

A VISION FOR BEAR FLAT CENTRE

Responses received

In order of receipt

An interesting document. I would agree that the main problem is getting people to enjoy walking the length of the shops in Bear Flat. Most have a destination in mind and the traffic will always put them off. I think the 'shop local' campaign and incentives to use more than one outlet would be a welcome addition. I would also welcome better signage of where shoppers can park without penalties for the shops on Bear Flat. I still encounter many concerned shoppers each week who are worried about staying too long and going on to other outlets due to where they parked.

Overall, I feel excited over the plans and am happy to contribute to any artwork plans or greenery where I can.

Julia Davey

Hi this all looks great, nice to see there is an initiative to improve the area, I have often tried to get together with other traders but most of the time too busy to organise it all.

I think there should be a special Christmas event, Widcombe & Moorland Road have a switching on of the lights, which is a little difficult here as we have the main road travelling through Bear Flats but think that something could be done to have all the traders do a special Christmas evening where we all open late, maybe get some carol singers etc but I personally don't have time to get everything organised, I could help contribute though.

Definitely think the 'shop local' could be utilised more!

I have been thinking of putting more flowers outside, I do normally put up a Christmas Tree with lights outside the shop (which is quite expensive) maybe we could get a larger tree we all contribute to?

Silver Bear

What we would like to see improved on Bear Flat is employee parking.

Chemist

How about putting some large containers with flowers on the traffic islands and on the edges of the pavement in one or two places.

M Kings

I've just read the draft paper on this, and I completely agree with the principles. Some random thoughts follow.

The problem, as you identify, is the traffic, and this must be tackled. I recall hearing somewhere that the reason the carriageway is so wide is because there used to be a tram stop in the centre ... that's long gone but the road layout remains. It's a very poor layout for traffic, even the buses don't use the bus lane, some drivers see it as an opportunity to over/undertake. There is plenty of scope here for reducing the vehicle lane widths and widen the pavements.

Car drivers don't get any cues that they are entering a "neighbourhood"; signage would help, but some form of traffic calming that can't be ignored such as speed cushions, 20mph restrictions, etc would be good as well. NB for anyone who says you can't put a 20mph limit on a major road, have a look at Radstock.

One quick fix would be to add a central pedestrian refuge on Hayes Place at the junction with Wellsway. Crossing to/from the chemists is unnecessarily difficult.

Retaining the short-term parking at Hayes Place is desirable, but I've always felt the arrangement is less than optimal. It ought to be possible to make better use of the space by limiting parking to one side in herring-bone fashion, whilst still allowing pavements to be widened.

This is outside the scope of the paper, but rat running through Hayesfield Park ought to be prevented.

A minor point: can someone please get the proprietors of the Bear pub to put the bear back on his feet properly? It's designed to stand on three paws, with the fourth hanging over the edge above the doorway. It just looks wrong the way they have it now.

Colin Blackman

The main problem with Bear Flat Centre is I didn't know we had one so more advertising would be great. Perhaps a little booklet/flyer from Bear Flat Association would be great.

What I'd most like to see to improve Bear Flat Centre is More greenery as it is quite a harsh looking area with the main road etc. and less Real Estate Agents too :-)

The Bear

Delighted with any more traffic calming measures to reduce stress, pollution, danger.

Helen Cooke

First of all, many many thanks for all the hard work that's clearly gone into it. I completely agree both with your identification of the problems, and your proposed solutions.

I couldn't see where you'd mentioned the proposed low vehicle neighbourhoods, which I think are a great idea apart from that they don't recognise that cyclists and pedestrians often go through areas on their way to other areas, so safe and pleasant connections from one to another are also important - this perhaps echoes what you've said about the need for greater provision and priority for pedestrians, cyclists and wheelchair users in crossing the main road.

Signage:

- A proper connection with/from Bloomfield Green and the Two Tunnels path - e.g. signs from the path exit/entrance to our local shops, cafes etc, - complete with good cycle parking would be great to see, and could benefit the local businesses;

- signs showing walking routes to and from town - there are several of them, but you have to be 'in the know' to find them

Work with the local B and Bs to encourage them to point people in the direction of the local shops etc, and to encourage their guests to walk into town - but the walking routes might need a bit of improvement (e.g. rubbish cleaning). Maybe the council would help as part of their enabling and encouraging people out of their cars.

