

Friends of the Avon New Cut (FrANC)

Minutes of meeting held at the Southville Centre on 18 May 2009

1. Present

Tess Green (Chair), Roy Gallop, Ed Hall, Ben Barker, Stephen Wickham, Jane (?), Helen Adshead, Angie Tonge, Margaret Fay, Martha van der Lem, Paul van der Lem, Sara Worth, Derek Hughes (minutes)

2. Apologies

John Purkiss, Chris Hamner

3. Purpose of Meeting

The purpose of this meeting was specifically to discuss the following issues:

- (a) South Bristol Riverscapes Project
- (b) The impact of the proposed Bristol Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) on the New Cut, and FrANC's position regarding this project

3.1 South Bristol Riverscapes Project

Helen Adshead gave a presentation on the South Bristol Riverscapes Project (Adrian Mantle is FrANC's link with this project). The aim of this project is to improve waterways in the south of Bristol and involve more people in river support groups such as FrANC. Activities which have been organised so far include

- Treks along all of the rivers covered by the project – the New Cut, the Malago, Pigeonhouse Stream, Colliter's Brook and Brislington Brook – including one along the New Cut for the Knowle West Three Hearts Group.
- Supporting Marksbury Area Community Association (MACA) in their campaign to "Save the Malago" from a possible BRT route, including involvement in clear-ups along the river
- Helping to set up the Ashton Vale Heritage Group, who are concerned with ensuring that this area of Bristol is not unduly spoilt by the developments planned for this area by Bristol City Council
- Running the Wild Waters Exhibition at the CREATE Centre in October 2008
- "Stream Dipping" with Hedley Park Primary School in Manor Woods last September. Also, the FrANC Treasure Hunt Leaflet has been piloted with Ashton Gate and Southville Primary Schools.

Helen noted that in helping to set up two new groups – MACA and the Ashton Vale Heritage Group - one of the project objectives had been met.

Helen continued by presenting a summary of the status of the targets included in Section 3.5 of the Riverscapes project plan, which specifically concerns FrANC. This summary is reproduced in Appendix A, and the following additional points were noted concerning the items listed in this Appendix :

Item 3.5.1 - Run an awareness-raising event to discover more of the wildlife and history along a forgotten stretch in Bedminster : the "forgotten stretch" of the Cut proposed by Helen runs from Bedminster Bridge to Temple Meads and beyond. A similar suggestion had been made by a resident of St. Anne's in July last year (see minutes of FrANC meeting held on 24th July 2008), who had proposed that FrANC should expand its remit to include the maintenance and improvement of the river immediately upstream from the New Cut. The feeling at that time was that this was

outside our interests and beyond our resources, but that FrANC would be willing to help stimulate the creation of other local river support groups responsible for these parts of the river. However, because of the involvement of FrANC's members in planning and organising the New Cut 200 Celebration held on May 4th, this has not been pursued further to date. It was suggested that the "awareness-raising event" could be an organised walk along this stretch of the river.¹

Item 3.5.2 – Organise two activities to support designation as a local nature reserve along the New Cut : so far three activities have been completed – Treasure Hunt, Bug Hunt and Bird Walk – and a Herb Walk will be held after this year's AGM.

Item 3.5.3 – Undertake at least 1 clear-up : in fact, FrANC organise several such events throughout the year.

Item 3.5.4 – Undertake at least 1 community walk : one New Cut Trek is organised by FrANC each year.

Item 3.5.5 – Monitor wildlife and produce a report : wildlife data is available from the already completed Bug Hunt and Bird Walk, and further data may be obtained from the Herb Walk following this year's AGM. FrANC has also encouraged the City Council to plant trees along areas of the Cut that have been cleared. The FrANC Secretary, John Purkiss, has a summary of the survey reports that have been completed. However, it was agreed that in order to complete this item the data gathered so far needs to be collated and then compiled into a formal document of some sort. A Wildlife Leaflet has already been produced by FrANC which could be expanded to form the basis of such a document.²

Item 3.5.6 – Publish a leaflet aimed at local people on an aspect of interest to them (e.g. historical, wildlife, river activity, 'their river') : Helen reported that about £300 is available for the printing costs of such a leaflet. It was agreed that she should discuss options with John Purkiss and Adrian Mantle. It was agreed by those present that some of the money should be used to print additional copies of the Treasure Hunt leaflet, as they are relatively expensive to produce and stocks are running low.

