



# **BRISTOL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**

## **Report of the Scrutiny Inquiry Day: Liveable Neighbourhoods**

Conclusions of the Overview Scrutiny and Management Board, July 2022

## **1. Introduction**

On 20th June 2022 the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (OSMB) held an Inquiry Day to consider the topic of Liveable Neighbourhoods in light of the Bristol Labour manifesto commitment to test Liveable Neighbourhoods in Bristol, and the concurrent development of a Liveable Neighbourhoods Handbook for local use. The programme for the Liveable Neighbourhoods Inquiry Day can be found in Appendix 1.

The Inquiry Day was attended by Elected Members and supported by relevant Bristol City Council Officers. It was chaired by Councillor Tony Dyer (Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board) and supported and developed by a cross-party steering group which included Councillor Mark Bradshaw, Councillor Mark Weston, Councillor Martin Fodor, and Councillor Tim Kent.

## **2. Scrutiny in Bristol**

Bristol City Council's Scrutiny function supports the development of the Council response to key issues by exploring, with experts and stakeholders, key issues for the city. This work results in recommendations to the Mayor to feed in to corporate priorities.

Scrutiny Inquiry Days enable Councillors to acquire a deeper understanding of complex issues by hearing from expert speakers and engaging in debate with specialists, with the objective of identifying well-informed evidence-based recommendations. Inquiry Days aim to create a balance between information sharing and discussion, thus allowing a broad range of views to be heard and enabling participants to share their particular perspective and experience.

## **3. Background**

Liveable Neighbourhoods are areas of a city where improvements are designed in partnership with local communities to achieve a better balance between how streets are used for vehicles and people.

Improvements can vary in scale and may be easy to install, such as planters and signs, or include features such as trees, paving, parklets, or providing more benches and better lighting, and the introduction of measures to reduce through traffic and other infrastructure changes making it easier to catch a bus and to walk or cycle.

All schemes are overseen by Active Travel England, and must meet certain minimum design standards in order to meet funding requirements.

The Mayor of Bristol made a manifesto commitment in 2021 to promote safer neighbourhoods, which extended to the testing of two Liveable Neighbourhoods pilots by 2024; in 2021 a pilot was initiated in East Bristol, with plans for a second pilot in the future. A Liveable Neighbourhoods Strategy is planned to be produced incorporating lessons from these pilots.

In October 2021 it was announced that a Liveable Neighbourhoods Handbook was also being developed prior to establishing a Strategy to ensure that future projects appropriately emphasise community engagement. A draft Handbook was made available to the Inquiry Day participants; this can be found in Appendix 2. The draft Handbook in its circulated form was aimed at all audiences (Bristol communities, Councillors and stakeholder groups), and aimed to provide a common understanding of Liveable Neighbourhoods and their success criteria in order to facilitate local conversations.

## **Objectives**

The ultimate objectives of the Liveable Neighbourhoods Inquiry Day were to support Members to understand the aims and purposes of Liveable Neighbourhoods, and to influence the Bristol approach by providing feedback and input on the draft Liveable Neighbourhoods Handbook.

In order to achieve these objectives, the Inquiry Day aimed to:

- Provide information about what Liveable Neighbourhoods are and what they aim to achieve
- Provide information about the Bristol approach and plans around Liveable Neighbourhoods
- Invite national experts to speak about Liveable Neighbourhoods, how they are constructed and the potential transport, health, and environmental benefits
- Invite representatives of areas which have trialled Liveable Neighbourhoods to share their learning
- Provide an update of the progress of the East Bristol pilot
- Hold a workshop where Members consider the draft Liveable Neighbourhoods Handbook and provide feedback

## **Additional Papers**

In order to ensure that all attendees were able to participate in the Inquiry Day with a baseline knowledge of Liveable Neighbourhoods, a Frequently Asked Questions document was developed by Bristol City Council Officers; this can be found in Appendix 3.

The Draft Liveable Neighbourhoods Handbook was also circulated in advance of the Inquiry Day to allow sufficient time for reading and processing, allowing meaningful participation in the feedback workshops.

## **Inquiry Day Format**

The format for the day consisted of a combination of local and national expert speakers who provided presentations and participated in Question and Answer sessions, and group workshops involving all attendees in discussion. The full programme can be found at Appendix 1.

The event was divided into three sessions. The first session was based on establishing the national picture and local approach, with the following speakers providing their expertise:

- Brian Deegan, Active Travel England, who presented on the national picture of Liveable Neighbourhoods and what they can achieve.
- Dr Adrian Davis, University of West of England, who presented on the health and wellbeing benefits to the communities in Liveable Neighbourhoods.
- Adam Crowther, Bristol City Council, who presented on the Bristol approach to Liveable Neighbourhoods.

