built on. Most areas of the city will be affected, the biggest development

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The biggest development area is Hengrove and Hartcliffe.

# Focus on Old Market

John Payne, from Bristol Civic Society's Planning Applications Group, looks at what's going on in Old Market.



Perrett House.

Change is palpable as you walk along the streets of Old Market with new shops, restaurants and bars moving in and residential conversions and new builds coming on stream.

Local residents' preferences and aspirations for development in Old Market are expressed in the Old Market Quarter Neighbourhood Development Plan. Bristol Civic Society has supported the representations of the Old Market Community Association in a number of cases. Applications in Old Market are frequently on the Planning Application Group's (PAG) agenda. Here are some examples.

**Perrett House, Redcross Street** (Application ref: 16/06885/F). This proposal is for extensive remodelling of the existing building to provide 31 additional dwellings including affordable units. PAG had no objections to this proposal which makes more efficient use of the site whilst substantially improving the appearance of the building. The applicants also propose to upgrade the quality of the nearby triangles of open space which are currently poorly maintained.

**59-67 West Street** (17/04749/F). This site contains poor quality



59 - 67 West Street.

buildings between two buildings on adjacent sites which contribute positively to the character of the Old Market Conservation Area. It extends from West Street to Braggs Lane. The proposal is to replace the existing degraded buildings with a mixture of retail floorspace, other commercial space and flats. PAG has sought and welcomed improvements to the design of this proposal since the application was first made.

However, we still think there is room for improvement to the ground floor on the West Street elevation to make the retail units more compatible with the character of the neighbourhood.

Traditional shop fronts with stall risers would achieve this. The window design on the upper floors also needs to reflect local character to a greater extent. Further revisions have been made to the application.

PAG has submitted objections to a proposal for a terrace of houses to the rear of **13-15 West Street** (17/06891/F). The application is for one single town house and five houses in multiple occupation. Whilst the site is suitable for residential development, this proposal would put far too much pressure on it. As it stands, it would accommodate 25 to 30 people yet there

(continued on page 8) ►

## Not just in Bristol...

The closure and sale of Filton airfield has already led to massive housing development on the northern fringe of Bristol, but there's plenty more to come.

Some 5,700 homes along with commercial and employment spaces, schools, a railway station and community facilities are set to be built there following an agreement between South Gloucestershire Council and private businesses at the beginning of this year.

Several companies are involved as landowners and developers, including Deeley Freed, YTL Developments, BAe and Taylor Wimpey.

The pact between council and companies is intended to ensure that the infrastructure for the whole site is properly delivered, and at the right time, and that all the development sites are properly joined-up.

The plan also includes a Metrobus line extending to Cribbs Causeway, a path for cyclists and pedestrians, and a north-south bus link.

Some have long complained that South Gloucestershire has taken advantage of the Filton area in order to keep further housing development away from the authority's more rural areas, but there can be little doubt that homes just five miles from the centre of Bristol will be in demand.

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area is Hengrove and Hartcliffe but over time we will see major developments in Bedminster, east of Temple Meads, Cumberland Basin (see page 12), Lockleaze and Southmead."

Rees and Smith intend to have started a process which will continue regardless of who is elected Mayor in 2020, creating a momentum which they hope will end Bristol's shameful rate of rough sleeping and which will accommodate the expected population growth.

It will be an uphill struggle. If he



Redcliffe Quarter. In central Bristol the skyline will begin to change. Photo: Mike Manson

## The trouble with students

Landlords love students. They're usually quite well-behaved, and in any event their tenancy agreements are often for less than a year, so any troublesome ones will be gone quite soon. Besides, you can demand a hefty deposit out of them to indemnify you against any damage and you can get their parents to sign a legal guarantee that the rent will be paid.

They're good news if you're in the buy-to-let business, and if you're a big property developer, building student flats is a no-brainer which comes with the added bonus that there's no planning requirement to include affordable housing in your development.

In Bristol, students are also a major factor in the local economy. By the end of this year, UWE and Bristol between them will have something like 44,000 scholars on their books, and they can't all live in halls of residence.

The modern Bristol student is presented with a wide range of choice when it comes to accommodation, from shared houses that look like

something out of 'The Young Ones' all the way to luxurious purpose-built flats with ensuite bathrooms and other mod cons - and rents to match. Several old buildings have also been re-purposed as apartments.

A survey last year ranked Bristol as the tenth most expensive place in the UK to study, with the average weekly rent for student accommodation coming in at just under £150. Another survey suggested that international students were paying more like £180 per week. All those overseas students you see on the streets of Clifton and around the Bridewell neighbourhood are big business.

Overall student numbers are set to grow, particularly with Bristol University's hugely ambitious new campus at Temple Quarter.

But it's not all good news. Most students are exempt from paying Council Tax, but they still use various Council services. If all the students living in rented accommodation off-campus in Bristol had paid council tax

in 2017, Bristol's coffers would have been better off to the tune of over £13m.

There are also dangers that whole neighbourhoods can become taken over. "We don't want ghettos of mono-tenure single demographic anywhere," says Cllr Paul Smith.

"It's really bad news for retailers to have a population which is only here seven months of the year, and not great for communities to have a huge transient population. Students as part of a mix in a balanced community is fine - student monoculture is not fine."

The Council welcomes students, and the likely expansion in numbers attending Bristol and UWE, stressing the "significant economic and social benefits" they bring to the city.

Nonetheless it is likely to make changes to its Local Plan to take greater control of where student accommodation can be built, and to force landlords to apply for planning permission to change a private house to a student one in some parts of town.

# All spruced up and somewhere to go... recent blue plaque unveilings

The Blue Plaques Panel has enjoyed a serious spate of curtain-raising recently. *Gordon Young reports.*

Three exceptionally varied unveilings, albeit with a common theme:

## Dame Katharine Furse

Last September we honoured a truly remarkable woman. Katharine Furse was born in 1875 in Clifton Hill House: her father was the literary critic and poet John Addington Symonds. Furse presented us with a difficulty: would we find room for her many accomplishments around the time of World War One? We did: Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS), Girl Guides, Red Cross, Voluntary Aid Detachment – she pioneered the establishment of all of these organisations and they each get a mention. Her autobiography, *Hearts and Pomegranates* was published in 1940 and is now a sought-after rarity.

## Hardy Falconer Parsons

In November a brave young soldier was commemorated with full military honours. Hardy Parsons was a medical student at university here, preparing for medical missionary work. He enlisted in the Glosters during World War One and fought off enemy flamethrowers, rifles and grenades in a trench. He died of his injuries at just twenty years old. Parsons is buried at Villiers-Faucon Communal Cemetery but his memory lives on at his parents' house.

Redland had never seen anything like it: civic dignitaries, senior military figures, and buglers playing the Last Post. Two builders, working next door, stood to



*Hardy Falconer Parsons. Awarded the Victoria Cross.*



*Dame Katharine Furse. So many accomplishments.*

attention by their skip. When it was my turn to speak I ended with: "Plaques can make powerful statements. Many young students live in this suburb. Let's hope that they glance up as they walk past. And pause. And ponder." Afterwards, some of us retired to the Artillery Grounds at Whiteladies Road. The mess is named the 'Falconer Parsons VC Mess' in his honour and his medal is displayed there.

## The Terrence Higgins Trust/ Aled Richards Trust

This plaque in West Street, Old Market recognises an organisation, rather than an individual. The Trusts gave support to people living with HIV. Panel member Lori Streich spoke: "Plaques on these buildings are important because Bristol's history is not just that of unique individuals doing amazing things. We also have a collective history, of places where people got together and have done amazing things together... It's hard to remember now the days of the 'gay plague', but that's one of the reasons why this building is so important... this plaque speaks of profound social and medical changes."



*Terrence Higgins and Aled Richards Trust. Speaks of profound social and medical change.*

[www.bristolcivicsociety.org.uk](http://www.bristolcivicsociety.org.uk)

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are only four car parking spaces and twelve bicycle stands proposed. There would be very little external space.

The Society has also strongly supported the Old Market Community Association's objections to the pre-application proposals for the site at

40-48 Midland Road between Midland Street and Louisa Street. There have been many unsuitable proposals for this site and the latest plans fail to provide an acceptable solution. The proposed mix of units is unsatisfactory and there is little amenity space. By contrast, an approved scheme (16/01164/F) meets almost all of the criteria set out in the

Old Market Quarter Development Plan.

The Society welcomes the Council's refusal of the application to retain the large advertisement hoarding at **90 West Street** (17/04780/A). PAG objected to this on the grounds that it was incompatible with the general improvements to the Old Market area.



*Old Market, going through a period of change.*

## Westmoreland House

*Lori Stretch updates a long running saga*

Property developers, The PG Group, are preparing the site for the demolition of Westmoreland House, and shoring up the Carriageworks façade so as much of the building as possible can be saved. Number 4 Ashley Road, the Old Doctor's Surgery, a Grade 2 listed building, has already been demolished. Too far gone, apparently, to be kept.

The PG Group remain committed to developing the site in line with the Planning Permission that was granted in October 2014.

The Carriageworks Action Group



*Say goodbye to Westmoreland House.*

is working with the PG Group and consultants Willis Newson on the development of a Cultural Plan for the site. This will take account of a range of issues including how the non-residential spaces (commercial units, market square and public realm) can be developed

and run to fit with the cultures of the areas surrounding the site as well as the history of the site itself. It will also include a public arts plan.