It would be great to see Bear Flat 'greened' - we really do lack any floral or green presence, which could really make the place look more welcoming. Installation of big planters, e.g. where July Davey and the radiator shop have done such a good job of making that little bit so much more attractive.

I don't know if you've seen the 'parklet' now installed at Kingsmead Square, but something of that nature would be wonderful to see in a reconfigured Hayes Place - I'd love to see Hayes Place become a vibrant, pleasant place to congregate and sit safely and slightly more peacefully, away from the awful traffic and fumes of the main road.

[later email:]

One thing that occurred to me is that you could use the B F Flyer to ask people with disabilities and/or mobility issues for comments/suggestions. Something along the lines of what do they really appreciate about Bear Flat (including the businesses) and what improvements/ changes they would like to see. For me this would include anyone using a mobility aid (wheelchair, mobility scooters, car, walker, stick etc), and also people with prams and buggies.

For example, taking my late mother-in-law out in her wheelchair was a nightmare with poor pavements, lack of dropped kerbs and pavement parking. More recently going out for a walk with my wheelchair-using friend we have so much appreciated being able to go out together along the Two Tunnels path.

When I've been ill provision of benches has made the difference between going out and having to stay in.

Underlying all this is the understanding that accessibility can affect every one of us at different points in our lives. When we plan for and make provision for people with specific needs we probably also provide for many others.

Deborah Steele

We have been reading the vision for bear flat document and it all looks good.

The only other suggestions we have would be to narrow the road (possibly remove the bus lane which I know would be controversial). Currently Bear Flat is dominated by the road because it is so wide, and this gives the impression it is somewhere to travel through rather than spend time. The whole layout is in favour of the motor vehicle and not the pedestrian.

Additional seating outside the bear pub would make the area more attractive.

This suggestion is fairly ambitious, but the old car phone warehouse shop would be a great location for a farm shop and would bring more people to the area. I went to prior park garden centre recently and they've got a great one. It would hopefully be a success as lots of passing trade and places to park. Not sure how we could go about making that happen.

They're just some thoughts we had. Good luck with it and well done for trying to improve things.

Simon & Natalie Walshe

I support the proposals put forward in the draft document - thank you to those who have worked on this so far. A few thoughts:

A fruit and vegetable shop would be a very useful addition, as well as a post office.

Wider pavements would be great, but I think there should be room for at least two buses to pull out of the main traffic lanes so as not to hold up traffic when they stop, thereby increasing congestion and pollution. The morning traffic coming down Wellsway is already very heavy and may well increase when the Southstoke plateau is developed.

Is there a case for moving the northbound bus stops away from The Bear?

If the plan is to use large wooden planters, these can cause visibility problems for drivers near junctions (an example is when pulling out from Snow Hill onto London Road - the planter makes it impossible to see low vehicles approaching from the right).

Sue Evans

Many moons ago, when Traffic Convenor, we had some thoughts on the Hayes Place crossing from the Pharmacy to the Coop. That crossing is dangerous because it is quite lengthy and unbroken. Double parking adds to the dangers, and we did not request a pelican/ zebra crossing but rather a midway refuge - this would also help deter the double parking that is so rife. All this went to the Council at the time.

I would also draw attention to the lack of cameras at the Bear crossing - so many traffic dangers which go unpunished!

Gareth Bunn

I've now had a chance to have a look at the Vision paper and would like to congratulate you for the work on it. I'd call it a first-class document, and I hope that it has the impact on the Council and WECA which it deserves.

Though it rightly praises the tenacity of the Co-op, it does not really stress the sparsity of basic shops – McColls was a sad loss, and so was the post office and the characterful Rolfeys, and if the Co-op *should* go there would really only be specialist outlets left. That's not an easy thing to do anything about, of course, though, insofar as premises are rented, a bit of pressure on landlords might have a little impact. Maybe we need to see how the delivery culture settles down after Covid.

I wonder if one or two more detailed ideas might be offered on greening – for instance, Hayes Place is rightly highlighted as offering opportunity, but the short-term parking there is useful for those like us who live a bit further away and haven't got an hour to spend on a small shopping trip, and some thoughts on how different interests could be reconciled there would, I suggest, add to the plan.

