

Harbour Hopes

Engagement Playback

17 November 2021

About Harbour Hopes

Harbour Hopes Engagement 2021 surfaced ideas and opportunities for Western Harbour through a series of sessions held in-person and on-line.

This is the start of continuing engagement which aims to reach Bristolians in the immediate vicinity of Bristol Western Harbour and city-wide so they can share their views on what the Place Vision could be.

Engagement will continue in 2022 for people to have their say as the council embarks on the next phase of Masterplan definition and associated scheme delivery plan.

This report consolidates findings from the stage of engagement which was focused on qualitative 'deep dive' workshops delving into what people value about Western Harbour, and what they would change. This has surfaced the early themes set out in this report which will continue to be validated through up and coming workshops.

For updates we encourage everyone to:

- Follow the Harbour Hopes instagram channel
- Go to the [HarbourHopes.co.uk](https://www.harbourhopes.co.uk) website
- Sign up on [HarbourHopes.co.uk](https://www.harbourhopes.co.uk) to stay in touch

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One Page Summary

What we're setting out to do

Engage — meaningfully and creatively to inspire and capture diverse voices from across the city

Listen — sensitively and openly to understand a wide range of views and aspirations about the future

Co-Create — build skills, shape plans, test ideas and spaces that meet future needs

Collaborate — connect, share and bring together ideas and opportunities among council, stakeholders and communities

What has happened so far?

We have...

Run over 20 workshops, listening labs, and visioning days with local residents, businesses and history groups gathering over 200 opinions, reaching over 2,000 residents.

Generated online engagement with 4687 unique visits to HarbourHopes.co.uk and 461 comments. With 339 followers on @HarbourHopes instagram*.

Worked with 5 Bristol Creative Ambassadors who captured what this part of the Harbour means to people through stories, portraits, film and illustration.

*5 Nov 2021

What did we learn about the Western Harbour?

WHY people love the Harbour:

The Sense of Freedom — the green spaces, big views and blue expanses that offer discovery and connect city to nature.

The Raw, Open Energy — an independent, in-between place that inspires creativity and that people are free to make their own.

The Working Fabric of the Area — its maritime industry at Underfall Yard and the Riverside Garden centre, as lively spaces to be cherished.

A Place Built on Community — from the spirit of landscape architect Sylvia Crowe to Riverside Garden Centre, a place open and welcome to a diversity of uses and people.

What does this mean for its future?

People want to see:

Public Space — Safe and playful spaces for everyone to enjoy — especially those who are often excluded.

Nature — even more green space and the preservation of those expansive views.

Transport — easier and greener ways to get around — with fewer cars!

Community — housing for people over profit, the provision of community facilities, and space for small businesses to grow.

Culture — to proudly bring to life the working heritage of the docks and maintain the area's independent character.

Emerging Themes

History

Adventure

Community

Connections

Freedom

Industry

Water

Wild

Harbour Hopes Playback

Where are we in the programme?

This report captures feedback we have had since launching the Harbour Hopes engagement programme in September 2021. The engagement will inform the vision for Western Harbour which in turn will set the brief for the masterplan to be developed from 2022 onwards.

Throughout September and October 2021:

We have run...

- 7 Workshops in person
- 1 Workshop online
- 5 Listening Labs online with local resident, business and stakeholder groups, with one more to come

- 2 Walks with Bristol Civic Society and the teenagers participating in Design West's Shape My City programme
- 2 Further in-person drop-ins at Riverside Garden Centre and Harbour Heritage weekend

Online, to date we have received...

681 unique engagements online through our interactive map on harbourhopes.co.uk

Worked with 5 Creative Ambassadors...

Capturing what this part of the Harbour means to people through stories, portraits, film, poetry and illustration.

This qualitative creative research phase has now given us thousands of comments, ideas, opinions and stories.

Harbour Hopes Playback

What do we do with this information?

Drawing on this insight, we have a clearer picture of what the people of Bristol love and value about this part of the city; what they hope and desire for its future; and what they don't want.

When drawing on such a breadth of voices, patterns and common themes emerge, but also tensions and differences of opinion. This playback represents a summary of what we have heard so far, and will feed into the visioning exhibition in November and December.

What next?

From the 20th November for one month, there will be an opportunity for the public to visit the gallery space at the Create Centre and contribute to the building of a vision for Western Harbour. Visit [HarbourHopes.com](https://www.harbourhopes.com) for more details

At the exhibition you have the opportunity to reflect on these emerging themes. Do these capture your own feelings about the area? Is there anything that has been missed?

