

Carriageworks: what next?

Lori Streich hopes something is about to happen (but she's not holding her breath).

Bristol's biggest eyesore may be removed from the streetscape by the end of this year. The Carriageworks site in Stokes Croft (including Westmoreland House and the land behind it) have been derelict for over 30 years. But a new developer, Bristol based The PG Group, has told the Carriageworks Action Group (CAG) that it is in the process of acquiring the site from current owners OpecPrime, aka the Comer brothers.

Their intention is to build the scheme that was awarded planning permission in October 2015, comprising 112 flats, 1,010 square metres of commercial space, a market square and a through route.

Planning permission for the scheme was granted to Fifth Capital London after considerable dialogue and robust debate with CAG. The permission reflects the intentions of a Community Vision for the site which was facilitated by CAG in 2011 and supported by Bristol City Council.

The Vision draws together the views of the diverse communities and interests in the area. Over 1600 people contributed

Empty for 30 years



to the Vision which states that

The Carriageworks development will make a positive contribution to the economy, culture and environment of Stokes Croft and the surrounding area. It will be a mixed use development that is home to many activities, businesses and people. It will be a buzzing, vibrant place for people from the local communities and from further afield...

The Vision has been influential in ensuring that the plans for the site come close to meeting the aspirations of the communities most impacted by its dereliction. It addresses the need for

redevelopment to end the blight that the site casts over its nearest residential areas, through a developer who will work with CAG to replace years of neglect with "a scheme of which we can be proud."

Stokes Croft is border country. It is on the edge of St Pauls, Montpelier, Kingsdown and Cotham, with the city centre and national brand businesses to the south and the independent traders of Gloucester Road to the north. And it is a major arterial road carrying traffic through one of the most economically diverse areas of Bristol. Since 2011, CAG has held open meetings which, to an extent, reflect this diversity. We have shown that the communities surrounding the Carriageworks really care about the development which will be at the heart of it. We have been determined to see development happen - but in a way that will embrace and reflect the areas that surround it - not exclude and marginalise them.

CAG has a single aim: to work with any developer that will develop the site in line with the Community Vision. We have a growing sense of optimism based on PG Group's willingness to engage with CAG as they work towards the development of the site. Over the coming months we will continue to work with the PG Group, and to bring together the people who contributed to the Vision, so that collectively, we will see a dynamic development that builds on the creativity of the area.

Lori Streich, Chair, Carriageworks Action Group.

Needs to make a positive contribution to the culture of Stokes Croft.



Keep in touch with progress towards development at www.carriageworks.org.uk For regular updates delivered to your inbox, join our mailing list - the link is on the front page of the website.



The Bearpit

At times the development has been challenging, Alan Morris acknowledges. What's your view? he asks.

The regeneration of the 1970s sunken roundabout public space that is the Bearpit has been running for seven years.

Since 2015, thanks to the initiatives of the Bearpit Improvement Group, progress has been made including:

- the physical makeover has been completed. The new paving, steps and lighting are now so familiar that it is difficult to remember what it used to look like.
- the edible planting on the bank in the north-west corner is complete, thanks to Incredible Edible Bristol.
- a new performance space, using a converted shipping container, has been used for the first time this summer.

Organisationally, the trading operation has matured and expanded into a



Bearpit Wednesday market

separate social enterprise called Bearpit Bristol, and the council has run a stakeholder group to bring together all the other agencies and interested parties. Anti-social behaviour is currently low, helped by support to problem drug users from the Bristol Drugs Project outreach team, one of the stakeholder group attendees.

There have been challenges. Recently, the independent Cable newspaper ran an article called "The Bearpit: contested hub of struggles for Bristol". It is true that there are different ways of viewing the Bearpit 'project', and they can conflict with each other. Some of these views are:

- it's an awful place. I would never go there.
- it's an oasis
- it's a public space that needed improving for all that pass through it - it's as simple as that
- it's a beacon for a different world, surrounded by a corporate-dominated world
- it's an incremental and organic approach to urban micro-regeneration
- it can become a destination through trading, community activities, events and markets
- it's an uneasy meeting point between inner-city wealth and social exclusion.

In any community group, you can get strong-willed, passionate people, and

sometimes they become equal and opposing forces, even if they are united in many of their aims. This has been part of the recent Bearpit story.

The Council, as owner of the space and licensor to the community group, has worked to heal relations. It has adapted and strengthened the governance to manage the tensions while allowing the good work to continue.

To recognise this new start there will be a change of name to Bearpit Community Trust. To some extent, this change of name recognises an evolution from the improvement phase of the last seven years, with many physical changes being made to the space, towards a maintenance phase, focusing more on the continued incremental development of activities in the space.

There is however one physical improvement outstanding: the next challenge will be when the Council closes the toilets in the Bearpit, which will release the buildings to be refurbished for another use.

The Bearpit will continue to mean different things to different people.

What's your view?

If this sort of community project interests you and you would like to apply to be a director of the newly constituted board of trustees, please contact me.

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