



Wellsway, and the Bloomfield Road junction

Introduction

This position paper sets out BFA’s thinking on how Wellsway through Bear Flat and the Bloomfield Road junction could be improved in pursuit of *A VISION FOR BEAR FLAT CENTRE* published by BFA in 2020:

<https://bearflat.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/BEAR-FLAT-CENTRE-.pdf>

The immediate aim is to have this ready in time for a scheme following the West of England Combined Authority’s (WECA) corridor study of the A367 to identify improvements for bus travel, walking and cycling.



How Bear Flat could look with wider pavements, trees and more places to sit

Walking

Pedestrians should have a higher priority generally at Bear Flat. Wellsway between Hayes Place and Bloomfield Road is a very wide road, with potential for narrowing of the carriageway.

Pavements should be widened especially on the east side of Wellsway and especially to allow space for pedestrians to walk past those waiting at bus stops.

There should be continuous pavements across junctions where possible to make for safer walking: so, for instance, you could walk between the Coop and Da Vinci's on the level with priority over traffic on Bruton Avenue.



An example of a change of surface for people to walk across a junction.
Wanstead, London

At Hayes Place, BFA has put forward ideas for a reconfigured space, see <https://bearflat.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Hayes-Place-Consultation2.pdf> Cllr Duguid has submitted this approach to the Council for possible funding.

Cycling

Cycling should be encouraged, and the Centre has space for this. Sustrans has already drawn up plans for cycleways along Wellsway and Bloomfield Road as part of a strategic network, including a connection to the Linear Park/Two Tunnels Route.

Providing a cycle lane on the west side of Wellsway would be fairly straightforward. If such a lane ended at Bloomfield Avenue then there would be no complication with the northbound

bus stop. Cyclists would then use the crossing to the east side where they could pick up a short cycle lane to Hayes Place.

A lane on the east side, however, would pass the two southbound bus stops. This would set up a conflict between cycles travelling south-north (often at speed) and bus users walking east-west (and having just got off the bus perhaps not concentrating on the danger) to reach the pavement from the bus stop. For this reason, a single cycle lane, but two-way, on the west side of Wellsway seems preferable.

Buses

Any changes should facilitate, not hinder, bus use. At the same time, it is questionable whether six bus stops are essential to serve Bear Flat. BFA would like to see the two adjacent bus stops for different southbound services rationalised into one.

There is often pedestrian congestion around the two southbound bus stops particularly when schoolchildren await buses in the afternoon. For pedestrians not wanting a bus this is at best awkward and at worst dangerous if they step into the road to find a way through. Wider pavement and enhanced bus stop(s) would work.

The short bus lanes northbound have very marginal benefit to buses. That from Bloomfield Road is used by just one route, though it avoids a queue at busy times. The one alongside Majestic/Cook is both confusing and a source of danger in making space for traffic about to turn into Bloomfield Avenue to undertake northbound traffic at speed. Both bus lanes could be reconsidered if overall there were benefits, but only after consultation with operators.



An example of a shopping street having widened pavements and a narrowed carriageway (though in this case a one-way street). *Marylebone High Street, London*

Traffic

Any improvement scheme for Wellsway must recognise that the A367 is a major radial road in the City serving places unconnected with Bear Flat. But we may ask through traffic to slow as it passes through a neighbourhood focus and Local Centre: BFA advocate a 20-mph speed limit through Bear Flat.

Parking

Some measures, particularly cycle lanes and a pedestrian crossing over Bloomfield Road, may replace some parking. This may be controversial but there are in fact many areas where it is possible to park at and close to Bear Flat Centre. BFA has counted available spaces (figures are approximate as spaces are not marked out). There are 35 spaces that are exclusively available to short-stay visitors to the Centre. There are a further 108 spaces on or close to Wellsway that are available to visitors but also usable by RPZ permit holders. In total some 143 spaces are there currently. A loss, should it be necessary, of some spaces on Wellsway would thus be a small proportion of the space available.

Also, better enforcement of the time limits would boost the efficiency of the parking spaces and BFA is pressing for this. Some re-allocation of parking spaces to allow more scope for visitors and/or shorter periods might be helpful.

Viability and Amenity

An aim of any highway improvement scheme should be to offer far more pleasant conditions for all users of Bear Flat Centre. Slow but steady traffic speeds, with less stopping and starting, will reduce danger, noise, disturbance and pollution. More pavement space can mean trees, shrubs, public places to sit, outdoor seating at cafes and pubs, and public art. Bear Flat Centre could become a destination and a place to linger and meet people, not somewhere to get through as quickly as possible.

Bear Flat is designated as a Local Centre in the Bath & North-East Somerset Core Strategy and Place-Making Plan. So it is Council policy to maintain and enhance Bear Flat as a Local Centre.

Crossings: The Bear

The existing crossing from The Bear to the florists works reasonably well, especially following the quicker response time for pedestrians in the phasing of the lights made in spring 2022.

The crossing could be shifted a short distance if this was necessary for a wider scheme, but there must be a crossing at or very near the current location.

Crossings: Wellsway/The Gore

The existing crossing at The Gore* needs to be improved, aesthetically and functionally. Railings add to street clutter and do not fit the current design thinking. A controlled crossing would be safer. It should be straight (not a dog leg as now) and meet pedestrian and cyclist needs.