During November and December 2021, we are inviting the public to translate these themes into a set of place principles for the area. These will form the vision for the area and will guide any future changes to the area, ensuring the spirit of area is captured for current and future generations.

Why do people love Bristol's Western Harbour?

The Wild Green (and blue)

People note the greenspace, with the gateway to the Avon Gorge as the transition from city to nature. The green spaces have always offered an escape and a valuable way to stay healthy with friends and family.

'The area acts as a wildlife space and food source particularly for birds and insects'.

Allotments and growing are also key to the surrounding areas popularity, with Riverside as 'much more than a Garden Centre' and as a champion for this green community.

The sense of openness, play, freedom and discovery

People love the sense of discovery that the site packs in. It reveals a new vista with every twist and turn and gives an experience of openness when emerging from densely packed streets.

This is freedom not only in exploring the space, but also in making it their own. That sense of independence is essential to its character. In addition, a place for play from the pump tracks to play on the water through water users groups, are valuable.

Why do people love Bristol's Western Harbour?

The spaces in between

It's the spaces under, around and in-between the big, bold infrastructure and buildings that are important to people. These spaces often don't have official names, but that doesn't mean they are not valuable.

People value the undefined 'multi purpose, multi functional' nature of this area, as 'somewhere where people can gather and meet for free without restriction'.

A raw energy and spirit of fierce independence

To some, 'what makes it lovely to many is that it isn't developed — don't lose the rawness.' It's part of the working history of the place that docklands often offer.

There is sentiment that the rest of the docks has been 'pushed up' so there's a call to maintain a different character. Whereas this area is not contrived, and even though it has changed hugely over the years, it has done so in a way that people feel is organic and feels like something over which people have agency (even if there is big infrastructure!).

Why do people love Bristol's Western Harbour?

Pivotal role as 'a fulcrum of the city'

This is an area of connections — between North and South, and many different neighbourhoods from Clifton and Hotwells to Southville, Bedminster and Ashton Gate. The experience is as valuable as a space to move through on bike, or walking, as it is a space to stop. People want to enhance the ability of these spaces to connect communities.

A blend of different modes of getting around creates a hubbub of movement: from boats, kayaks, bikes, cars, even the steam train from M-Shed to two feet.

The bold scale – just not for housing

People love the bold scale of bonded warehouses and the bridges. They want to make sure that the 'majesty' of these buildings endures. It makes them feel like they're part of the city.

But when it comes to housing development, many cite the need for low-rise development. In part to protect views, but also as people associate high rise development with a lack of a community feel.

Why do people love Bristol's Western Harbour?

The working heritage fabric of the area — and Bristol's maritime identity

Part of the character of the area comes through the working heritage infrastructure of the place that remains in place: old bridges and boats of the Docks (not 'Western Harbour' as many noted) but a place that has been here for much longer and has shaped the Bristol we know.

However, this is only seen in certain spots and there is a feeling more could be revealed throughout the area. As a working area for dockside businesses, this is living history it is seen 'as key to their survival and seen as the prime example of Bristol's maritime past.'

A diversity of unique industries make this place, from the Boatyards to the eco-focused

businesses in the Create Centre. It has always been a space to try new things and take risks — a place of innovation in citymaking, from Brunel to Sylvia Crowe, with heritage still very much working and in use!

Riverside as 'much more than a garden centre'

Mention has to be made to Riverside Garden Centre and the support it has garnered as 'a local institution and a valuable community asset, 'local social hub and focal point in the city.'

As 'many people love this place' calls for 'any redevelopment must protect Riverside's future viability.'

What do people hope for it's future?

Safe spaces for the young, the elderly, women and those of different abilities to enjoy

Inspired by Sylvia Crowes' landscape driven ethos of making spaces that invite and welcome everybody, we have an opportunity to design differently. Spaces for kids to play safely by themselves; for people to stay healthy later in life; Intergenerational spaces; well lit for use year round and day to night, especially for women who have noted that they don't always feel safe when moving around here.

Youth provision is seen to be poor in this area, and focusing on spaces for kids and young people is welcome. Spaces that are appropriate for people of different physical and neurological abilities were also cited. Working with creative approaches to resolve safety issues, such as

artistic lighting under bridges and underpasses, could create beautiful and welcoming spots.

More green and growing spaces — and to keep Riverside Garden Centre!