**For further information:**  
<https://carriageworks.org.uk/>

# Major developments

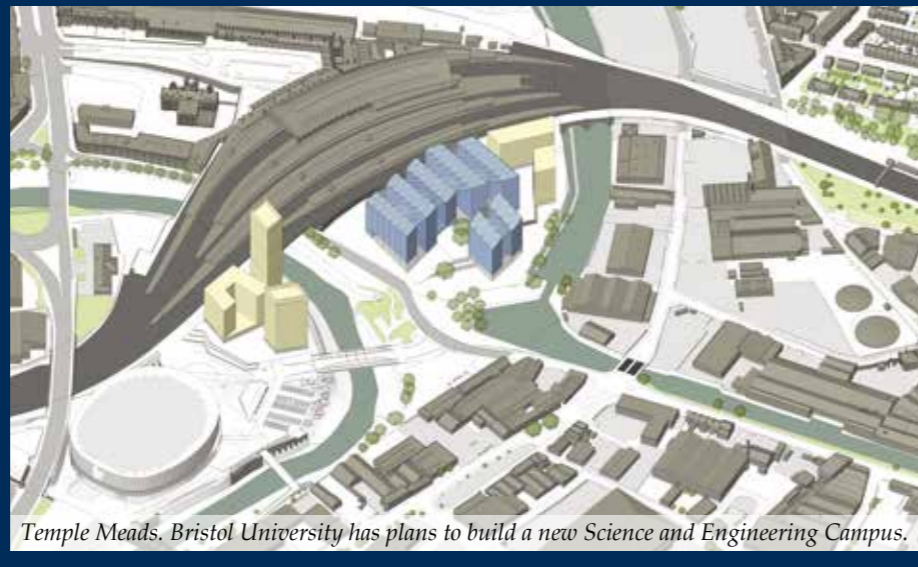
John Frenkel, convener of the Bristol Civic Society's Major Sites Group, writes.

## Former Central Ambulance Station residential redevelopment, Castle Street

Councillors approved this application. The Society strongly supports Council policy to increase the number of residents in the city centre and the redevelopment of this prominent site. The Society was, however, disappointed with the planning process that could have produced a much better scheme. The Old Market Community Association said, and the Society agrees, that there is a fundamental objection to a 26-storey tower on the corner of Castle Street and Tower Hill. It is not necessary to exceed the height of the nearby building, One Castlepark. The 'tower' will intrude onto the street scene and detract from the many listed buildings in Old Market. The development will not contribute to the improvement of Castle Park's east end or remove motor vehicles to enable Castle Street to become a cycle and pedestrian route. The development will achieve a low level of affordable housing on a site that the Council part owns.

## Bristol University new Temple Meads Campus, Cattle Market Road

The University has applied for outline planning permission for a new science/engineering led Campus. The Council has agreed to demolish the former Post Office Parcels Sorting Office to enable the University to build on the former Cattle Market site two buildings of 8 and 9 floors and, to accommodate up to 1,500 students, three residential buildings of 11, 18 and 25 floors on Arena Island. The Society supports the development. The Society is neutral about the proposal to construct tall buildings; the east side of the river may be an appropriate site. The group of new buildings could create an impressive entry to the city from the railway and an opportunity to create an



Temple Meads. Bristol University has plans to build a new Science and Engineering Campus.

internationally recognised symbol of the University and the City's aspirations. A design to match the Wills Tower would be impressive.

## Callowhill Court, Broadmead



Broadmead. Plans for the redevelopment of the north-east quarter.

The Council has approved the outline plan for the demolition and redevelopment of the north-east quarter of the Broadmead shopping area. After revisions that Councillors and the Society requested the car park access will be directly from Bond Street and not via Brunswick Square. The parking spaces are reduced to 380 from 1,000. The new perimeter blocks on Bond Street and Merchant Street will be lower. The Society was pleased to support the planning officers who have achieved these revisions. Now that the Council has approved the Cabot Circus extension, will the Secretary of State refuse to approve the Cribbs Causeway Mall extension?

## Colston Hall

The Society supports the Phase 2 of the scheme to refurbish, restore, improve and revitalise and building although not everyone welcomes the replacement of the hall's interior. The Council supported the application, which is referred to the Secretary of State.

## Generator Building, Counterslip, Temple.

The Society is enthusiastic about this proposal to redevelop the interior of the former Bristol Tramways turbine hall into offices. The exterior will be cleaned, and the entrance restored.

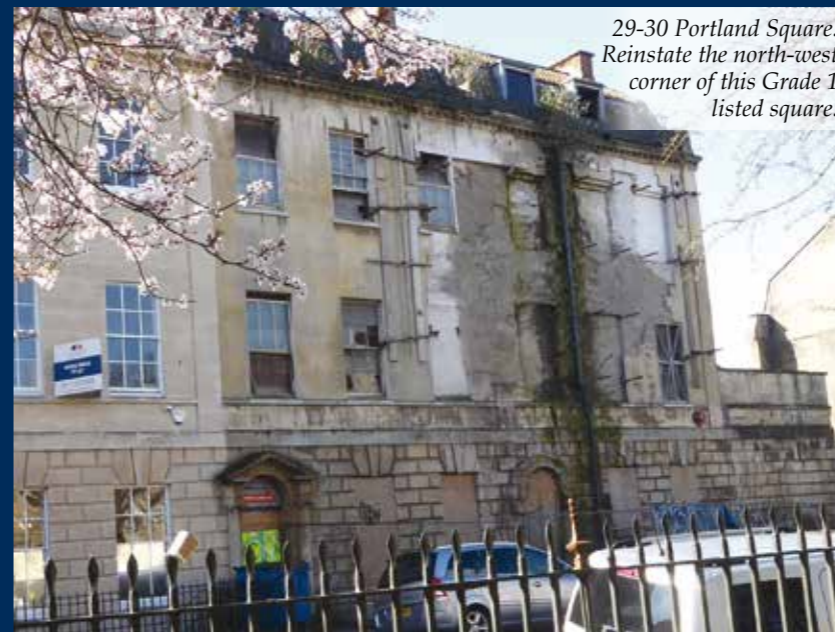
## McArthur's Warehouse, Gas Ferry Road, Spike Island

This long derelict building behind the SS Great Britain is the final undeveloped site on Spike Island. The Guinness Trust has planning permission to build three flatted blocks with ground level commercial space to redevelop. The permission was given against Historic England's advice, which the Society supported, that two of the buildings would be too tall for this sensitive site.

## Sandhu's Cash & Carry site, 29-30 Portland Square, St Paul's

The Society supports this planning application that would reinstate the

# in Bristol



29-30 Portland Square. Reinstate the north-west corner of this Grade I listed square.

derelict north-west corner and complete the restoration of the Grade I listed Portland Square. The Society has made constructive criticism about the new Surrey Street elevation and the quantity and quality of some of the proposed new development.

## Redland Court (Former Redland High School)

- In 2017, Redland High School closed and merged with Redmaids School. A planning permission consents to the conversion and reuse of the former school for housing. The application has been referred to Secretary of State because the permission was contrary to Historic England's objection that the scheme overdeveloped the site.

**Redcliffe Wharf, Redcliffe** - is the last major undeveloped site on the Harbour. It now has planning permission for a mixed-use scheme that includes the public realm and the restoration of two surviving stone warehouses. Building will start in the Autumn this year. The Society supported the application.

## Join us

The Bristol Civic Society Major Sites Group (MSG) meets every six weeks. The Group needs new members. Please contact johnfrenkel5@gmail.com. It is critical for the Society to meet developers of large projects early in the design process. MSG tends to concentrate on city centre developments, which affect the greatest

number of residents and where local representation is weakest. The Society supports development and modern architecture. These are the edited highlights of some of the city's development activity. Items on the Society's website have links to the Society's full responses.



Generator Building. Plans to redevelop into offices.



Former St Mary's Hospital. Scheme for student accommodation.

