

TRANSPORT - STILL A MAJOR PROBLEM

Kerry McCarthy is Member of Parliament for Bristol East

Bristol has announced an aspiration to become the Green Capital of Britain. Obviously the city has much to commend it for this title. It is home to national organisations, such as Sustrans, the Soil Association, the Furniture Recycling Network, the Community Recycling Network, and Viva! It has achieved Fair Trade city status, and hosts an annual organic food festival, as well as a vegan fayre and regular slow food markets. And it has many residents who - as I know from my constituency postbag - are interested in green issues and keen to pursue a more ethical and sustainable form of living.



But there is still a long way to go to persuade more people to get out of their cars and onto public transport. I believe we need to build a cross-party consensus on road-pricing and/or a boundary-based form of congestion charging; this has always been a political football in Bristol, but it is unlikely we will persuade people to leave their cars at home, or to think twice before making journeys at peak times without it. We need more park and ride schemes, and better co-operation across council borders so that plans drawn up many years ago can finally be realised.

But Bristol will never be able to lay claim to the title until it sorts out its transport problems. And that will be no easy task. The roads are virtually at gridlock; according to one survey, Bristol traffic runs at a slower m.p.h. than traffic in any other city in Britain. The bus service, as evidenced by endless complaints from my constituents, is over-priced and chronically unreliable; commuter rail services often are too.

There has, I admit, been some progress over the past year. The Government has given the city £42.8 million to develop more Showcase Bus Routes and, after an excellent campaign by Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways, we have now got the Council to commit to subsidising the Severn Beach Line. First Great Western has belatedly - albeit only after passenger protests on a massive scale - realised its horrendous mistake in cutting capacity when it introduced its December timetable and has reversed the cuts.

Establishing a Passenger Transport Executive across the four local authority areas (i.e. those who currently work together in producing a Joint Transport Plan) would be a good start, and would also give Avon a much stronger voice in lobbying the Government for more investment in rail. And we need to give serious consideration to making use of the powers the Government will soon be giving local Councils to decide, through awarding franchises, how their bus services are to be run. All this requires greater leadership and political courage from our local politicians, and for the people of Bristol to join together to ensure that they are not let off the hook!

Kerry McCarthy MP

? 0117 939 9901

email: mccarthy@parliament.uk

website: www.kerrymccarthymp.org



ASHTON COURT - A LESSON IN COOPERATION *continued from page 1*

All these issues were discussed on 17 January, It was agreed that there should be a rolling programme carried out incrementally. A small proactive Steering Group will soon be meeting to draft a Business Plan and move things forward.

The group will comprise Civic Society representatives plus English Heritage, Dorothy Brown, George Ferguson and Peter Floyd, and will report back regularly to the main committee. Anton Bantock and South Bristol Groups will also be involved. Cellan Michael and I are to agree the agenda, setting out priorities.

WHY is all this happening?

The operational formula is a mutual agreement on aims; the Council and Civic Society are going forward together, North Somerset Council (Planning Authority) are being involved from the start. All parties are working together in a spirit of goodwill.

Audrey Lennox

? 950 0664

email: audjob@waitrose.com