The second session involved speakers presenting on specific cases where Liveable Neighbourhoods were being tested, including in Bristol. Speakers were:

- Councillor Clyde Loakes, Waltham Forest.
- Sam Kirby, Bristol City Council.

Question and Answer panels followed both the first and second sessions. The slides used to accompany speaker presentations can be found at Appendix 4.

The third session consisted of an introduction to the Draft Liveable Neighbourhoods Handbook provided by Jacob Pryor (Bristol City Council) and a workshop in which attendees discussed and commented on the draft Handbook.

## 4. Findings

### Session 1

Brian Deegan from Active Travel England delivered a presentation on the form and function of Liveable Neighbourhoods.

*[paragraph to follow]*

Dr Adrian Davis from the University of West of England delivered a presentation on the health and wellbeing benefits to the communities in Liveable Neighbourhoods.

The significant physical health benefits as a direct result of active travel were highlighted, and the further benefits of a reduction in air pollution were shown. An increase in greenspace was shown to be linked to improvements in mental and physical health. The health implications of road casualties were also considered; casualties in Bristol are greater in neighbourhoods in more deprived areas.

As a benefit to communities, social support networks are greater in areas with lighter traffic. Different modes of transport require different amounts of 'space' devoted to it; pedestrians require the least space, while cars require the most.

Adam Crowther, Head of Strategic City Transport in Bristol City Council delivered a presentation on Liveable Neighbourhoods in Bristol.

Extracts of the Joint Local Transport Plan (JLTP4) were shown, including maps of key transport lines (including bus routes, cycle paths, and roads) in Bristol were displayed, and the mass transit corridors highlighted. It was demonstrated that to be effective, Liveable Neighbourhoods should be contained within cells that remain within these corridors. Examples of what this may look like in Bristol were shown.

Funding streams were clarified, and would include £12m from the WECA City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) which is earmarked for Liveable Neighbourhoods projects between 2022 and 2027. Further funding may be obtained from future ATF rounds, and potentially from income from the Clean Air Zone.

During the Question and Answer Panel, Speakers expanded on how the lower travel rates during the 2020 pandemic lockdown provided an opportunity for residents to see the safety and community benefits to low traffic neighbourhoods. A Liveable Neighbourhood itself can be considered an area where residents are 'free from fear' in terms of travel choices.

Regarding traffic displacement impacts, it was emphasised that wider traffic management must be considered in order to keep 'through traffic' moving on the main transport corridors. It was expected that local traffic overall would reduce, limiting the amount of displacement.

## **Session 2**

Councillor Clyde Loakes from Waltham Forest delivered a presentation on the outcomes of the Mini-Holland programme 2013-20, which built new sustainable travel infrastructure that prioritised walking and cycling, making the streets safer for residents.

The Mini-Holland programme introduced a range of new features, including improved crossings, trees planted, cycle tracks, pocket parks, and public realm improvements. Pictures demonstrated the improvements made, and data supports the increase in active travel.

The engagement approach was outlined demonstrating a strong emphasis on community input. The use of data to address perceptions was identified as a useful tool; local businesses had assumed a greater proportion of customers travelled by car than was the case. Supporting community led active travel groups helped to encourage the change in behaviours.

It was warned that Liveable Neighbourhoods can be controversial schemes, and that a degree of pushback could be expected. Councillor Clyde Loakes emphasised how strong political support is needed to deliver these schemes.

Sam Kirby, Professional and Technical Officer for Bristol City Council delivered a presentation on the progress of the Liveable Neighbourhoods pilot in East Bristol.

The milestones of the project were outlined, emphasising co-working with the community at each stage. The stages included; Co-Discover (gathering local views), Co-Develop (refining issues and opportunities, Trialling (potential solutions), Co-Design (design and feedback), and Co-Deliver (deliver permanent solutions). The Co-develop stage had been

completed, and the project was entering the Co-Develop stage. Examples of work undertaken during the Co-discover stage included perception surveys of the area, surveys of local businesses, and circulation of 'postcards' to be returned with feedback. Events included roadshows, school visits, door knocking, and drop in sessions. The online feedback tool used in the Co-Discover stage was demonstrated.

During the Question and Answer Panel, Speakers expanded on the impact of free parking close to local facilities which has the potential to undermine active travel efforts. Parking management would be a key factor in a successful Liveable Neighbourhood.

It was emphasised that in light of common initial hesitance it would likely be necessary to move forward even with some objections but, at some point, the authority must make a clear decision. Officers felt the East Bristol pilot was moving ahead at a pace the community trusted.

Barriers to using public transport were raised, including cost and safety at night. Speakers noted the importance of promoting use of bus services, and Bristol City Council Officers recognised the importance in understanding local issues around safety at night.

Members noted the benefits in badging Liveable Neighbourhood interventions in terms of the positive health benefits they could bring to residents, both in relation to physical and mental health.

