

STREET STRATEGY (PLAIN TEXT VERSION)

Introduction

The Street Strategy represents a significant step towards ensuring a coordinated and comprehensive approach to managing public spaces in Bath & North East Somerset.

The strategy supports the economic vibrancy and animation of public spaces and links individual policies in order to maintain a consistent approach. Ultimately, this strategy aims to maintain consistency across all communities.

Our aim and objectives

Foundation and alignment

This strategy supports the Council's wider priorities by improving the quality, safety and accessibility of public spaces, while also supporting economic activity and local businesses. It establishes a consistent approach across related policies, ensuring alignment in how the public realm is managed, and seeks to balance vibrancy and animation with the need for compliance and public safety.

In doing so, it draws on and integrates key principles from the Public Realm and Movement Strategy to enhance both the function and experience of streets and spaces. It also applies the findings of the Bath City Centre Accessibility Study across the wider authority area, promoting a consistent and inclusive approach to accessibility for all users.

Corporate Strategy

We have one overriding purpose – to improve people's lives. This brings together everything we do, from cleaning the streets to caring for our older people.

Core policies:

- Tackling the climate and nature emergency
- Giving people a bigger say

Ambitions:

- Lead the UK in climate and nature action (net zero, nature positive by 2030)
- Work with residents to act on their concerns

Principles:

- Preparing for the future
- Delivering for local residents
- Focusing on prevention

In accordance with the Public Sector Equality Duty, the Council will consider the needs of disabled people, visually impaired people, people with mobility issues, this includes considering the needs of disabled people, access for mobility aids, wheelchairs and parents or carers using prams and pushchairs.

These considerations are relevant across the strategy, including pavement licences, amenities on the highway, A-boards, markets, events, and busking activity where congestion, obstruction or noise may create barriers to safe and inclusive use of the public realm.

Coordinated management and enforcement

Develop a coordinated approach to managing and enforcing the use of public spaces through the implementation of legislation, and policies that are informed by this strategy.

Create design guides where necessary for Pavement Licences, Amenities on the Highways and Street Trading, focusing on accessibility, layout, and visual appearance of temporary street furniture (tables, chairs, A-boards, trading stalls, etc.) to provide excellent quality information for applicants to aid the application process and ensure compliance with conditions thus ensuring public safety.

Ensure an integrated approach to the placement and relationship of street furniture within the public realm.

Policy and operational documents:

- Develop and implement the following policies and operational documents over the next 12 to 18 months:
- Amenities on the Highway: A policy for determining what, if any, type of items can be placed on the street outside of Pavement Licence legislation.
- Street Trading: Management of Street Trading activities.
- Buskers and Street Entertainment: Guidelines to manage busking and street performances.
- Events & Film: Policy framework for managing events and film activities in public spaces.
- Markets: Guidelines for the operation and management of markets.
- A-Boards: Regulations for the use of A-boards in public spaces.

We have also had regard to evolving counter-terrorism risks, including the shift in recent years from attacks focused on buildings to those targeting more open public spaces.

The role of Street Trading in Bath city centre

Street trading, defined as the selling or displaying of items for sale in public streets, is an age-old practice that adds to the dynamic character of urban spaces. In Bath, this tradition continues to flourish, providing both residents and tourists with a variety of shopping options that are often unique and locally sourced. The traders' stalls are not just points of sale but also social hubs where people can interact, exchange stories, and experience the local culture first-hand.

Bath city centre is home to many street traders who contribute to the city's unique charm. Traders offer a diverse range of products, from street food to artisanal objects and clothing. The presence of traders is not only a commercial activity, but a reflection of the enterprising spirit that thrives in Bath. Many traders are small start-up ventures or businesses specifically designed for street trading, highlighting the importance of supporting local enterprises. Street trading contributes to the character, economy and visitor experience of the area. It provides opportunities for small and start-up businesses, but must be managed to ensure accessibility, public safety, the quality of place, and the needs of residents and businesses are protected.

