



Car-free areas in response to Covid and legacy in Cotham Hill, Bristol

What did they do?

Cotham Hill is situated in Cotham, a suburb of Bristol, about one mile from the city centre. In April 2021, the council introduced temporary road closure measures in response to Covid-19 restrictions. This aimed to support local businesses operations by providing outside space and enabling social distancing. Before implementing the changes, the local authority surveyed the residents, asking them about their street environment, what they liked, what they would improve and what their priorities were. The closure was initially demarked by a temporary red and white barrier. In response to complaints about the look of these barriers, planters were put in place to improve the appearance in July 2021. An on-the-street survey accompanied this

change to capture what residents and users of the street thought. **80% felt the road was safer and 75% felt the shared space was easy to use.**

In autumn 2021, there was a consultation based on making the changes permanent. Residents were offered three choices: keeping the current changes, making more areas car-free, or returning car access with a single lane and reducing speed limits.

63% of respondents selected to keep the existing measures, 27% wanted to extend the pedestrianised area, and only 5% wanted to return to some car access. 37% wanted better bike parking and 59% wanted street art included in the preferred option.





Car-free areas in response to Covid and legacy in Cotham Hill, Bristol

What was learnt?

Pedestrianisation has benefits for hospitality businesses – cafes and bars.

- Street furniture is important and should be considered early in planning. Having clear requirements prevents the area looking a mess or deployment of unsafe equipment. Different departments have control over street furniture requirements, so internal stakeholder engagement is vital.
- Businesses will be concerned about the disruption to customers during civil works. Plan for this, make sure you support business through this process and keep them up to date on timelines.
- It is important not to underestimate how time consuming for staff this process is. Engagement with the community is vital and should be well resourced.
- The unique circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic meant it was possible to move quickly and gain support for increasing outdoor space for social distancing. But the outcome has shown that the changes are popular and people want to keep them.
- Being able to have quick and temporary Traffic Regulation Orders would help test what works.

What was the result?

Cotham Hill pedestrianisation is now permanent, and Bristol has submitted a funding bid for £5.2 million to make walking and cycling easier in eight areas. Cotham Hill's engagement process serves as an example of good practice in terms of understanding the needs and priorities of businesses and the community, and consulting on individual plans. The local authority worked with the community from early stages of gauging opinion, to assess the changes and responded when issues were raised (eg in the case of initial barriers being unsightly).

Further links or information

- Experimental traffic regulation orders, using [VivaCity](#) to track walking trails, to show where pedestrians go.
- [Lucy Saunders Healthy street approach](#)
- [Cotham Hill Permanent Scheme Consultation](#)