*The green triangle at the apex where Bloomfield Road and Wellsway meet

Crossings: Bloomfield Road/The Gore

At present, the bottom of Bloomfield Road Junction is dangerous as there is no provision for crossing Bloomfield Road. This is despite the significant footfall on this route, not least those on their way to Beechen Cliff School via Bloomfield Green/Linear Park; and those looking to cross the Wellsway, travel along Bloomfield Road and access the Linear Park – that is also the National Cycle Network (Two Tunnels).

There should be a crossing, on Bloomfield Road just south of The Gore to meet pedestrian and cyclist needs. If a new crossing was created between build-outs on both pavements, the loss of parking would be slight. Such a crossing would also have a calming effect on traffic – the uneventful road that opens up like a runway to southbound traffic after turning from Wellsway evidently encourages excessive speed. Bloomfield Road has a 20-mph limit (and an active Community Speedwatch scheme, run by Bloomfield Residents Association).

We need to slow traffic down and create better awareness of ‘activity’ and many modes trying to use the space, such as with a raised table.

Bloomfield Road junction

The current junction of Wellsway and Bloomfield Road is at present uncontrolled and imposes delays on vehicle turning right into Bloomfield Road. There is also a minor road, Kipling Avenue, that joins Wellsway at this point, making the junction more complicated e.g. when two vehicles arrive at the junction from east and west, which has the prior claim on the first gap in north-south traffic? The uncontrolled junction means that traffic movements are unpredictable when – as above – there is no safe crossing on Bloomfield Road.

A roundabout might make joining Wellsway from east and west harder at busy times, and it would make traffic even more unpredictable for pedestrians.

Traffic lights might make for longer queues at busy times when phases would halt Wellsway traffic to allow for east and west movements, though they would make traffic more predictable for pedestrians. Traffic lights are costly, add to clutter and make sharp acceleration and braking more common. At quiet times, they may interrupt flow unnecessarily (though, potentially, signals can ‘talk’ to buses and give them advantage).

The best option appears to be to redesign a large stretch of road. This might extend south just beyond The Gore on both Wellsway and Bloomfield Road, and north a short distance beyond the junction, plus a short stretch at the foot of Kipling. This area would be designed for low speed, with a change of surface, few markings and possibly devices to calm traffic.

Reprioritised routes and spaces can work on busy roads: Poynton, Cheshire for example, where flows are comparable to our A367. The scheme brought 'low speed and steady flow': see *Appendix*.

The Gore

BFA has long had ambitions to upgrade The Gore. These form part of the Vision for Bear Flat Centre and are complementary to improving Wellsway. Each scheme will enhance the other: improving Wellsway will make The Gore easier to get to and more pleasant to dwell in; improving The Gore will strengthen Bear Flat as a place (i.e. a Local Centre not just a route) with a visible focus that would help motorists see that they are somewhere (as well as on the way to somewhere).

Works to renovate the listed fountain and to remove the large cabin behind it (thanks to Wessex Water) were completed in early 2022.

For more information, see: <https://bearflat.org.uk/planningandtransport/the-gore-garden-project/>

'The BFA vision will change what is a pleasant neighbourhood into an even better community. Improvements in the physical environment and the public realm, for example through emphasis on pedestrians and cycling, will make Bear Flat more attractive and safer for our residents, visitors, businesses, shops and cafes.'

Councillor Winston Duguid

Illustrations of Bear Flat by Funda Kemal, Freelance Architect, Bath <https://turkishheather.com/>

Illustrations of Marylebone High Street by LT Studio, Landscape Architects, Bath www.ltstudio.co.uk

Appendix: low speed and steady flow at Poynton



In this scheme at Poynton, Cheshire traffic has been tamed by subtle highway redesign so that it flows smoothly: 'low speed and steady flow' as one observer put it.

People apparently find it easier to cross roads since low-speed traffic can conveniently slow or pause to let someone cross with little impact on flow.



Noise and pollution are reduced because vehicles are not stopping and starting as much

David Fenton, BFA advisor and retired Planning Inspector, saw the scheme first hand in 2021 and writes:

'The scheme seems to be working really well. Traffic was slowed by the surface treatment, with minimal signing. There are no formal pedestrian crossing places,

but marked surfaces at various places. Slight changes in level help the demarcation. It is an uncluttered treatment that works brilliantly.

'Although there was a lot of traffic about, it did not dominate the area. Lots of pedestrians were walking about and crossing the roads. I myself crossed each of the main roads simply and easily - each time as soon as I approached the carriageway, vehicles paused to let me cross!

'I understand from a relative who lives nearby that the centre had been in decline, with empty shops. Now, it has a real buzz to it, with attractive shops and cafés.'

Poynton Town Council say: 'With its wide pavements, slow vehicle speeds and easy crossing, Poynton offers a friendly and vibrant atmosphere for all visitors.'

The award-winning regeneration scheme has operated since 2012.



Relevance to Bear Flat

Poynton has around 26,000 vehicles per day, broadly comparable to our A367 at Bear Flat. A similar scheme might work at and near the Wellsway/Bloomfield Road junction, but perhaps not to the north where the light-controlled crossing at The Bear should probably be retained.

Note: The scheme was designed as a 'shared surface', but a repeat of this particular measure would have to await the updated Government guidance promised when shared surfaces were paused for further research. However, roads can be redesigned and traffic and people on foot reprioritised in similar ways without it being a 'shared surface' as such.

For a visual analysis of the problems Poynton faced and how the scheme addressed them, see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-vzDDMzq7d0>

Two illustrations supplied by David Fenton, plus one of a person crossing by Hamilton-Baillie Associates