The benefits of Street Trading

Economic opportunities: Street trading offers significant economic benefits, particularly for small businesses and start-ups. It provides an accessible platform for entrepreneurs to evaluate their products and services without the high overhead costs associated with traditional retail spaces.

Cultural enrichment: The variety of goods sold by street traders, from artisanal crafts to international cuisines, enriches the cultural offering of Bath. Traders bring a slice of global culture to the city, making it a more cosmopolitan and inclusive place.

Tourist attraction: Street markets are often a major draw for tourists. The vibrant atmosphere, combined with the unique products on offer, enhances the overall visitor experience, encouraging longer stays and repeat visits.

Challenges

The Street Strategy applies to the entire district, special consideration must be given to the appearance of the city, which is a twice-inscribed UNESCO World Heritage Site, must be preserved and enhanced. This includes ensuring that the stalls and products align with the historical and cultural significance of the area.

Consideration of trading days and times: The operation days and times of street traders must be regulated to balance the needs of the traders with those of the local community and businesses. Overcrowding and noise can detract from the city's ambience, which is a key aspect of its charm.

Quality and type of goods: It is important the products offered are of high-quality, and aligned to Tackling the climate and nature emergency

Pavement licences and amenities on the highway: Balancing Café Culture and Public Space Management.

The Covid-19 pandemic has significantly transformed urban landscapes, with one notable change being the rise of café culture. In Bath city Centre, this shift has led to an increased interest among businesses in using outdoor spaces around their premises. While this trend has revitalised the local economy and enhanced the social atmosphere, it has also introduced challenges related to the free movement of pedestrians and the fulfilment of the Council's statutory obligations.

The rise of café culture

The pandemic prompted a shift towards outdoor dining and socialising, driven by health guidelines and a public preference for open-air environments. Bath city centre particularly, with its picturesque streets and historic charm, has seen a surge in businesses setting up outdoor seating areas. This has not only provided a lifeline for many establishments but also contributed to a vibrant street life that attracts both locals and tourists.

Impact on pedestrian movement and highway use

The proliferation of outdoor seating and other structures on the highway has begun to potentially impede the free movement of pedestrians and other highway users. Narrow pavements and busy streets can become congested, making it difficult for people to navigate the city safely and comfortably. This is particularly problematic for individuals who are visually impaired and those with mobility issues, parents with strollers, and cyclists.

Statutory obligations

The council has a responsibility to ensure public spaces are safe, clean, and accessible. This includes conducting regular highway inspections and street cleaning. The increasing number of items on the highway, such as planters, floral arches, and heavy parasol bases, complicates these tasks.

These structures can obstruct access for maintenance crews and hinder the effective cleaning and inspection of streets.

Challenges with compliance

Businesses are required by their licenses to remove and store outdoor items at the end of the trading day. However, the size and design of some of these items make compliance challenging. Heavy parasol bases, large planters, and intricate floral arches are not easily moved, leading to their permanent presence on the streets. This not only affects the appearance of the city but also poses potential safety hazards.

Balancing interests

To address these issues, a balanced approach is needed. The benefits of outdoor café culture must be weighed against the need for accessible and well-maintained public spaces. Practical solutions include:

Design guidelines: Implementing design guidelines for outdoor structures that prioritise ease of removal and storage to help businesses follow licensing requirements without compromising on aesthetics.

Clear zones: Setting up clear zones on pavements where no structures are allowed to ensure pedestrians have sufficient space to move freely especially those with mobility issues or are visually impaired in line with our Public Sector Equalities Duty.

Regular inspections: Ensuring the frequency of inspections are appropriate to ensure compliance with removal requirements and to address any obstructions promptly.

Community engagement: Engaging with business owners and the community to raise awareness about the importance of keeping clear and accessible public spaces.

Events & Film: The dynamic cultural landscape of Bath.

Bath, a city renowned for its historical and architectural beauty, is also a vibrant hub for events and film productions. Each year between 70 to 100 events is held and the area accommodates 60 to 80 film productions. These activities range from large-scale events like the Bath Half Marathon, Bath Christmas Market, and Keynsham Music Festival to smaller community gatherings such as the Bath Carnival.