Item 3.5.7 – Contribute to the production of audiotrails in 1 : a Riverscapes website will be created in which there will be a link to FrANC. It will show how the rivers are linked together and include maps which can be downloaded. The "audiotrails" will contain photos, recorded sounds or film clips associated with certain stretches of each river. As part of the "audiotrails", Helen organised an Oral History training day whose attendees included Pat Fung and Richard Clutterbuck from FrANC. The aim of this activity is to obtain a verbal record from local people about how these areas have changed over the years.

Item 3.5.8 – Contribute to production of self-guided walking leaflets in 1 : the Treasure Hunt leaflet has already been produced. It was noted that people are unlikely to get lost when walking along the Cut. It was suggested that maybe a History Walk leaflet could be produced, perhaps with selected points of interest marked on it, to complement the annual New Cut Trek.

Item 3.5.9 – Contribute to creating Malago place markers in 1 : Jo Young has assisted with this activity. The aim is to design and erect four information boards, some placed on bridges, that will mark the route of the Malago river where it travels underground. It was suggested that ASDA might be approached to pay for some of

¹ The publicity leaflets concerning the New Cut Celebrations of 4th May that were distributed to residents of York Road and the Redcliffe area, plus John Purkiss' continuing efforts to get the Council to clean up the Bedminster Bridge to Temple Meads stretch of the river, indicate that FrANC are working to raise awareness here.

² Wildlife information has already been collated which (apart from bug life) is available to download from the FrANC section of the Southville Centre website.

these boards as the river runs underneath its Bedminster store. It was proposed that one of the information boards could be located on the Chocolate Path, opposite the Malago outflow into the New Cut.

Progress on the above items will be discussed at FrANC meetings over the next few months. All tasks must be completed by March 2010.

3.2 Impact of Bristol Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) on New Cut

Stephen Wickham reported on the progress he had made in investigating the impact on the New Cut of the Bristol Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system proposed by Bristol City Council. Stephen noted that he was also due to present his findings to English Heritage in a week's time. Although the BRT planners had stated that English Heritage "had been consulted" about the project, much of the detail is still not clear.

A publicity campaign to raise awareness of the BRT was launched last November, and featured a computer simulation of the proposed route. Screenshots taken from the computer simulation to illustrate those parts of the route that affect the New Cut are presented in Appendix B.

The BRT starts from Long Ashton as a two-lane bus way and crosses the New Cut at the Ashton Avenue Rail Bridge (Figure B1), then is routed through Butterfly Junction (Figure B2) to the junction between Avon Crescent and Cumberland Road (Figure B3). The inbound and outbound bus way lanes split here; the inbound bus way shares the track of the Harbour Railway, while the outbound bus way continues along Cumberland Road (Figure B4). There is a transit stop near Vauxhall Bridge at Spike Island Arts Facility (Figure B5). The outbound bus way eventually descends from Cumberland Road via a ramp to rejoin the inbound bus way/Harbour Railway just before the existing railway bridge (Figure B6). The bus way is then routed under the railway bridge and is single track, BRT traffic being controlled by signalson either side of the bridge. The bus way then becomes two-lane again and runs behind the Museum of Bristol and through the proposed Wapping Wharf development before crossing Prince Street bridge and heading into the City Centre to terminate at Temple Meads station via Broadmead and Cabot Circus.