## Former St Mary's Hospital, Upper Byron Place, Clifton

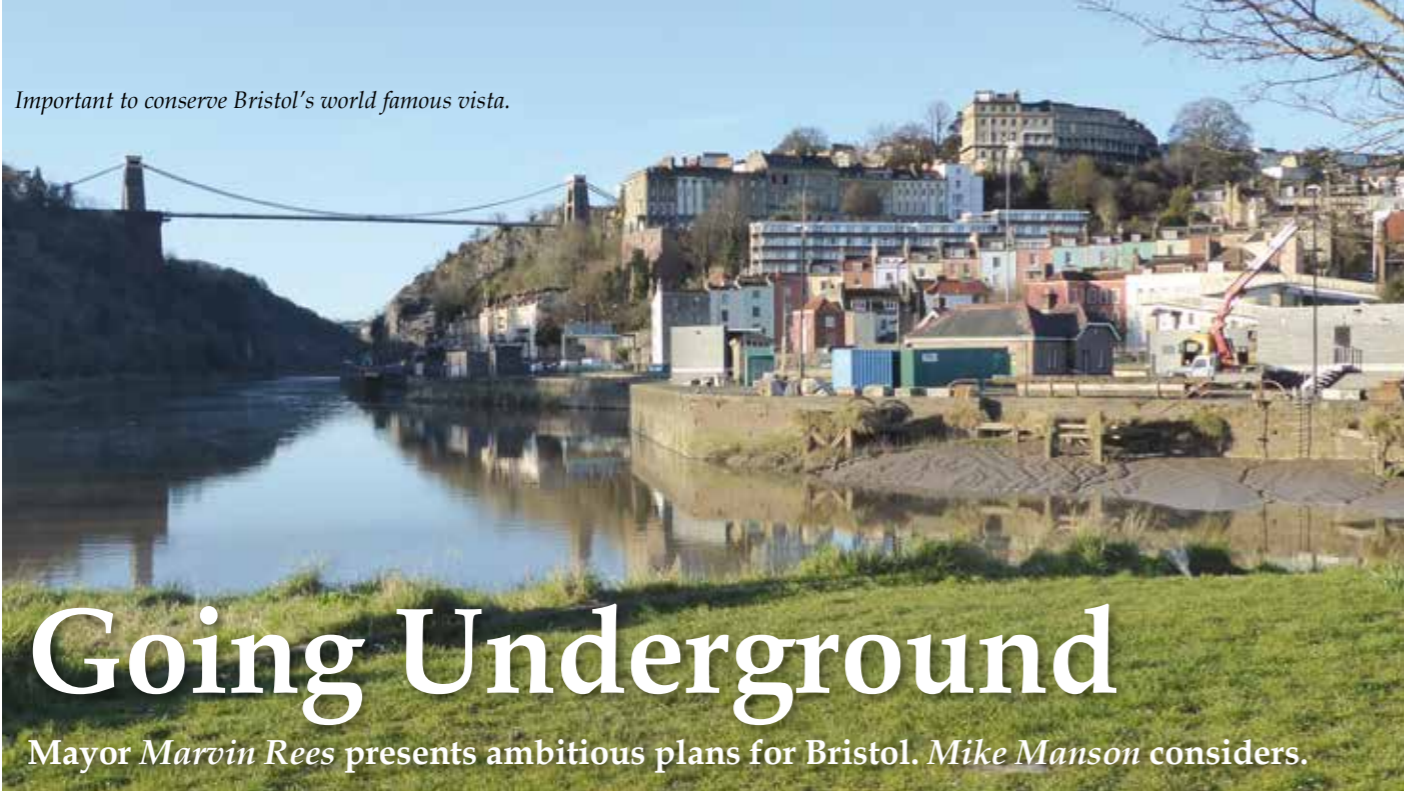
This is the fifth scheme to redevelop this empty building for student accommodation. The Society supports it. This scheme will retain the main block of the former hospital building, which will not require extensive structural alteration. The conversion will include a new mansard-style roof, which has the potential to create a more satisfactory outline. The Society supports the demolition of the undistinguished, informal additions to the rear of the main building but the design of the replacement terrace of two-storey units is not informed by local house types and does not yet enhance the 'green lane' of Upper Byron Place. The Society suggests the omission of a new "pavilion" building in the garden; it causes great local opposition.

## Engine Shed 2 and Temple Circus

Councillors approved this planning application against officers' advice.

The application has been referred to Secretary of State. Historic England objected to the harm that the scheme would do to the listed Grade II former George and Railway Hotel. The Society originally opposed the scale of the proposed buildings and the loss of the locally listed Grosvenor Hotel. The developer revised the height of the buildings, which officers considered to be in keeping with the scale of the city centre. A sensitive design of buildings within the proposed envelope should be achieved with a design that helps to contain the scale of the buildings and provide a finer grain of architecture. Officers recommended that the locally listed Grosvenor Hotel's elevations should be retained and integrated within the development scheme. The footprint of the scheme and the response to Victoria Street is not convincing for such a prominent city centre site. The important aspiration to deliver a high quality public space associated with the development is not yet met.

Important to conserve Bristol's world famous vista.



# Going Underground

Mayor Marvyn Rees presents ambitious plans for Bristol. Mike Manson considers.

In his annual State of the City Address on October 18 2017 Mayor Marvyn Rees detailed his vision for the future of the Bristol. Among a range of initiatives around transport and housing the Mayor announced two innovative and far reaching proposals.

The first initiative included ambitious development plans for the Cumberland Basin, renamed The Western Harbour.

'We're putting together a proposal that will tear down the old, ugly road network across the western end of the harbour, build a new bridge across the river at a lower point and develop the available land on both sides of the Avon bringing more affordable housing to the city centre, extending the harbour as a residential area to the west.'

The second initiative included a plan for the development of a mass transit scheme that could incorporate an underground system. The Mayor explained that a 'pre-feasibility study report' into an underground had said that ground conditions are not too problematic and that with the right level of investment is perfectly buildable.

A month later the Mayor, armed with a brochure of investment opportunities, flew to Malaysia to speak to potential business partners and then continued to China where he attended the Fortune 500 Forum. The Fortune Global Forum is a market place for the 'CEOs of the world's biggest multinational companies'. Its aim is for would-be partners to actively engage with China and its leaders from both business and government.

Important to conserve Bristol's world famous vista.



## Western Harbour

In the investment brochure the Cumberland Basin project is described as thus:

*'The Western Harbour is a key element of Bristol's floating harbour. It is the cultural heart for leisure and entertainment and is increasingly recognised as a highly desirable location for residential development. With views of Brunel's world famous Suspension Bridge, the stunning Bristol Gorge, Bristol Harbour, the city centre and the open green expanses of Ashton Court, the Western Harbour is one of the most desirable development locations in the UK. The Western Harbour road system built in the 1960's (sic) covers large parts of this area and prevents development in this prime, historic location. Removal of the heavy road infrastructure and replacement with less high impact options will release 15-20 hectares of developable land.'*

*The opportunity exists to combine this with works to support the delivery of a tidal flood risk management strategy for central Bristol, to improve access to the historic harbour running through the heart of the city whilst providing essential flood defences resilient to climate change.'*

The prospectus outlines the key features of the site:

- Developable land 15-20ha.
- Potential to provide 3,500 homes, plus commercial and leisure space.

- The residential elements alone have a gross development value estimated at over £1 billion.

- Land ownership - 75% Bristol City Council with intention to purchase remaining land.

- Sustainable development - seven minutes segregated cycle ride to city centre, 25 minutes walk.

- New Metrobus Rapid Transit route link to city centre and Bristol Temple Meads national railway station launching in 2018.

This redevelopment proposal has been around for some time. What is new is the re-routing of the Cumberland Basin road network - a major gateway into Bristol from the west, along with the Portway - and its replacement with 'less high impact' options. It is unclear exactly what these could be.

The site is uniquely challenging. It will require extreme creative thinking if the developer is to work within the physical confines of the docks which also include a range of Grade 2 listed buildings and structures.

A requirement of the development for the site is the removal of the 1960s Plimsoll swing bridge and its replacement with a new bridge further **downstream**.

At present the road network on Western Spike Island does seem unreasonably complex and could be tweaked, but the removal of Plimsoll Bridge is perplexing. Where would a new bridge go? How would a new bridge impact on the Portishead railway line and the allotments? (The Avon and Somerset Dog and Mounted Police Training Centre on Clangage Road has closed recently so there could be an opportunity to utilise this land.)

Western Harbour.



Developers will also have to bear in mind the iconic vista towards the Avon Gorge and Clifton Suspension Bridge.

And, as the Mayor says, the development would need to be flood-proofed against tidal surges and rising sea levels which already impact on parts of this area.

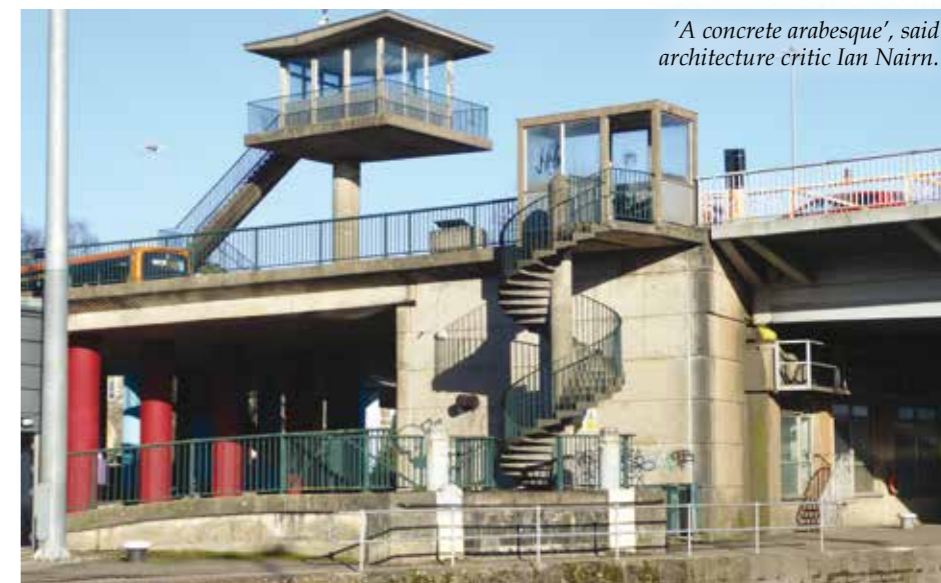
It is difficult to understand quite how this would work without being prohibitively expensive.