### **Session 3**

For the workshop session the Inquiry Day attendees divided into groups to conduct facilitated discussions providing feedback on the draft Liveable Neighbourhoods Handbook. Participants were asked to consider:

- Does the handbook provide a clear description of what a Liveable Neighbourhood is, including the interventions required and the benefits?
- Does the handbook provide a clear description of the co-design process?
- Is there anything missing from the handbook?

All comments were recorded and collected by Bristol City Council officers for consideration. Most feedback fell broadly into the following themes;

- **Document Format**
  - The creation of two documents was strongly recommended; one with simpler language for Councillors to use when communicating with residents, and a more technical document to include Active Travel England criteria.
  - Less technical language and jargon in general was requested. It was suggested that the Campaign for Plain English may be able to support this. A glossary could also be useful.
  - Pictures and other visual aids were strongly recommended.
- **Engagement**

- The focus on community engagement within the document was appreciated. The information from the speaker presentations emphasised the importance of this aspect.
  - Promotion of the Liveable Neighbourhoods Handbook through schools and health centres was suggested.
  - It was queried how successful engagement would be judged in light of the difficulties of balancing differing 'voices'; acknowledging and balancing the expectation of a degree of initial negativity while allowing that it should be possible for residents to reject becoming a Liveable Neighbourhood.
  - The perception surveys, including of local businesses, were noted and agreed should be built in to the approach.
- **Health and Wellbeing**
    - It was suggested that the health and wellbeing benefits of Liveable Neighbourhoods should be central to the Handbook and that the public health aspects should be expanded.
    - The benefits for those with mobility constraints (eg dropped kerbs) should be highlighted, and the inclusion of disability advocates within the EQIA should be noted to demonstrate that these views had been considered.
    - It was noted that planning in areas outside of transport would be required to recognise the underlying reasons people may favour car travel, for example, limited mobility, limited public transport options, food deserts. Addressing these would be essential to reducing local travel.
    - There was an opportunity to demonstrate how Liveable Neighbourhoods can address inequalities through the improvement of local facilities; this should be emphasised.
- **Application across Bristol**
    - Members raised a concern that overly detailed descriptions of possible Liveable Neighbourhoods could lead to the impression that a scheme would not be applicable to the wards that do not exactly match this. It should be made clear that Liveable Neighbourhoods could be applied anywhere across Bristol. The use of pictures may support this.
    - The outer wards of Bristol may have specific concerns around displaced traffic; assurance around this may be useful.
    - It was suggested that routes for active travel should reach across the city and not stop at a Liveable Neighbourhood boundary.
- **Parking Management**
    - A Residents Parking Scheme does not feature as part of the existing pilot, although information provided by speakers suggests some form of parking control will be a key factor in success. Officers were asked to consider how this may work.

- **Funding**

- A request was made to elaborate on the available funding streams, and details of the funds being utilised
- An explanation of the economic return would be useful.

## 5. Recommendations

The Overview Scrutiny and Management Board has made the following recommendations:

- **Additional document.** Bristol City Council to consider and implement the feedback provided by Members on the Draft Liveable Neighbourhoods Handbook regarding the format of the Handbook, specifically to develop the existing Draft Liveable Neighbourhoods Handbook into two separate documents in order to tailor the content and language used to different audiences and to achieve different purposes. These two documents should consist of a strategy focused document with the greater technical detail required by Active Travel England, and a brief document written without jargon targeting Bristol communities, which will support Members in discussions with residents. Visual aids are strongly encouraged for both documents.
- **Additions to content.** Bristol City Council to consider and implement the feedback provided by Members on the Draft Liveable Neighbourhoods Handbook regarding the content of the Handbook. This should include reference to:
  - Parking management
  - Health and wellbeing
  - Application across Bristol
  - Funding
- **Engagement approach.** Bristol City Council to consider and implement the feedback provided by Members on the Draft Liveable Neighbourhoods Handbook regarding the approach to engagement with Bristol communities on the issue of Liveable Neighbourhoods in order to ensure community buy-in.

## 6. Next Steps

The Overview Scrutiny and Management Board Commission will consider the draft report on [date], following which it will be referred to the Mayor at a Cabinet meeting. Where recommendations are accepted by the Mayor, an action plan for implementation will be produced and progress monitored by a standing committee of council members and by the OSMB on an annual basis.



### **Cross Party Steering Group Members**

Councillor Tony Dyer (Chair)

Councillor Mark Bradshaw

Councillor Martin Fodor

Councillor Tim Kent

Councillor Mark Weston

### **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Liveable Neighbourhoods Inquiry Day Programme

Appendix 2 – Draft Liveable Neighbourhoods Handbook

Appendix 3 – Frequently Asked Questions

Appendix 4 – Speaker Presentations