Stephen said that he proposed to discuss those parts of the route that were particularly relevant to FrANC, notably the section running along Spike Island, and had identified a number of specific items for discussion. These are listed below:

- **Ashton Avenue Rail Bridge** (Figure B1) – this will be refurbished for the sole use of the BRT, and in the plans it is proposed that a new pedestrian footbridge and cycleway will be built alongside it. FrANC would be opposed to any major modification or redesign of the bridge in order to accommodate the BRT.
- **Butterfly Junction** (Figure B2) – FrANC are concerned that this important nature conservation area could be completely destroyed during the construction of the BRT, and our view is that it must be protected at all costs. However, FrANC would not be opposed to the relocation of the habitat and wildlife of Butterfly Junction to another area to make way for the BRT, provided there is reasonable confidence that this can be successfully accomplished.
- **Avon Crescent/Cumberland Road junction** (Figure B3) – the road is extremely narrow here, yet this is the area where one of the BRT tracks starts to run along Cumberland Road. Further detail is required of what exactly is being proposed by the BRT planners. It is difficult to see how the BRT route, a cycle track and two-way traffic along Cumberland Road can be accommodated.

- **Underfall Yard** – again, the narrowness of Cumberland Road in this area raises concerns that some of the buildings may be demolished to provide sufficient road width for the BRT and traffic, and further details are required. If cutting into Cumberland Road necessitates the building of a new retaining wall then the stonework should be similar to that which is currently in place.
- **Chocolate Path** – FrANC’s view is that this must also be preserved at all costs. For safety reasons, there will have to be a barrier of some sort separating the Chocolate Path from the BRT track, in which case many of the historic railings that run the length of the Chocolate Path may be at risk. There are also concerns that the construction of the concrete bus way along which the BRT will run will affect the natural drainage of the area between the Chocolate Path and Cumberland Road, to the extent that the integrity of the stone embankment along this side of the Cut may be put at risk.
- **Vauxhall Bridge** (Figure B5) – from the computer simulation it was unclear how the proposed BRT route would negotiate Vauxhall Bridge. Again, FrANC would be opposed to any major modifications to this important New Cut landmark.
- **Spike Island Arts Facility Transit Stop** (Figure B5) – the publicity artwork released last November shows a transit stop outside Spike Island Arts Facility (Figure B7). Again, given the width of Cumberland Road at this point, it is unclear how a transit stop, the BRT track, two lanes of road traffic and a pedestrian pavement will all fit into the width available. It is suspected that the trees outside Spike Island would be cut down and the pavement narrowed to accommodate the transit stop – the trees are conspicuously absent from the computer simulation!

In summary, there are important details of the BRT proposal that are unclear at present, but from the information that is available it is apparent that there could be a significant impact on the wildlife, natural habitats, infrastructure and historical architecture associated with the length of the New Cut that is affected by it.

It was suggested that Stephen should send the material he is intending to present to English Heritage to John Purkiss, via e-mail, with a request that John should distribute this to those attending the meeting for comment.

Tess Green presented a first draft of a general statement on FrANC’s position regarding any future developments that would compromise the Cut’s status as a “wildlife corridor”. It was suggested that this could be “beefed up” with Stephen’s material in order to present FrANC’s position regarding the BRT proposals (Note: subsequent to the meeting, a suitably “beefed up” draft statement was circulated for comment to the FrANC membership and is included in Appendix C).

It was reported that a “Neighbourhood Networks” meeting would be held in three days’ time on May 21st at 5pm. Despite the short notice, Paul and Martha van der Lem offered to attend this meeting on behalf of FrANC.

4. Future Events

A trek along Colliter’s Brook is planned for this coming Sunday (24th May), starting at 10.00am from the CREATE Centre Car Park.

5. Date and place of next meeting

FrANC AGM on Thursday 2nd July starting at 7.00pm (venue TBC), to be followed by a Herb Discovery Walk along the Cut at 7.30pm.

Appendix A

3.5 Friends of Avon New Cut (River Avon)

3.5.1 Run an awareness raising event to discover more of the wildlife and history along a forgotten stretch in Bedminster.