## Bristol Metro

*'Bristol and the surrounding metropolitan area is the only major British city without a major rapid transit system. The Metro will deliver high speed, high quality, high frequency transport capacity to the region driving productivity increases through congestion and journey time reduction. Growth will come from re-purposing planned and existing housing and employment sites. All system types will be considered but it is expected that some degree of underground running will be required. Funding of the project will be through a mix of sources, making use of locally generated funds as well as central grant funding and private sector investment. Policy measures will drive patronage and usage as well as providing funding.'*

The prospectus outlines the key features of the project:

- System length 40-45km
- Initial cost estimate £2.5-4.5bn dependent on system type with £1.5 to £2bn sought from private sector funding partner
- Potential patronage 30-50m trips per annum
- Potential for income over and above operating costs to be explored
- Medium to high cost benefit ratio



*'A concrete arabesque', said architecture critic Ian Nairn.*

The proposal is for mass transit routes North, East, and South to the airport. On the North and East routes there isn't enough spare road width, hence the underground option.

This is a bold scheme. Big ideas are required to face the challenges of the future. Currently, both London and Los Angeles are expanding their underground systems. But these are mega cities.

The council has commissioned a £50,000 study to determine if the transportation scheme is financially viable. *'A pre-feasibility study will be published early in 2018 and the signs are promising. Ground conditions look good and there are some initial thoughts on routes already being considered. Costing the work up and establishing a financing model will be the next stage and whilst some will question the amounts being discussed we have to be clear that to meet this challenge we must be ambitious. Without a viable alternative to using cars this challenge will continue to hold back Bristol's continued success and growth.'*

It is currently unclear where the funding is coming from. What are these local sources? Have pots of central grant funding been identified? And what has been the reaction of potential investors in China? A Bristol City Council spokesperson told *Better Bristol*: ... Support for projects takes time to build, so we are now working with the Department for International Trade and other partners in China and Bristol to follow up on some of the links and interest we generated from the trip."

In the *The Guardian* (16 January 2018) the council's Conservative group leader, Mark Weston, is reported as saying: "In any large project a lot of money is spent on paperwork, studies, reports. My fear is we could spend tens of millions on reports and in the end find that the project is unfeasible."

Meanwhile we look forward to the MetroBus coming into operation.



# A future for Ashton Court Mansion

Ashton Court Action Group has ambitious plans  
write *Simon Birch and Sarah Curnow.*

**A**t our AGM in June 2017 the main discussion focussed on Ashton Court Mansion. A major study looking at its future had been commissioned by Historic England and the City Council. The Civic Society had contributed to a Steering Group for the work. But there had been delays and the AGM asked us to find out what was happening! This article provides the answer.

## Setting the context – a quick history

Ashton Court is a site of significant historical importance. Archaeological evidence of Iron Age field systems has been found in the meadows and it has accommodated a settlement since Roman times. Since at least the 6th century, the site of the Mansion itself has been occupied by a fortified manor, of a similar size to what is now the Great Hall. The Great Hall has been the core of the property for the last 15 centuries and the Hall fireplace dates from the 14th century.

It was in 1545 that it first came into the hands of its last owners, the Smyth family, when John Smyth, a wealthy Bristol merchant and twice Mayor of Bristol, bought the mansion and grounds.

The mansion as we now know it, with its imposing, nearly symmetrical, south elevation, is the result of a series of extensions and renovations, although the elevations all approximately follow the curtilage of courtyards and stable blocks that were in place since its earliest days. Additions tended to follow the fashion of the era, so we see the Classical style of the south

west façade with its pedimented sash windows, added in the 17th century, compared to the Gothic tastes of the 19th century seen in the mullioned windows of the south east elevation.

## Bristol City Council

The Council purchased the Ashton Court Estate and Mansion from the Smythes in the late 1950s. Since then the 800 acre estate has been very well used by local residents and for events, including the Balloon Festival. Some of the ground floor rooms of the mansion have been used for weddings and other events and there is also a popular café. Other rooms have been used as offices and lecture rooms. However, some 75% of the building is unused and is now largely unusable since panelling, walls and even floorboards have been removed – in an attempt to eradicate any potential rot. In contrast, major expenditure on the roof in the 1970s means that this is largely safe and sound.

The Council announced that it would no longer be able to use the mansion for weddings and other events after the end of 2017 as it was losing money. The Mansion faced an uncertain future.

## Reaction by the Civic Society

We decided to take action – who else was interested in the fate of the mansion? We organised a public meeting in late November in the mansion with speakers from the City Council and from national charity SAVE which has an unrivalled track record in saving country houses. Over 100 attended and there was overwhelming support for something to be done – but what?

Following that meeting we put together a strong Action Group with representatives from Business West, UWE (which has the Bower Ashton campus), solicitors VWV, accountants Saffery Champness and media experts Cadence PR. Our objective was (and still is) to identify a way to save and to restore the mansion.

## The Options

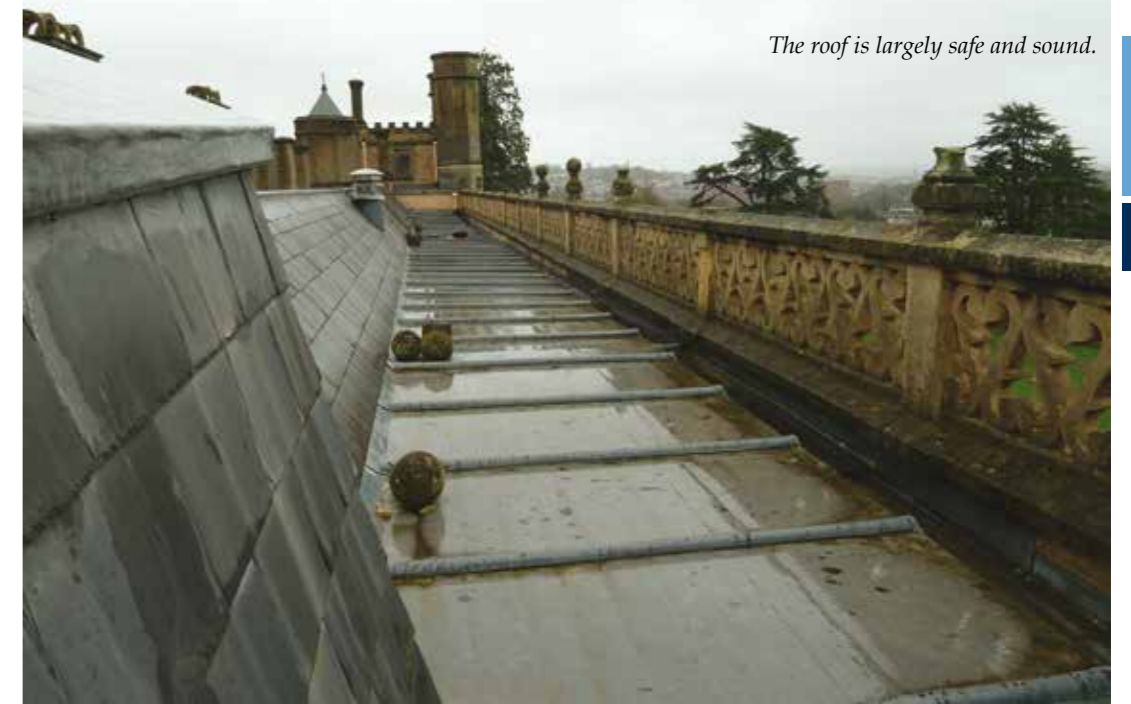
The options for the future range from “do nothing” with a real risk of deterioration, even fire damage and the increasing difficulty of achieving future restoration; to a full and comprehensive restoration in a single operation – but estimated costs in excess of £20m make this seem unrealistic.

The City Council does not have the funds to restore Ashton Court and the suggestion of “enabling development”, involving selling off part of the Estate (perhaps for private housing) in order to fund restoration may prove difficult to progress in an area of Green Belt.

There is clearly a substantial funding gap between the costs of restoration (however estimated and estimates do vary) and the likely availability of funding.

## A Possible Way Forward

We need to examine alternative approaches. Nothing will be easy or straightforward. For example, we



Panelling, walls and even floorboards have been removed.

might base a future programme on the following:

- There clearly needs to be an ongoing programme of building maintenance and security – gutters need to be kept clear, windows repaired.
- The usable rooms of the mansion should be put back into use, generating income, maintaining the profile of the venue
- It should be accepted that only a phased (incremental) restoration of the rest of the mansion is feasible – for example, should the already fire damaged library room be tackled first? It might take decades but is there really any alternative?
- Carrying out the restoration with apprentices and volunteers needs to be assessed as a great opportunity to involve and to train Bristolians – what a tremendous way to celebrate the heritage of a mansion purchased for the enjoyment of Bristolians.

We also need to examine whether a different organisation will be needed to manage the mansion – for example, would a charitable trust give access to different funding and deliver focussed management?

This is developing into a major initiative by the Civic Society and is exactly what the Society should be tackling – we are raising the profile of the Mansion, pulling together the necessary skills and exploring possible solutions – exactly as demanded by the AGM last June!

We have a regular newsletter – please get in touch if you wish to keep in touch with the developing situation at Ashton Court. And do get in touch with your ideas, enthusiasm and skills - we have no doubt we will need them all!



# St Michael Archangel on the Mount Without

In October 2016 St Michael's was seriously damaged by fire. *Simon Birch* outlines what happened next.



The fire changed it all.

## Background

St Michael's was closed in 1998 due to a diminishing congregation. No immediate decision was taken to dispose of the building and a series of alternative uses were examined, of varying degrees of credibility. Very little maintenance took place.

