

THE BRISTOL CONTEXT - SLIGHTLY EXPANDED

Part III

Poor dear old Bristol! Since the 1950's we always seemed to be dressed for the wrong pantomime, singing from the wrong song sheet and the only ones in step. I'm writing now about our political context within which most post war planning was submerged - very slippery terrain . . .

◆ From the '50's to the early '90's:

Bristol City Council were constantly out of step with national government. When they were "left" we were "right" and vice-versa. No national party really loved us.

Our Rate Support Grant was diminished by calculations which no Member of Parliament (M.P.) or Westminster boffin could explain to our academic advisers.

Our historic county status was withdrawn and our boundaries confused.

The temporary County of Avon reduced the need for playing fields and swimming pools by decimating physical education. ("Every Bristolian a Swimmer" was reduced to one in five unable to swim; competitive games were abhorred and the Egg and Spoon Race was banned as "too competitive").

Two of our most offensive tower blocks were occupied symbolically by Avon and the Department of the Environment.

We were refused a City Challenge grant for Hartcliffe who needed it badly; and we were given Bristol Development Corporation's (BDC) elevated motorway that the City did not request.

The attractive weir and canoe slalom which were promised to the BDC never materialised.
etc. etc. etc.

◆ In the '80's and early '90's:

Whilst Iain Patterson (City Planning Officer) and Bristol's environmental lobby combined to promote sustainable development the hostile national context persisted. Implementation of good plans can take much longer than 'volume house building'; and the development business which had blossomed on government grants and Bristol acquiescence in the '60's and '70's met with refusals to which it was not accustomed. Bristol was seen as dragging its feet; whilst our joint success together with Ian White (our Euro Member of Parliament (M.E.P.)) and Iain Patterson in obtaining European Commission funding for College Green only fuelled resentment by the Government which had been by-passed.

◆ In 1992

Bristol Civic Society published "Go Public" which set out a detailed strategy for Bristol's transport. In addition to exploring the most sustainable means of travel we also presented an extension of Jane Jacobs' principles:

[Mixed use development in appropriately high densities not only generates symbiotic land use benefits. It can also reduce the need for motorised journeys. Wow!]

Our submissions concerning a development of this principle were sent to authors of the European Commission Green Paper on Urban Design and to the Minister responsible for "Quality in Town and Country"; they were well received; and the Secretary of State responded by sending his representatives to Bristol for a discussion with a Civic Society planning group on 'mixed use development'.

[In 1995: Planning Policy Guidance 13 - 'A government guide to Better Practice' had as its sub title: 'Reducing the need to travel through land use and transport planning']

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