3.5.2 Organise 2 activities to support designation as a local nature reserve along the New Cut.

The amazing Avon New Cut Treasure Hunt was launched by FrANC on 12th October as part of Wild Waters. The inspiration and images came from Jo Young, an artist and FrANC member, and the group pulled it together into a really exciting and effective tool to entice people in to explore the New Cut.

We trialed the Treasure Hunt with Ashton Gate Primary School, 9th and 10th October, and had good feedback from the children, teachers and parents. One boy who wasn't looking forward to the day at all (I thought it would be really boring walking along this river) said it was the best school trip he'd been on!

200th birthday celebrations – exhibition and public event.

3.5.3 Undertake at least 1 clear-up.

Clear-ups were undertaken on the following dates in the 2007-2008 winter. Winter dates are selected in order not to disturb nesting birds: 18 November (10 volunteers), 30 December (11 volunteers), 2 February (26 volunteers), 8 March (16 volunteers). Wild Waters clean-up on October 4th.

3.5.4 Undertake at least 1 community walk.

New Cut Trek happened on 30 March, see above for report of highly successful event. 2009 New Cut Trek July 26th

3.5.5 Monitor wildlife and produce a report.

The Avon New Cut Bug Group have met several times over the summer to explore the minibeasts on the banks of the river. They have been very successful, finding a wide range of creatures, including a rare snail.

Alison Leaf leading mammal surveys.

Wildlife leaflet already produced. Extra info on Southville Centre website.

3.5.6 Publish a leaflet aimed at local people on an aspect of interest to them (eg, historical, wildlife, river activity, 'their river').

Could be the FrANC info leaflet, or the historic trail sheet or another new leaflet? Or for Bedminster to Temple Meads stretch of river? Or Treasure Hunt Leaflet (print some new ones?)

3.5.7 Contribute to the production of audiotrails in 1:

research and produce 40 audiotrail mp3s for independent walking. Make available on world wide web.

Richard Clutterbuck and Pat Fung came on Oral History training course. Keen to do some sort of audio project.

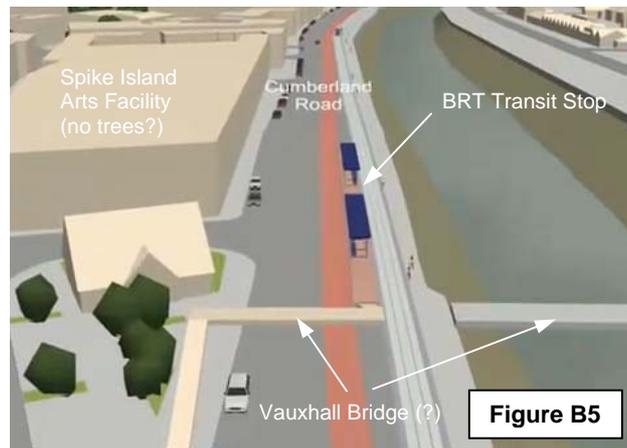
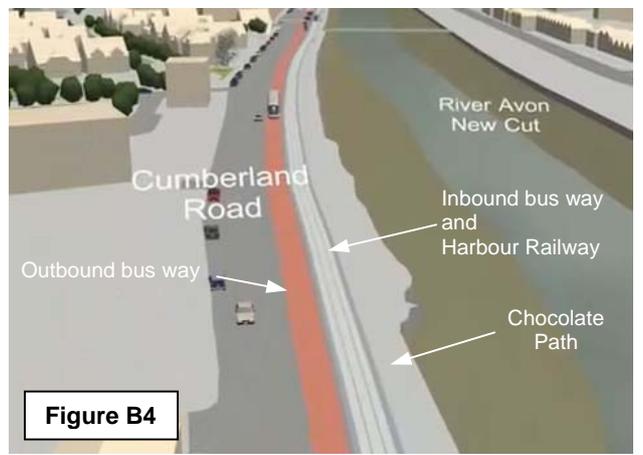
3.5.8 Contribute to production of self-guided walking leaflets in 1:

Self-guided leaflets for independent walking.