People want to protect existing greenspaces, and see more where possible. The allotments adjacent to the site and the Riverside Garden Centre are key anchors in the area, and greening and growing have become great ways to share ownership and care with local people from all origins and backgrounds.

What do people hope for it's future?

Cheaper public transport & cycling routes, greener modes of getting around

With a consciousness of climate change, people seek ways to move through the city by bike, bus or electric vehicle in ways that are affordable. Yet there are calls that this needs to tie into the city's wider system, because "with all the effort to get people out of cars, if there isn't an alternative it's a bit of a hiding to nothing."

There is a big call for better connections across the city into Western Harbour, and potential for transport by water. Meanwhile, car travel is seen as essential for those with disabilities or the elderly. Among some communities this area still has a stigma of not offering anything or feeling unwelcome, partly as transport from across the city remains a challenge.

Safe swimming — and cheaper access to the water

Designated spaces for people to swim, whether a Lido or Wild Swimming, and the health benefits 'both physical and mental that this brings'. This should be balanced with the expert guidance coming from those community groups who work on the water who cite significant challenges of doing so safely in a working Harbour. And a consciousness of who this is for, with some citing existing open water swimming areas 'for the elite of Bristol only'.

Opening kayaking and rowing up to more people would educate people around water safety and offer a new form of exercise for many.

What do people hope for it's future?

Encouraging community spirit and character to grow

Creating spaces to gather for free, keeping the 'hotch potch' diversity of the place that gives us so much to discover, and keeping spaces and design open for community to have agency and make their own. Spaces to try things out and ground-up innovation are in keeping of the character of this area.

More of the heritage made relevant and brought out into the open

The archives, SS Great Britain and Underfall Yard are anchors, and this 'patina' is seen as key to the rawness of the place, especially among those who hold personal memories of 'the Docks' as we used to call it — Not the Harbour! Some don't like to use the word preservation — 'that's for jam' — as a recognition that life moves on and cities change. But a way for maritime history to live on through skills sharing programmes or better interpretation is valued.

What do people hope for it's future?

Affordable Housing

There is positive sentiment towards housing if it is 'affordable, not investment-ready luxury flats'. This is seen as 'an opportunity to make a big contribution to the desperate need for affordable homes in Bristol, homelessness and overcrowding' if developed at an 'appropriate scale and density, and not at the expense of the area's green spaces and maritime heritage.

There are calls for residential development 'to provide a minimum of 40% affordable housing, primarily for social rent and suitable for families.'

More community services

Calls, especially from those most local in Hotwells, Cliftonwood and Southville, for 'greater provision for community facilities, local shops, health centres and doctors, meeting rooms etc.' This also relates to schools.

What do people hope for it's future?

Spaces for independent culture and businesses

Spike Island and Create are cultural anchors, and some see the Bonded Warehouses as potential spaces for even more small business growth.

Strips along the water are also key — south facing spots that 'get the sun, would be amazing with a row of cafes' etc. Opportunities to reflect the widest cultures of Bristol are important here, and especially creative art spaces for community, such as the project to establish a barge gallery for Bristol's AfroCaribbean Community.

Simplified road layouts

The road network is seen as an essential connection into and out of Bristol, it is a key North to South route for local and non-local traffic movements. Yet there is a desire to find a simple solution to make the area both easier to navigate, promote greener transport and alleviate traffic and parking issues in residential areas.

What don't people want?

More Cars

A raised consciousness of climate change means that we all want to see less traffic, noise and air pollution, and most people want to go as car free as possible. The exception is those who need access for elderly family or people with disabilities.

Despite best intentions, most people complain about the poor public transport infrastructure, and the cost of it in Bristol. This needs to be considered within a citywide transport strategy, and with consideration for the way transport will change over the next 10 years. For example, there is public recognition that the way we travel around the city will change with the advent of electric cars.

Views blocked and green spaces built on

Vistas are core to what people value here, and there is a sentiment that hi-rise development endangers these. There have been calls for development that is stepped away from the harbourside, to ensure that the views close to the water are maintained, with housing rising away from the water.

What don't people want?

Hi-rise housing as a sign of greed over community good

While the general sentiment towards affordable housing is positive, and despite the bold height of the bonded warehouses, there's strong sentiment that high-rise flats are perceived to represent speculation and a loss of community feel.