## The involvement of the Civic Society

We watched with increasing dismay as St Michael's deteriorated year by year. This is an important City Church, Grade 2\* Listed, part 15th century and part Georgian. Some four years ago we held discussions with the City Church, at that time a possible user of



Our fingers are crossed.

the church; we offered support from the community for funding bids but eventually nothing emerged.

Around that time we met with Veronica

Lyell (and others) from Christmas Steps Arts Quarter and jointly kept up pressure on the Diocese to do essential maintenance, especially the clearance of gutters and downpipes, and to make the church secure. Eventually scaffolding was finally erected in autumn 2016.

We floated the idea of the Civic Society being granted a licence to occupy - for up to two years - with the intention of the Society opening up the building for workshops and events in order to publicise its potential for longer term, even permanent arrangements. We met with representatives of both Church Commissioners and Diocese to pursue this idea.

## The fire that changed it all

I was away in Shropshire on Sunday 16th October 2016 when the BBC called me requesting the Civic Society's reaction to the major fire in Bristol City Centre. It was not a great surprise to learn that St Michael's had been set alight by squatters. We had been warning the Diocese for a long time that their security arrangements were inadequate. The roof was largely destroyed and the rest of the church building severely damaged.

## The Civic Society reaction

We quickly realised that St Michael's still had great potential and could be saved and restored. We called a public meeting in Spring 2017, leafletting the surrounding roads and attracting a crowd of well over 100 residents and businesses. Fortunately, Bristol University generously provided a very large lecture theatre in the Wills Building. The meeting was unanimous in its support for saving and restoring St Michael's.

As a consequence, we established an Action Group jointly with the Architecture Centre, Christmas Steps Arts Quarter and local residents. Our aim was to keep St Michael's as a building for public uses, based around a flexible performance space. As part of our approach we teamed up with St Michael's Memorial Parish Hall Trust, located adjacent to the church.

In order to stimulate ideas and to enhance the profile of St Michael's we decided to hold a limited Architectural Competition. The Civic Society offered a prize of £2,500 for the winning entry. Sean Redmond of architects ph3 was successful (ph3design.co.uk) with innovative ideas and very attractive designs.

## For Sale!

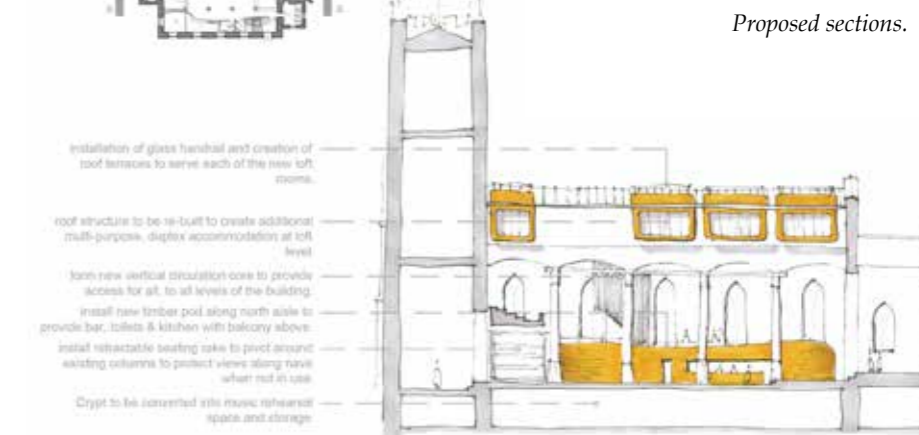
As we developed our proposals the Diocese unexpectedly put St Michael's on the market in October 2017 for a freehold sale. We were almost ready and quickly decided to put in a serious bid for purchase. Who better to restore the building?

Our bid was submitted in mid December, our financial offer was the princely sum of £1, a realistic amount for a severely fire damaged building with future restoration options hedged by planning restrictions and covenants. We were called to interview in mid January - at the Bishop's House in Winterbourne - where we were questioned and challenged for 70 minutes by representatives of the Diocese, Church Commissioners and property agents.

We are promised a decision in late March / early April so the new owners will probably be known by the time Better Bristol is published. Our fingers are crossed!



Right, Very little maintenance.

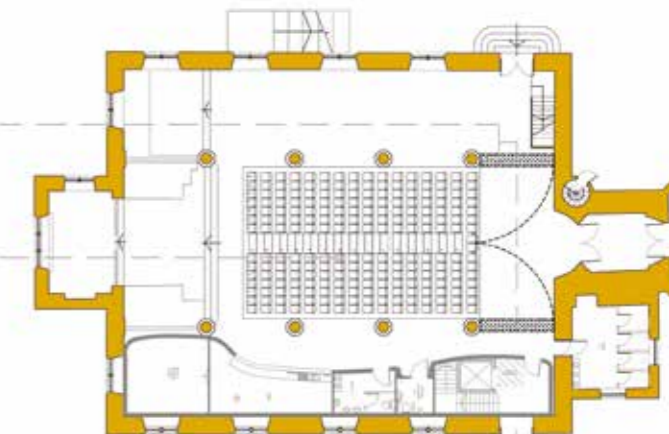


Proposed sections.

Ground floor stage end seating draft plan.

retractable seating rake to split along centre line and rotate through 90 degrees when not in use, to preserve views along nave from main entrance.

installation of retractable 'end stage' seating rake provides 238 seats when in use + seating balcony seating.



proposed ground floor; 'end stage' seating layout



How it could look.

# The future for Bristol's parks when public money is tight

Alan Morris asks: can the community pick up what the council used to do?

We all know that councils are taking some hard decisions in the face of government cuts in their budgets. In the case of parks, Bristol Council is cutting from £4.5m to £2.9m a year. It is looking for ways of generating income from parks, and has even considered passing across the whole service responsibility to an independent organisation. It's a time for anyone who cares about Bristol's environment to stand up against the most threatening proposals.

Bristol is fortunate to have a strong

advocate - the Parks Forum. They and others have persuaded the Council to reduce the size of the original budget cuts. And their vision for the future is clear and well communicated.

Some key issues in managing the parks and green spaces are:

- *maintenance* - the vast majority of the saving comes from reducing the level of grounds maintenance. The Parks Forum is concerned about the impact, and it cautions that "a perception that a site is not being cared for can rapidly lead to a downward spiral with reduced use and increased anti-social behaviour."
- *cross-subsidies* - some parks are more self-sustaining than others. The income generators - for instance, the larger parks and the crematoria - subsidise the smaller parks.



St Andrews Park, integral to the neighbourhood.



Eastville Park, an essential community facility.

- *cross-department co-operation* - the green spaces include land managed by Highways, Housing, and Education departments. The street trees budget comes from Highways, and has until recently been under threat.
- *advertising* - the Society joined over 1000 other consultees in arguing strongly against commercial advertising in parks. The point is well made, but in truth the Council probably never intended big billboards or banners in parks. Advertising can include small business sponsorship adverts on roundabouts. The Forum accepts some advertising, as long as there are tight rules.
- *events* - it is the big events that bring in the money. Is it realistic to double the income from big events, and what will be the impact on parks?
- *rental for sports use* - it is argued that the use of parks for sports (as opposed to leisure and informal play) should be self-sustaining financially.

Newcastle has decided recently to hand over its parks to a trust, with the National Trust a partner to help manage the parks. Leeds established a Parks Fund solely as a vehicle for donations. In Bristol, the Parks Forum proposes a Bristol Parks Foundation. This community-led organisation would have a licence from the Council to raise funds, decide how those funds are spent, run cafes in the smaller parks, and run volunteer-led projects. But the Foundation would NOT take over running the parks: the Forum believes this would be a step too far. For some, this is a point of principle: parks should remain a public service. For others, it comes from a weighing of the pluses (freedom from council

## Redcatch Community Garden

The bowling green had been closed for five years when a team, who call themselves The Super 7, with skills in gardening, events organising, sustainability, education, marketing, catering and nutrition, had the idea of re-purposing it as a community project centred on growing food. In April 2017 they received permission for the change of use from the Sports Council and Bristol Council. Cultivating the space with fruit and vegetable plots is well under way.

The project aims to involve the whole community and provide learning, volunteering and social opportunities for all. There are currently seven members of the core team. Listening

bureaucracy, control over changes to the parks, more entrepreneurial) and the minuses (loss of democratic accountability, unclear savings, high risks without large reserves).

The Parks Forum continues to develop its proposals for a Foundation, and is pursuing start-up funding - see their website for more information.

## Refreshing our parks

Parks need 'friends' groups to bring life to them. Sometimes these groups can seize the opportunity to regenerate a park by finding a new use for existing assets. In Redcatch Park, a disused bowling green has been taken over for growing food. On Horfield Common, the old Ardagh centre for sports is getting a new lease of life. I visited both to find out more.

Both projects are still quite young, and growing from a small group of people with a mix of skills. But talking to them, and hearing of their plans to grow their activities, I found them filled with inspiring enthusiasm and community spirit.

## Ardagh Community Trust

In the 1960s and 70s, a fenced-off area on Horfield Common contained a thriving council-run sports centre (bowling green and tennis courts), and award-winning gardens tended by six staff. Over time, the council support has gone, and the 10 courts have become under-used. The friends group for Horfield Common was founded in 2005, and from 2011 it has developed the project to reinstate the Ardagh as a thriving community



Redcatch polytunnel.

to them talk about their plans for growing and selling food, the café (run on a sustainable/local/ethical basis), skills workshops, a health and well-being garden for all including children, the disabled and the elderly, you can feel the energy and clarity of purpose.