The Majestic Wine parking area is effectively wasted space; it's in private ownership of course which makes it harder to deal with, but the school have now picked up the idea of using it as a drop-off point, which is good, and there is maybe potential to use it for other helpful purposes as well.

Mark O'Sullivan

I think with Hayes Place the suggestions of more street life, wider pavements, lower priority for traffic etc is a good one. Currently unsafe on the drop-down kerbs – pedestrians believe they have priority and many cars certainly don't respect that. Vehicles double parking, dominating space and performing a range of manoeuvres obviously doesn't sit well with a community led / shared space / liveable street neighbourhood that the Bear Flat Association seem to be aspiring to. I also believe that higher footfall and greater congregation of active modes in a safer environment will help the traders (as well as reduce noise and pollution and make the environment a safer one).

Jeremy Douch

We have had sight of the Vision Plan for Bear Flat Centre and fully endorse the excellent ideas contained within. We would be particularly supportive of a pedestrian crossing at the lower end of Bloomfield Road, the return of a Post Office, and better provision for pedestrians & cyclists. Please let us know how we can help.

Julie Ingerfield, Acting Chair, Bloomfield Residents Association

Like others, I fully support the plans and intention to build on the potential for the Bear Flat area. In an odd way, with Roffey's closure, it began to feel less cohesive, and more like Real Estate Central, and sadly that seems to be the intention for those old premises. On a more positive note, Mauro's cafe provides the model for what the neighbourhood needs, to attract visitors, and also to build on more local shopping.

What I would love to see are small good quality and value, non-chain, neighbourhood restaurants, open in the evenings, and focusing on attracting and serving residents living nearby. Mauro does a great job at lunch and with some evening supper clubs, but would there be an opportunity to attract young, up and coming new chefs who would like to start up - even the odd pop-up would be great. Especially now with the new fresh and excellent fishmonger in Moorfield, a local butcher in Widcombe, small neighbourhood restaurants would also serve to attract people to this part of the city. It may be competition for existing businesses, but areas with good amenities attract more people, and encourages those who may go into town (when allowed) to be able to eat out locally. Menu Gordon Jones, while popular with many, isn't the kind of place I would just pop into for a mid week meal.

Cheryl Young

I agree with doing something about the bus lane. The layout could become more community friendly. It is often used by people under- overtaking and a danger for vehicles turning left from the Wellsway into Bloomfield Ave. Currently, buses stop there anyway to allow cars from Bloomfield Avenue to come out and turn left to the traffic lights. Perhaps the bus stop could be shifted from the Bear to that wasted lane? It would allow for some seating and planters outside the Bear and planters in that space may not obstruct vision as much as planters where the bus lane is now.

Felicitas Ruhlmann

I am writing as a long time resident of the area, a pedestrian, cyclist and as a bus driver for First Bus in Bath.

To start with three wider points:

1. The A367 Wellsway has been a main route into and through Bath since Roman times. Short of Bath having a by-pass, the volume of traffic is what it is. Restricting the flow of this traffic will only result in more congestion and pollution.
2. Bear Flat area along the A367 is a classic ribbon development. It does not have or lend itself to the concept of a 'Centre' very well.
3. It is very popular for councils and pressure groups to promote cycling and compare Bath to other cities such as Oxford or Cambridge. However, due to the hills and narrow roads, Bath is never going to become a cycling city.

That said there is no reason not to try to improve the Bear Flat environment.

I support the following points in BFA's Plan:

- Undertake improvements to the Gore
- Put in a pedestrian/cycle crossing on Bloomfield Road – I also suggest that the crossing on Wellsway at the Gore be upgraded to a Pelican Crossing.
- Explore the possibilities of public artworks.
- Give better signage so people/drivers are more aware of the commercial area.

I do not support the following points in the BFA's Plan:

Reconfigure the Wellsway carriageway to yield more space for walking and cycling.

- The area has 4 bus stops which serve many bus routes and passengers. The idea of taking one or more of the current road lanes for another purpose will result in significant congestion and pollution – traffic will not be able to pass a bus at a bus stop.
- Likewise the right turn feeder lane from Wellsway to Bloomfield is a vital safety feature and also helps the traffic from backing up into the area of the shops. It should not be removed.
- Changing the speed limit to 20 mph is not relevant as the vast majority of traffic is not achieving this speed anyway due to the volume of traffic, the pedestrian crossings and turnings. A 20mph speed limit will not stop the occasional 'boy racer'. That is a job for the Police.