'Anywhere' development

There is concern that the 'edge of city' open and independent character many people love will not be maintained. In general, people don't want a place that wipes out the sense of freedom, independence, and tangible heritage, and that it becomes inaccessible to a wide group of people.

Where do we need to find common ground?

This place is full of diverse uses, from working harbour to valued green space to community heartland — so there will always be tensions in the way the people of Bristol want it to evolve.

We'll need inventive thinking to work through these challenges together, and establish common ground. In a city with such creative spirit we have that in droves.

We will share these challenges at the Visioning Days to gather your ideas and find creative solutions together. The tensions we have heard include:

We want to beat Bristol's housing crisis but we don't want high rise

There is recognition that we need affordable housing in the city, especially for future generations. However, there is a clear call from the public for low to mid-rise development in this area. There is a belief among some that high-rise housing equates to fractured communities through social breakdown, and that it is indicative of speculation and investment from those with little long-term interest in the area. There is also a recognition that high-rise is different to high density.

How do we build genuinely affordable housing at a density that meets Bristol's housing need, builds community and is financially viable?

Where do we need to find common ground?

We need affordable housing but we need to keep our green space and views

Among the cherished green and blue spaces is much brownfield land, which presents an opportunity for development of housing. Yet, we hear that it is essential to maintain the iconic views and open feeling that are so valued. And to find a way to mitigate the challenges presented by climate change such as the flood risks in the Harbour and air pollution caused by the roads.

How can we build more housing without destroying natural infrastructure that is vital in mitigating climate change?

We want to swim in the harbour but we need to stay safe

There were a number of comments around water-based activities, specifically Lido or wild swimming spot. However, local businesses and residents working on the water (who are skilled in water safety) share real concerns about encouraging open-access swimming in the Harbour without training or lifeguards present, due to the nature of a working dock. They believe that the Western Harbour is not the ideal location.

How do we enable people to access and enjoy safe swimming? Is western harbour the best place for swimming?

Where do we need to find common ground?

We don't want more cars but we need easier, greener transport options

Unless public transport significantly improves, no-one sees how the traffic can be reduced or sees any combination of 'road options' resolving the matter. Public transport is seen as being too expensive, and not running to the places that people need.

Local businesses also need to maintain vehicle access. Yet there is an understanding that the way we move around a city in 10 years will be very different to the way we move now. Transport is rapidly evolving through electric cars and hydrogen buses and an uptake in cycling.

How do we reduce traffic through better public transport rather than more road options?

We value the raw spirit of the place but we want to make it feel safer

Many cite the independent spirit and raw, untouched quality of the place and freedom to make it their own. Whereas others call for cleaning up of graffiti that they say makes the area feel 'dangerous and un-policed'. As well as calls for better lighting, especially from women who note that this space can feel unsafe at night.

How do we maintain the sense of independence but ensure the place is cared for, well-loved and safe?

Emerging Themes

Based on all the feedback gathered, we have identified 8 emerging themes. Where there are tensions, these will be resolved during the masterplanning phase.

From here, we will be developing a set of 'place principles' based around these themes which will feed into the overall vision of the area.

History
Adventure
Community
Connections
Freedom
Industry
Water
Wild

How to get involved

**Come to the Visioning Day
Saturday 20th November, 10am – 5pm**

**Create Centre, B Bond, Smeaton Rd,
Bristol BS1 6XN**

Open to all

There will be several workshops running throughout the Visioning Day. You can book a place on the workshops via the links below. If you're unable to book a place on a workshop, you can drop in at any point over the course of the day or at any time between 22nd November – 17th December (weekdays only) when the exhibition will be open to all. We would encourage anyone attending the Visioning Day or exhibition to wear a mask and take a lateral flow test prior to arrival to help keep everyone safe.

How to get involved

Visit the Harbour Hopes exhibition
20th November – 17th December
10am – 5pm

Create Centre, B Bond, Smeaton Rd,
Bristol BS1 6XN

Open to all

This exhibition is designed to build a 'place-shaping vision' and steer the future plans for Western Harbour.

- Share your hopes for what the western end of Bristol's Floating Harbour could be.
- Reflect on the emerging themes from engagement so far, and whether they capture the area's spirit.

Consider how these themes could be used to guide the positive changes we want to see and help us build a set of principles or 'place principles' for the future. The exhibition will be manned by BCC officers on 23rd November 10am – 7pm, 25th November 10am – 4pm, 29th November 10am – 3.30pm and 2nd December 10am – 7pm.

Harbour Hopes

Bristol Western Harbour