Additionally, the city attracts significant film and TV productions from major players like Netflix, Warner Bros. and various news and media outlets. Given the evolving nature of these activities, particularly in the post-pandemic era, the council's Events Policy, which was initially developed in 2011/12 and updated in subsequent years, now requires a comprehensive review.

Major events and their impact

The major events hosted in Bath, such as the Bath Half Marathon and Bath Christmas Market, are not only significant for their scale but also for their economic and social impact. These events draw large crowds, boosting local businesses and tourism. The Bath Half Marathon, for instance, attracts thousands of participants and spectators to the city. Similarly, the Bath Christmas Market, with its festive stalls and activities, enhances the city's appeal during the holiday season, attracting visitors from far and wide.

Community gatherings

Local community events like the Keynsham Music Festival, Midsomer Norton Carnival and Bath Carnival play a crucial role in fostering community spirit and cultural expression. These gatherings provide a platform for local artists, musicians, and performers to highlight their talents, while also bringing residents together in celebration. Such events are vital for keeping the social fabric of the community, offering opportunities for engagement and participation.

Film and TV productions

Bath's picturesque streets and historic buildings make it an attractive location for film and TV productions. The city has hosted numerous high-profile productions from companies like Netflix and Warner Bros., which not only bring economic benefits but also enhance Bath's cultural prestige.

These productions often require significant logistical support and coordination, highlighting the need for a robust and adaptable Events and Film Policy.

Need for policy review

The council's Events Policy was last updated in 2019 but should now be reviewed and incorporate a Film Policy, to address the increasing use of the region for filming and television productions. The pandemic has altered the nature of events, with a greater emphasis on outdoor activities. This shift necessitates new guidelines to ensure the safety and enjoyment of participants while minimising disruption to the local community.

Health and Safety protocols: The policy needs to incorporate updated Health and Safety protocols to address ongoing concerns related to public health. This includes guidelines for crowd management, sanitation, and emergency response. Although we are now post-pandemic, we need to demonstrate preparedness for future potential threats to public health and safety.

Sustainability: The policy should promote sustainable practices for events and film productions. This includes waste management, energy use, and the reduction of carbon footprints.

Community involvement: Ensuring that residents are involved in the planning and execution of events helps mitigate any negative impact and enhances community support. This includes transparent communication and opportunities for feedback.

Economic considerations: The policy should balance the economic benefits of hosting events and film productions with the need to protect businesses and residents from potential disruptions. This includes considerations for traffic management, noise control, and the use of public spaces.

The dynamic cultural landscape of the entire district, characterised by its diverse events and film productions, requires a responsive and forward-thinking policy framework. By reviewing and updating the council's Events Policy, to incorporate a Film Policy, Bath and North East Somerset will continue to thrive as a cultural and economic hub, ensuring both residents and visitors can continue to enjoy the rich array of activities the city has to offer. Balancing the needs of the community, with the benefits of hosting major events and productions, is key to maintaining Bath's unique charm and appeal.

Busking and street entertainment

Busking and street entertainment have long been integral to the Bath experience, contributing to a lively and enjoyable atmosphere for visitors. These performances bring energy and charm to the city's streets, enhancing the cultural fabric and providing spontaneous moments of joy for passersby. However, the presence of buskers can sometimes be intrusive and disruptive for residents and workers. Therefore, it is important to recognise the dual impact of street entertainers and consider management approaches to balance their positive contributions with the need for harmony in public spaces.

Cultural enrichment: Buskers bring diverse forms of art to the public, often introducing new genres and styles that might not be accessible otherwise. This cultural enrichment makes the city more cosmopolitan and inclusive.

Tourist attraction: Street performances are a significant draw for tourists. The lively atmosphere created by buskers enhances the overall visitor experience, encouraging longer stays and repeat visits.

Economic benefits: Buskers can indirectly boost the local economy. Their performances attract crowds, which can increase foot traffic to nearby shops, cafes, and restaurants.