3.5.9 Contribute to creating Malago place markers in 1.

Could help to convince ASDA to host and pay for a Malago panell

Appendix B



Appendix C

Draft Statement

Friends of the Avon New Cut and the Bus Rapid Transport Route

The New Cut

FrANC was set up by local people to recognise and protect the Avon New Cut as an important historical and natural resource for the city of Bristol.

The New Cut enables Bristol to preserve an expanse of open water in the centre of the city. Although this is no longer important to the import and export trade it is vital to the management of the rivers Avon and Frome as well as contributing life and focus to the city centre.

The wildlife of the surrounding countryside is brought into the city by the rivers, which act as natural corridors. As a tidal waterway, the New Cut also acts as a powerful reminder of the forces of nature, for city dwellers. The brackish water supports different varieties of wildlife than the fresh water rivers, helping to increase the biodiversity of Bristol.

FrANC members would oppose any development which would change the major characteristics of the New Cut and wish to preserve the banks and environs of the river as a peaceful, natural space, rich in trees, shrubs and animal life. Any future development close to the Cut should have minimal visual, auditory and wildlife impact, neither should it lead to any deterioration of water or air quality. These restrictions must apply to the whole length of the Cut in order to preserve it as a wildlife corridor.

For some years the Cut has become an important focus for the community. Many people now appreciate this resource for learning about plant and animal life as well as the historical development of Bristol. They feel a sense of commitment to the Cut which was demonstrated by the very successful 200th anniversary celebrations as well as the regular clean-ups, walks and other activities.

Proposed Rapid Transport Route

Our main concerns about the development of a rapid transport route between the Park and Ride site at Ashton and Princes Street Bridge focus on the possible deleterious effects on the New Cut.

Until detailed plans of the route with alignments and measurements are available it is impossible to judge how much damage could be caused to the existing environment. We believe that the artist's impressions of the route, which are part of the consultations so far, are misleading and we have failed to get satisfactory responses to questions asked at the consultation meetings. We have a number of questions about the proposals.

- We consider that a double concrete bus way would have much more serious impacts than extension of the existing rail link. Has the rail alternative been properly evaluated and costed?
- We have concerns that a concrete route would adversely affect drainage from the roads and land between the City Docks and the New Cut. Compaction of the soil and changes to the

natural and managed drainage systems could cause pressure damage to the existing walls and banks which could potentially ruin the attractive freestone walling and cause the banks and walls of the Cut itself to collapse. This happened near the Underfall in 19?? and was repaired at the time using rocks. (Does anyone know the date?)

- We have other concerns about the architectural and engineering features of the docks and the Cut. How would a concrete route be built without damage to the Underfall infrastructure, much of which is listed as well as being vital to the management of water and silting of the docks?
- The existing walls and most of the railings along the railway are very attractive and should be retained. They will need to be protected during the building process and we would like to ask how this will be achieved.
- How many trees would have to be felled on Spike Island or the Cut? We need these trees to be identified and for us to be reassured that adequate measures would be taken to protect trees and other wildlife during the building work.
- How would irreparable damage to the site known as Butterfly Junction be avoided and this important site be protected during building?
- How would the bridges of the Cut be affected? Ashton Rail Bridge is a unique structure requiring complete restoration and repair but has this been costed? Vauxhall Bridge is an attractive feature of historical interest and it is not clear what alterations are contemplated for this.
- The plans indicate that the Chocolate Path would be retained and we are pleased to see this but it is unclear what separation would be between the path and the bus route. We would not want the 'wild' borders of this path to be sacrificed.

We await further consultation when perhaps some of our concerns will be addressed and look forward to advice about when this is likely to take place.

Tess Green
May 2009