A crowd-funding campaign and matched grant in summer 2017 funded a polytunnel, and another

was donated by a community project that had to close. The other items of infrastructure are modest - converted shipping containers, a small trailer for a café, a small wooden building for events. The group is constituted as a Community Benefit Society.

Below, Preparing the foundations for the polytunnel.



and sports facility. The project is now a separate Charitable Incorporated Organisation, with members, and the site is the subject of a Community Asset Transfer from the Council. They have grants to develop the project, with Sam Thomson and Rob Savage providing the necessary energetic leadership

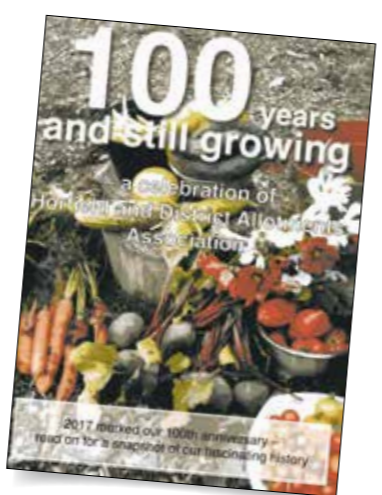
They started with a cafe run out of a trailer. They are about to convert part of the pavilion to a café. They already have a number of regular community

activities, including a social club, Shedmen group (wood products), a repair café, and children's groups. I attended the project's drop-in day aimed at widening their community base.

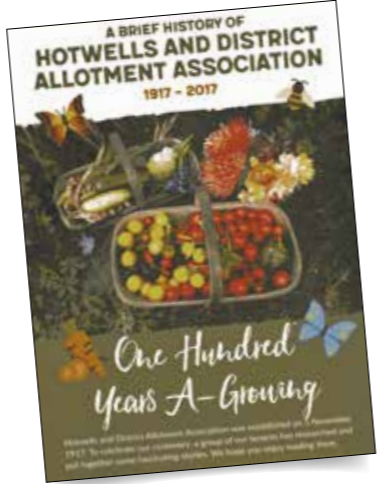
Unlike Redcatch, there remains an element of active interest in the original sport uses, but other uses like a Multi-Use Games Area and walking basketball are being considered. They even have dreams of an open-air lido one day in the future!

# Bristol allotments

2017 coincided with centenary celebrations for several allotment associations in Bristol. Maggie Moss unearths the story.



Left, Ashley Vale. Once open grassland.



The Allotment Act of 1908 imposed a duty on every urban authority to provide allotments where there was a demand. With cuts in Council funding, and intense pressure on building land to ease the housing crisis, how are Bristol's allotment sites faring?

Some *Better Bristol* readers will be aware that 2017 coincided with Centenary celebrations for several allotment associations in Bristol - in particular Hotwells' Allotment Association, Ashley Vale Allotments Association (AVAA) and Horfield and District Allotments Association, (HDAA). Widely associated in the public's mind with urban areas, and the WW2 "Dig for Victory" campaign, allotments actually have their roots in the rural countryside over a century before, when the Enclosure Acts of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries forced thousands of rural poor off land they had once cultivated, to migrate to the towns.

The earliest Allotment provision was a response to rural destitution, when

some private landowners, charities, and parishes set aside portions of rural land as allotments. It must be said that the land provided was often excluded from Enclosure because of its poor quality, and provision was often politically expedient:

*"To the cottager it affords the comforts of life; to the parish it lowers the poor's rates; a man who keeps a cow has seldom been known to be troublesome to a parish..."*

Lord Brownlow 1795

*"...a contrivance to compensate the labourer for the insufficiency of his wages by giving him something else as a supplement to them."*

John Stuart Mill

*"But the object of making such allotments is moral rather than economic.....to keep a man at home and from the ale house."*

The Penny Magazine 1845



By the mid nineteenth century some landowners on the edges of urban areas started to let out "guinea gardens", and some rural allotments were absorbed into the growing towns. As Bristol expanded, land originally set aside for allotments was swallowed up by demand for housing in the new suburbs:

*'On the outskirts of Bristol, in the parish of St Pauls, there existed an "old garden ground", let out in small allotments. The tenants gradually put chimneys into their tool houses and converted them into dwellings, and thus arose a curious race of squatters...At its height some 500 or more people, breeding fowls, ducks, pigs, and famous for 'monster vegetables,' reportedly lived in this colony.'*

*The 'colony' was eventually evicted, "after some resistance", in the early 1880s, to make way for the new suburb of St Agnes, and the Victorian streets we see today.*

### Bristol Broadside-Bristol's Other History 1983

However, this piecemeal provision changed in the early 1900s as Bristol City Council began to obtain land across the city.

At the start of 1900 the Ashley Vale (AVAA) and Horfield sites were still mostly undeveloped open grassland, surrounded by new suburbs, whilst several of Hotwells' sites were developed on Smythe family land at Ashton Court. All three are examples of Allotment Associations founded in 1917 as a result of the new availability of allotment land in the City, and kick-started by war-time fervour.

It was the realities of providing foodstuffs for the nation during both world wars which led to the huge national increase in both privately owned and Council owned allotments in urban areas. The First World War "Defence of the Realm Act 1916" increased numbers nationally from 600,000-1.5 million in two years, and although many allotments were relinquished after the Great War, demand remained high due to a steep rise in the price of fruit and vegetables, the resettlement needs of ex-servicemen, and the 1930s Depression. The famous "Dig for Victory" campaign of WW2 saw allotments extended once again.

Post war things changed: By the 1960s many sites were only partially tenanted, and in 1964 a Departmental Committee of Inquiry into Allotments was set up to enquire into national provision at a time of increasing pressure on urban land coupled with falling take-up, (blamed by some on television and rising incomes, by

New crops have been introduced. Jamaican pumpkin, cho-cho and callaloo.



others on Council apathy). One of the Inquiry's recommendations was the adoption of the term "Leisure Gardening", as allotments became less associated with the relief of poverty or the supply of food stuffs, and more to do with wholesome leisure activity.

Ashley Vale bucked the trend of falling numbers. In the 60s and 70s many new allotment tenants on this site came from the Caribbean community in St Pauls and St Werburghs, and many took on more than one plot. Raising plants from seeds brought from "home", they introduced new crops to Bristol, such as sweet corn, jamaican pumpkin, cho-cho, "round red" beans and callaloo, still grown on this site today.

Today Bristol City Council has a total of 102 sites, (down from 108 a decade ago). Currently there is an overall 85%

occupancy rate, with many sites have waiting lists, although this varies across the City.

So what does the future hold at a time of "austerity", and the huge demand for building land in the City? Fortunately for allotment holders the 1908 Allotment Act imposed a *statutory duty* on councils to provide allotments where there 'is a demand from six or more persons' and the terms make it difficult, (though not impossible), for Councils to dispose of sites, which can only be done with consent from the Secretary of State.

The guidance to Local Authorities clearly states that 'Where it is not possible to finance alternative land for displaced allotment holders, disposal will not be an option'.

The Bristol Local Plan Review (Feb 2018) keeps allotments within its *Resilience Strategy*, unsurprisingly under *Food Systems*. The Review designates allotments as Reserved Open Space, (rather than Specially Protected Local Space), which reflects their current legal status, however the Review specifically lifts the threat of a Park and Ride Scheme from Stapleton Rd Allotments, home of Feed Bristol.

Allotments, (like Parks), have had to take their share of the cuts: funding for management, maintenance and innovation has been drastically reduced to £220k in 2018, leaving Associations to once more take up the slack.

Bristol's allotments appear to be relatively "safe", and it remains to be seen if the near future brings a greater emphasis on home grown food production once more...



Allotments have had to take their share of the cuts.

# Cleaning up - a public or private matter?

Stephen Wickham gives a personal perspective to a perennial problem.

Two years ago a council Flood Prevention Officer told the Harbourside Forum he wanted the public to clear their own street gulley gratings to prevent flash flooding. I replied I was doing this already. Since the Southville Resident's Parking Zone (RPZ) started and Bristol changed waste contractors, the yellow lines on Coronation Road are now swept at night by machine and the RPZ bays swept, apparently, by no-one.

Of course, the Flood Officer meant autumn leaves, but locally two other things were dominant. First, the contractors of a nearby housing development regularly spread mud down Coronation road. Bristol City Council tolerated a token sweep of the residue in traffic lanes at 5.00 pm, ignoring what had already sprayed into the RPZ bays (and onto vehicles). Ultimately, this debris blocked the street gullies.

Second, Bristol Waste was still losing

lightweight materials into the street every week, which was carried by the wind to the riverbank or by rain to the gully gratings. Dust-devils reduced pavement air quality sharply in summer heat, and drains flash-flooded. So I was now broom-sweeping the whole surface of my closest RPZ box to de-dust it, while pushing the rubbish into the adjacent bus-stop where the night-sweeper MIGHT pick it up!

This sweeping was in the enlightened self interest of my family and nodding neighbours, but the cumulative impact on the other parking bays grew. Thankfully in 2017 Bristol City Council Highways contractors dug up and replaced many blocked drain lines carrying water away from the gully pots. But did one Council department pay for the sins of another?

In November 2016, Bristol Mayor Marvin Rees launched a campaign to clean up the city's streets. Also Bristol now has a litter-police; allegedly coining-it thanks to fag-end dropping smokers. But debris entering the riverbank is far larger.