The challenges of street entertainment

Despite their many benefits, buskers can also pose challenges, particularly when performances become intrusive or disruptive.

Noise levels: High volume performances, especially in residential or business areas, can be a source of annoyance. This is particularly true for performances that occur late in the evening or early in the morning.

Location and congestion: Popular busking spots can become congested, obstructing pedestrian flow and access to businesses. This can be particularly problematic in narrow streets and busy commercial areas.

Frequency and duration: Frequent and prolonged performances in the same location can lead to fatigue among residents and workers, diminishing the overall enjoyment of the area.

Management approaches for buskers

To balance the benefits of busking with the need for public order and harmony, several management approaches can be considered:

Designated busking zones: Establishing specific areas where busking is encouraged can help manage the distribution of performers and reduce congestion in high-traffic areas. These zones can be chosen based on their suitability for performances and their impact on surrounding areas.

Time restrictions: Implementing time restrictions for performances can help minimise noise disturbances. For example, busking could be limited to certain hours of the day, avoiding early mornings and late evenings.

Volume control: Setting maximum volume levels for amplified performances can help reduce noise pollution. This can be monitored through regular checks.

The Role of Markets in Community Regeneration

Markets have traditionally been a central part of local economies and community life. Recognising their significance, the council is committed to market initiatives as part of its broader Street Strategy. A Markets Policy aims to strengthen the local economy, promote community involvement, and preserve the city's historic character. Building on the success of well-established markets like the Bath Christmas Market and the Midsomer Norton Farmers Market, the potential introduction of new markets is expected to further enhance our communities.

Economic benefits of markets

Markets are essential economic drivers in local communities. They provide a platform for small businesses, artisans, and farmers to sell their products directly to consumers, fostering entrepreneurship and supporting local economies.

Support for small businesses: Markets offer an accessible entry point for small businesses and start-ups. Without the high overhead costs associated with traditional retail spaces, entrepreneurs can test their products and build a customer base.

Job creation: Markets generate employment; from stallholders to market managers and support staff, contributing to the overall economic well-being of the community.

Local sourcing: Markets often prioritise locally sourced goods, which support regional producers and reduces the carbon footprint associated with long-distance transportation. This emphasis on local sourcing also ensures that money spent at markets stays within the community, further boosting the local economy.

Social and cultural impact

Beyond their economic contributions, markets play a crucial role in the social and cultural life of a community. They serve as vibrant public spaces where people can gather, interact, and experience the local culture.

Community engagement: Markets create opportunities for social interaction, fostering a sense of belonging. They bring together people from diverse backgrounds, encouraging social cohesion and mutual support.

Cultural preservation: Markets often showcase local crafts, food, and traditions, preserving and promoting the area's cultural heritage. Events like the Bath Christmas Market highlight regional specialties, attracting visitors from near and far to celebrate local traditions.

Public spaces: Markets enliven public areas, making them more vibrant and inviting, which enhances the quality of life for residents and visitors alike.

Building on success

The success of existing markets, such as the Bath Christmas Market and the Farmers Market in Midsomer Norton, provides a solid foundation for expanding market initiatives. These markets have demonstrated the potential for economic growth and community enrichment.

Farmers Market in Midsomer Norton: This monthly market supports local farmers and producers, offering fresh, locally sourced products to the community. It promotes sustainable practices and strengthens the connection between consumers and producers.

Bath Christmas Market: Renowned for its festive atmosphere and unique offerings, the Bath Christmas Market draws thousands of visitors each year, boosting the local economy by millions each year, adding to the city's cultural appeal.

Future initiatives

As part of regeneration plans, the council aims to introduce more sustainable markets to further support and enrich our communities. These new markets will be strategically located to maximise their impact and accessibility. A Markets Policy will set out the basis upon which markets are held and the process by which applications for new markets will be considered

Diverse offerings: Future markets will feature a diverse range of products, from fresh produce and artisanal crafts to street food and unique goods. This variety will cater to different tastes and preferences, attracting a broad audience both locally, and nationally.