Hayes Place reconfiguration:

- We do not have the space of Widcombe, Claverton Street.
- The limited dimensions of the pavements, car parking spaces and the need for large vehicle access to the Holloway and Beechen Cliff Road means that any reduction of current road space will have a detrimental impact on residents. Worst case scenario – emergency service vehicles are blocked from accessing these roads. This would affect over 200 homes, many with elderly residents.
- Having a seating area outside the Café is not practical. Even when it was a car parking space it created a choke point for vehicle access to the Holloway. Plus the pavement is also narrow. It is a very exposed spot and I certainly would not want to be sitting there.

- The idea of reducing the road space for increased pavement space is not at all practical, for the reasons above.
- There is a need for designated loading zone(s) both sides to help prevent the double parking. There is also a need for a disabled/5 minute parking zone outside the Chemists to enable customers who have difficulty in walking to access the shop.
- The consequence of this is to significantly reduce parking spaces. Local traders need a say on that.

Greening the area. While I support the concept, what I do not support is the idea of planting trees along the roadside:

- It takes away the already limited pavement space.
- Trees close to a road provide a significant hazard to vehicles. To illustrate this- take a bus ride and sit on the top deck, left hand side.

Another point. There has been a rise in petty crime noted on the various neighbourhood social media groups – car break ins, theft from gardens. Interestingly there are no CCTV or vehicle recognition cameras in the Bear Flat area. Perhaps this is something the BFA can champion.

C Phillips

Just a few thoughts about the Hayes Place scenario and other aspects of the vision:

- a) Seems like a good opportunity to increase the width of the pavement between Hayesfield Park/ 1 Hayes Place and Hayes Place (the Pharmacy) where social distancing is very restricted and walking in the main road is sometimes the only answer. Also the pavement from the pharmacy to the café could also be considered as a pavement where widening would not go amiss.
- b) Consider 20mph on main road from north junction of Hayesfield Park to Tesco (Wellsway) crossing whilst also providing a crossing across the Wells Road at the junction with Oldfield Road. If controlled by lights at each end the whole centre along the Bear Flat could be reduced to one lane only (a bit like a bus gate.)
- c) Planters at each side of the road where the pathway crosses Hayesfield Park from Holloway to Wells Road to slow all rat-running traffic down – priority to traffic moving from south to north.
- d) Planters or crossing across Hayes Place junction with Wells Road in order to prevent non-compliant vehicles from using Hayes Place as a turning point. (This would be an inevitable consequence of the imposition of the CAZ boundary – or so I was informed by the Transport Manager – since Hayesfield Park would have been used for this hypothetical purpose, but it is now incorporated inside the poorly positioned CAZ boundary).
- e) Does Andrews Estate Agent really need all of Rolfeys old space? A well managed Post Office or a Parcel Drop and Collect Service would be preferable, or even a local hardware store, or an independent bookshop.
- f) Replace the trees that have been removed along the central zone (including in the Avenues), and add greenery wherever that can be achieved, bearing in mind the conservation area restrictions. Maybe incorporate trees and planters into the central reservation of the central zone (Bear Flat itself).

g) Plant trees and not more road signs.

h) Reduce light pollution – it is noticeable that the Council replaced street lights approximately three years ago but have now considerably heightened the lampposts thus providing residents with almost ‘football stadium’ light quality – this is extremely questionable in terms of light pollution, and also contract letting! Climate Change advocates lessening light pollution.

i) The Wells Road proposed development above Menu Gordon Jones should not be permitted to add another storey as this would not then be aligned to neighbouring properties and would spoil the ‘skyline’ on the Bear Flat, as well as invading other residents’ privacy. Affordable residential housing could be easily achieved by a vast reduction in student accommodation in properties that were originally built as ‘AFFORDABLE HOUSING!’ many years ago!

These are just a few thoughts regarding the future developments that could be considered around this area, and if some through traffic restrictions were introduced the traffic pollution evident in 2019 would be greatly reduced. The first ‘lockdown’ must have seen a dramatic decrease in traffic pollution – apart from the Council Highways who destroyed the peace and quiet on the roads by using this time to install cameras and then refurbish the road.

Andrew Terrett

TC 10 February 2021