Where I live the glue that holds the



Mud on the road.

Friends of the Avon New Cut (FrANC) together has been river bank cleanups on Saturdays. Initially, a large cohort of *Friends* recovered decades worth of discarded glass bottles, and found cracked safes and the occasional firearm emerging from the ground-ivy to add excitement!

What's depressing today is the huge volume of lightweight material being collected each year, almost all deposited riverside in the preceding twelve months. Discarded takeaway rubbish and bottles seem to indicate the night-time economy is thriving, but passing vehicles also eject their rubbish.

Additionally, Bristol Waste's reluctance to hard-copy the Christmas rota changes this year meant many householders put out their boxes on the normal day, only to be blasted into the river by Hurricane Eleanor!

Both an increasing amount of rough-sleeping debris, and also steady losses from weekly recycling pick-ups, end up in FrANC's annual collections. Signs of pressured times undoubtedly. Local voluntary workers caring for their linear green-space and wildlife-corridor carry the can.

FrANC was set up with loftier aims than litter-picking. Do community groups tidying up after others stop mess generation? No. It merely shifts cost and demonstrates motivation. Is something as simple as keeping the drains clear important? Absolutely! Do developers pressuring desirable districts really care about community groups or neighbours? Open to debate!

We'd be interested to hear about any community initiatives that tackle this problem. Ed



Friends of the Avon Cut do their Saturday clean-up.

# Aerospace Bristol and the heritage it commemorates

Gordon Young visits Aerospace Bristol, the wonderful new home of Concorde - and much more.

## Past times

The old Bristol Industrial Museum on Harbourside had a collection of aero engines, inert and sterile, displayed in a row, labelled (and laboured) with technical descriptions. A dead assembly of objects: hardly celebratory.

Then, in 2003, Concorde Alpha Foxtrot landed at Filton runway for the last time, anywhere. The expectations of locals was to get Concorde in the dry, off the end of the runway. Letters appeared in the local press, expressing concern that she was left, somewhat dejected, out in the open. Stick her in her place of birth, the nearby Brabazon hangar, they pleaded - after all, the ss Great Britain was returned to her dock cradle. But the hangar had an uncertain future, and problems with offices built within it, incorporating toxic asbestos.

There was a bonus, however. From the M5, car-borne families, queuing en route from the Midlands and the north to Cornwall's beaches, were astonished to glimpse what is possibly the most beautiful aircraft ever designed.



It all started with trams.

## The present

Well, the Industrial Museum has been reborn as M Shed, its galleries offering a Pitt Rivers-like miscellany. And flanking the disused Filton runway is a custom-built hangar for Concorde. It sits adjacent to a World War I hangar, now displaying the city's rich aviation heritage, from a flimsy biplane and cold-war missiles to the Giotto spacecraft.

The listed hangar is an impressive blend of old and new. Traces of the building's original function sit comfortably alongside modern interventions. It's a sensitive treatment and there is a real sense of space with plenty of room for big, impactful display boards alongside the exhibits.

Glance to your left as you walk between the old and new hangars and feel proud. In the distance is the GKN/Airbus site, the manufacturing complex where wing components for the world's largest passenger aircraft, the Airbus A380, are designed and manufactured.

Concorde's new hangar offers a spacious, respectful realm for its revered treasure.

Audio-visual effects are projected onto that pencil-thin fuselage. The aircraft is vivid testimony to the important contribution that the aviation industry has made to our city over many decades.

On 7 December 2017 Bristol Civic Society members were treated to a tour of the recently-opened £19m aviation museum at Filton. There is a report of the visit (Concorde - the worthy star) on the Society's website: <https://www.bristolcivicsociety.org.uk/news/341-concorde-the-worthy-star.html>



Bristol Aerospace Museum. Not just Concorde.

## The future

The runway, created by demolishing Charlton village, will witness a rebirth: several thousand homes and a high-tech business park. And the Brabazon hangar, described by historian Brian Little as one of the great industrial buildings in the world, is included in the airfield development site so might have a future - it deserves it.

What other city can boast such a distinguished triumvirate: the ss Great Britain, the Clifton Suspension Bridge, and now Concorde? Each of them a global icon of Bristol. Science, technology, design - linked inextricably with our city. Aerospace Bristol is sure to prove as popular as its two illustrious partners.

# ss Great Britain new museum space

Nic Billane visits 'Being Brunel', an exciting new visitor space

Civic Society members visited the ss Great Britain to see the new dockside buildings enhancing Bristol's waterfront, and the home of an exciting new museum called 'Being Brunel', which will cement ss Great Britain's reputation as a premier Bristol visitors attraction and a place of significant historical interest.

The refurbished buildings and investment in a new visitors centre is the culmination of a five year-long project which has seen a major redevelopment of derelict building beside Bristol's floating harbour, and the creation of a dedicated exhibition space where Brunel's personality and inventive genius can be explored under the title 'Being Brunel'. The Museum is part of the £7.2 million 'Being Brunel' project, with funding coming from individuals, companies and charitable trusts including the Heritage Lottery fund.

We were shown around the new buildings by Project Manager Mr Mike Day, who explained that the new or renovated parts of the Grade 2 listed Dock office have been designed to reflect the façade of the original building that would have flanked the ss Great Britain as she was constructed in her Dry Dock in 1840. The regional construction company Beard have been responsible for the building work with Alex French company being the project architects. The façade on the Harbour side facing walls has also been enhanced. Due for completion in February 2018, but



Being Brunel - new visitor's centre.

scheduled to be opened to the public in March, the steel frame exhibition hall built within the structure, will contain multiple gallery space and a mezzanine level, as well as a café.

The new museum and visitor experience will become a national centre of expertise in the life and works of Isambard Kingdom Brunel. During the construction of the ss Great Britain, Brunel was often on site to inspect work in progress and discuss his ships design. It is likely that he used the Drawing Office now renovated to its original 1840s appearance, which features a wide oriel window that the great man would have looked out of.

With the new building and renovations complete we were told that the focus for 'Being Brunel' is now on the various internal installations which will tell the

story and inspiration of the World's greatest-ever engineer. Visitors will be able to explore many facets of Brunel's personality including his ability to calculate risk, as an artist, as an entrepreneur. The museum will also examine the achievements and legacy of IKB, through never-before-seen personal possessions, as well as interactive exhibitions and audio-visual experiences.

With the opening of the Being Brunel exhibition in March, Matilda Wallis Volunteering Manager at the ss Great Britain Trust, and Annmarie Llewellyn a volunteer at the project, gave our group a presentation on volunteering roles across their organisation. They are particularly keen to hear from those interested in visitor experience roles and even costumed interpretation parts. But a whole range of roles are being recruited in order to bring to life the history of the ss Great Britain and Brunel to inspire the next generation. Well worth doing.

Being Brunel is keen to hear from those interested in visitor experience roles and even costumed interpretation parts. A whole range of roles are being recruited in order to bring to life the history of the ss Great Britain and Brunel to inspire the next generation.

For further details of the volunteer program, check the website. [www.ssgreatbritain.org/support-us](http://www.ssgreatbritain.org/support-us)



# Book review

Michael Manson is impressed by a history of popular politics in eighteenth century Bristol.

*Bristol from Below* examines Bristol's labouring class history from the 1680s-1830s. Poole and Rogers show the stresses and strains of a city growing at an unprecedented rate. In 1696 the population of the Bristol was estimated at just 20,000 – what we might call a small market town in today's terms. By 1831 the inhabitants had topped 100,000.

*Bristol from Below* focuses largely on the popular politics of working men and women and the everyday trials and tribulations they faced. It gives us a fresh view of Bristol's 'golden age' of expansion – which, of course, we all know was tarnished by the nature of the trade that made some people in the city so very wealthy.

By today's standards the governance of the city and the voting processes were astoundingly undemocratic. The Corporation was self-electing while voting for MPs, when it actually happened, was done publically over a two week period during which time voters were bribed with banquets and alcohol.

During the eighteenth century the growing city of Bristol was creaking at the seams. At times the intrusive power of the state could be alarming. In the period 1735 to 1815 Britain was at war two in every three years. Impressment into his majesty's navy was a very real possibility.

The crowd was becoming increasingly vociferous about inequalities and perceived incursions into their liberties. Meanwhile, with a lack of effective policing those in authority had to develop new strategies to deal with large scale demonstrations.