Sustainability focus: Increasingly, eco-conscious shoppers appreciate markets that emphasise sustainability. This might include, but is not limited to, eco-friendly packaging, recycling programs, and using local or organic produce. This aligns with broader Council initiatives and goals and enhances the markets' appeal.

Community involvement: Engaging the local community in the planning and operation of new markets will ensure they meet community needs and preferences. This approach involving residents' associations as well as trade associations will foster a sense of ownership and pride among residents.

Accessibility: Accessible markets are crucial for fostering economic growth, social inclusion, public health, and sustainability, while ensuring all members of the community can benefit from these shared resources.

Markets are more than just places to buy and sell goods; they are vital components of the local economy and community life. By expanding market initiatives, the council aims to support small businesses, create jobs, and enhance the social and cultural fabric of the area. Building on the success of existing markets, the introduction of new markets will further enrich our communities, making them more vibrant, sustainable, and connected. Through thoughtful planning and community engagement, these markets will continue to play a crucial role in the regeneration and growth of our local areas.

A-boards: Bridging benefits and challenges in urban spaces

A-boards, commonly referred to as sandwich boards, have become commonplace in urban environments, serving as crucial marketing tools for businesses. These portable and often visually appealing signs are strategically placed outside shops, cafes, and restaurants to attract the attention of potential customers. While the advantages of A-boards for business promotion are evident, they can present an adverse impact on pedestrian flow, particularly for those with visual impairments or mobility challenges.

Benefits to businesses

A-boards offer a cost-effective and versatile solution for businesses looking to enhance their street presence. Unlike permanent signage, A-boards are easily updated to reflect current promotions, new products, or unique events, allowing businesses to adapt their messaging dynamically. This form of advertising can significantly boost foot traffic and subsequently increase sales and brand visibility.

One primary benefit of A-boards is their ability to capture the attention of passersby who might not have otherwise noticed the business. For small businesses with limited advertising budgets, A-boards provide an accessible means of reaching a broader audience. Furthermore, the creative use of design and typography on A-boards contributes to a vibrant and engaging streetscape, enhancing the overall atmosphere of a commercial area.

Impact on pedestrian flow

Despite their benefits, A-boards can pose significant challenges to pedestrian flow, particularly in crowded urban settings. When placed indiscriminately, these signs can obstruct pavements and hinder the flow of foot traffic. This obstruction is especially problematic for individuals with visual impairments who rely on clear, unobstructed paths for safe navigation. The presence of A-boards can disrupt the use of canes and guide dogs, leading to increased risk of accidents. For those with mobility issues, and wheelchair users' walkers, or prams, the placement of A-boards can create added barriers. Navigating around these obstacles requires extra effort and can make environments less accessible. In extreme cases, A-boards can force pedestrians into the street, exposing them to traffic hazards.

Regulation and balance

Recognising these challenges, like many local authorities, we have guidelines in place to manage the use of A-boards. These guidelines aim to balance the benefits to businesses with the need to maintain accessible and navigable public spaces. Businesses must comply with this policy, or their board will be removed, and they will have to pay a fee to release it.

The guidelines only cover A-Boards (portable, free standing advertising signs placed at ground-level), and in respect of their size and position. These rules were published in 2012, with agreed support from Bath Business Improvement District (Bath BID) and the Chamber of Commerce. These measures are designed to prevent clutter and maintain clear pedestrian pathways. In addition to formal regulations, businesses are encouraged to adopt best practices, such as using lightweight and easily movable A-boards that can be quickly repositioned if necessary.

While A-boards offer substantial benefits for businesses by enhancing visibility and driving sales, their potential to impede pedestrian flow, especially for vulnerable individuals, must be carefully managed. Striking a balance between effective advertising and maintaining accessible urban environments is essential. Through thoughtful regulation, considerate placement, and adherence to best practices, it is possible to maximize the benefits of A-boards while minimising their adverse impact on pedestrian mobility.