Demonstrations against turnpikes reveal how vulnerable the city's elite were to the direct action of the

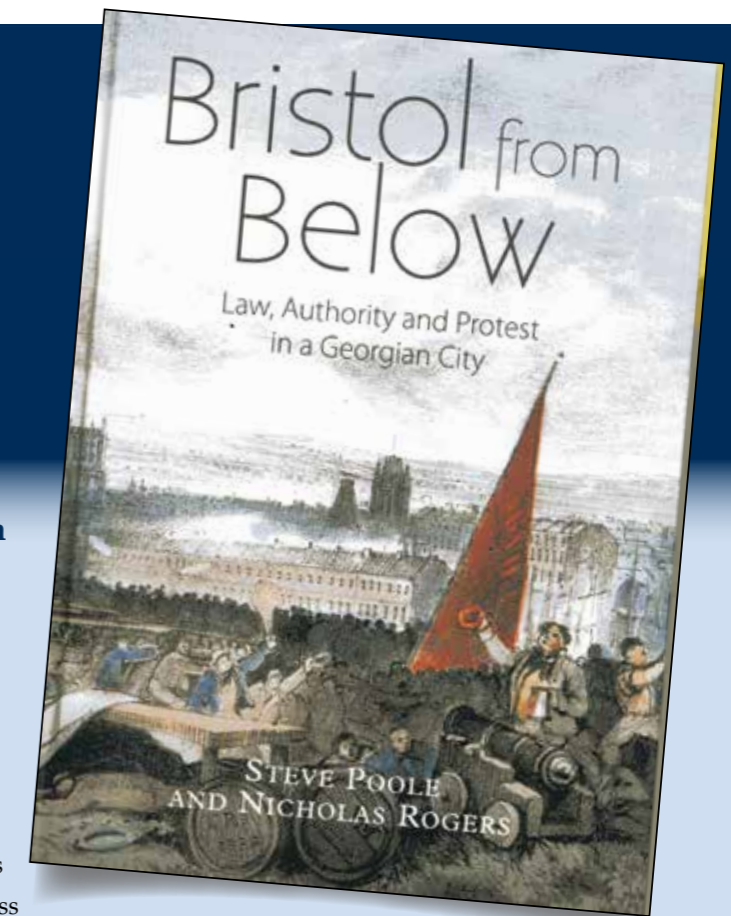
**Bristol from Below - Law, Authority and Protest in a Georgian City**

Steve Poole and Nicholas Rogers

The Boydell Press

ISBN 978-1-78327-244-0

Price – £70.00. Discounted to £30.00 for Bristol Civic Society members. See Flyer.



people, who, in their view, were only protesting about the infringement of their liberty. New crimes such as the burning of toll gates were committed for which there were no judicial precedents. In just seven years (1728-35) the punishment for those pulling down toll gates increased from three months imprisonment, to seven years transportation, to death by hanging.

The stability of Bristol was vulnerable to all sorts of outside influences. There were constant fears – both real and imaginary. There were threats of Jacobites (those who wanted a return to the Stuart monarchy), Dissenters and Nonconformists, marauding weavers, blackmailing arsonists, feral colliers from Kingswood and even gangs of 'sodomites'.

Labour disputes also challenged the ruling elite. In 1728, the weaving community, incensed by a cut in piece-rates, downed tools and destroyed about thirty looms before marching into Somerset and doing the same in Keynsham, Pensford and Chew Magna. The following year, once again, looms were taken into the street and fired, while the houses of the master weavers were surrounded by angry crowds. During a scuffle in a doorway shots were fired and four people were killed.

By the end of the era Bristol was

facing deepening poverty and frequent outbreaks of illness. Cholera revealed Bristol to be a class fractured society being most prevalent in the overcrowded and stinking central wards of the city. And it all comes to a head with the extraordinary popular uprising of October 1831 when several hundred men and women were killed by merciless military intervention. 'The 1831 riots,' conclude Poole and Rogers, 'reflected the deepening alienation and anger of marginal groups in Bristol Society whose only common ground was a disgust, if not a hatred, for the patriciate who continued to dictate Bristol's destiny'.

Poole and Rogers have shone a light into some of Bristol's darker corners. They write that *Bristol from Below* has been a long time in the making. Indeed, the amount of primary research that has gone into *Bristol from Below* is remarkable. Although written principally for scholars and academics *Bristol from Below* will be of interest to anyone who is curious about Bristol's rich history. My only caveat is the price. Perhaps a more affordable e-book could be made available?

Michael Manson is the author of 'Riot! The Bristol Bridge Massacre of 1793' (Tangent Books).

# Do you love Bristol as much as we do?



If Bristol has a special place in your heart, then leaving a legacy to Bristol Civic Society in your will is an excellent way to help keep it special for present and future generations. Bristol Civic Society has a long and proud record of campaigning to protect and preserve all that is best in the city.

It is an independent organisation and an independent voice. It does not answer to politicians, parties, big business, property developers or other vested interests. Its only role is to fight for what is best for the city and its people.

We campaign on behalf of the character of the city, its amazing heritage and all the wonderful diversity of its built environment.

If you're a long-standing Bristol resident you will know this. You will know of the epic campaigns of the past, such as those to prevent an urban motorway which would have destroyed communities and the Floating Harbour,



or the successful bid to stop a concrete hotel being built in the Avon Gorge.

Wrecking-balls and concrete have harmed Bristol in the past, but it would have been much worse without the determination of the Society and its members.

Ours is, and will remain, an unending struggle, and it costs money. There will be projects and campaigns ahead and to help with these we will be very grateful

"The Civic Society has had many heroes and we have much to be thankful for in the most dogged of them - the ones who may sometimes have been a real pain to the City Council, but who knew they were fighting for the city they love - and for the future generations that will hopefully be able to enjoy the fruits of their endeavours." *RIBA President George Ferguson, 2005.*

for any contribution that you are able to make through a legacy.

As Bristol Civic Society is a charity, bequests left to us are exempt from Inheritance Tax. Additionally leaving a legacy of 10% or more of your net estate to a charity reduces the rate of Inheritance Tax payable on the rest of your estate from 40% to 36%.

We will never ask about the contents of your will but if you do plan to leave a bequest to Bristol Civic Society please let us know so we have the opportunity to thank you for your support.

**If you would like further details or a confidential discussion regarding leaving a bequest to Bristol Civic Society, please contact John Jones, our treasurer, by telephone or email: 0117 962 0477 or [treasurer@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:treasurer@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk)**

# 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](http://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](http://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.

### Membership application to join Bristol Civic Society

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

**Please return to:** Alex Dunn, Membership Secretary, BCS, 47 Abbey Road, Bristol BS9 3QN.

Cheques, if not paying by standing order, made payable to Bristol Civic Society.

**Enquiries:** Tel: 0117 962 2475

**Email:** [membership@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:membership@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk)

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YES  NO

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Please pay annually from 1st of ..... (1) 20 ..... (2)

the sum of £..... (3) (.....(4) pounds)

to CAF Bank Ltd (sort code 40-52-40) for the account of Bristol Civic Society (account no. 00087355)

reference no. (5) ..... (for completion by BCS)

Name.....

Date ..... Signature (6) .....

Insert (1) next month (2) this year (3) appropriate rate (4) amount in words (5) leave blank (6) wet signature needed by the bank

# Events

Spring and Summer 2018

We are again organising a mixture of talks, walks and site visits. Some will have limited numbers and we usually make a small charge to cover any costs. Please check the Civic Society website for updates on the following, and other so far unannounced events.

**APRIL** Tuesday 17th April,  
10.30am

**Visit to Easton Jamia Mosque, St Marks Road**  
Limited to maximum of 20 people, an opportunity to visit the Mosque.

Easton Jamia Masjid is one of the oldest and most respected places of worship for Muslims across the South West region. It has recently been refurbished.

Tuesday 24th April, 6.30pm  
Watershed, Studio 3

**"What's happening with Bristol's transport in 2018?"**

**Speakers: Peter Mann, Director of Transport, Bristol City Council & James White, Interim Head of Transport, West of England Combined Authority**

This meeting is being arranged in response to the many requests we receive from people trying to find out exactly what's happening with the complex, and often bewildering, range of transport initiatives in Bristol.

What can we expect in terms of new transport projects?

- Metrobus operational; 4 tracking to Filton; Electrification; Temple Gate works

What can we expect to be consulted on?

- Sub regional Plan; Bristol Transport Plan; Air Quality; Review of 20 mph zones

It will be very much a factual event – covering approved projects and plans. If it's successful we should like to repeat it – in some form – every year, building up a comprehensive and accurate picture of transport in Bristol.

**MAY** Wednesday 23rd May, 10am

**Visit to Filton Airfield, hosted by YTL Developments.**  
Presentations and site visit. A great opportunity to find out more about this major development project – nearly 3,000 houses, employment areas, schools, metrobus and much more.  
Limited to 50 people.

**JUNE** Tuesday 5th June, 7.30pm

**Bristol Civic Society AGM, Redland Parish Halls**



The recently refurbished Easton Jamia Masjid, St Marks Road.

Tuesday 19th June, all day

**Study visit to Oxford**

Following the popular and enjoyable visit to Salisbury last year we are arranging a study visit to Oxford. We will travel by train and be hosted by Oxford Civic Society with opportunities for a range of guided tours and visits, details still being finalised. We might even arrange for some punting....

Date and venue to be arranged:

**Presentation of Design Awards**

We have received a significant number of nominations this year – many which we were not previously aware of, a reflection of the popularity of the Design Awards. We are meeting shortly to arrange judging panel site visits.

**SEPT** Tuesday 11th September

**Visit to Bristol by Salisbury Civic Society**

A reciprocal visit following our Salisbury trip last summer – more details nearer the date. An opportunity to host the visit and show the best of Bristol.

*If you have ideas for future events do please let us know! We always welcome fresh thoughts.*

**Ashton Court Mansion**

We will be continuing with our campaign to save and to restore Ashton Court Mansion. We plan further public events and consultation – following on from the very well attended public meeting held in the Mansion last November. To join the Mansion newsletter distribution list please email [simon.birch7@gmail.com](mailto:simon.birch7@gmail.com).

**We are a small team and need reinforcements.** If you can spare a little time to assist in organising our Events Programme please get in touch. Please email [events@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:events@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk) with bookings, queries, ideas and offers of assistance!