THE CITY CENTRE FRAMEWORK

Lewins Mead - character statement and place plan
Lewins Mead
1. The Pithay
2. Fairfax St. car park
3. Bridewell
4. St James’ Park
5. Rupert St. car park
6. Fusion Tower
7. Electricity House
8. Froomsgate Park
9. Hotel Du Vin
Historically defined by the narrow winding course of the River Frome, Lewins Mead is contained within the low-lying river valley. To the north-west the topography rapidly climbs towards the St Michael’s and Kingsdown escarpments, whilst to the south lies the higher ground of the Old City.

Situated outside the medieval city walls, the area included St Bartholomew’s Hospital and Greyfriars. Following the dissolution of the monasteries in the 16th century, townhouses were built and the buildings of St Bartholomew’s became the home of Bristol Grammar School, where it remained until the late 18th century.

As a result of the growing sugar trade, warehouses and sugar refineries developed along the course of the Frome. Dense development was contained between Lewins Mead on the north bank and Nelson Street to the south. Lewins Mead Sugar House, which is now the Hotel Du Vin, sat immediately adjacent to the River Frome.

The early 19th century saw a period of significant change as a large section of the river was culverted, to form Rupert Street and Fairfax Street. Rupert Street soon became the main tramway link between the Floating Harbour and Broadmead with the area retaining its industrial character, being home to firms such as the Lewins Mead Brewery, Stanton & Champion’s Steam Confectionary Works and the ‘fancy box’ factory.

The next phase of change in the area came with the application of radical post-war town planning principles which sought to separate vehicle and pedestrian movement. Many of the surviving buildings were cleared to enable road widening and the development of Brutalist high-rise office buildings. Associated ‘walkways in the sky’ provided connections above the fast-flowing traffic, however the segregated routes soon became underused and threatening.

The introduction of tall buildings, with little or no street-level activity, intensified the canyon like swathe between the Central Promenade and St James Barton. There remained, however, a number of intriguing glimpses to historic buildings and the presence of St James Churchyard and the more recent Fromesgate Park have helped to soften the hard urban environment.

Today, the area is undergoing another period of change. New development, and the conversion of redundant office buildings has resulted in an influx of residential uses and student halls which have helped to reinvigorate the area. Increasing levels of activity at street level, together with public realm improvements, have increased the attractiveness of the more direct route between Harbourside and the Centre through to Broadmead.

Lewins Mead, Rupert Street and Nelson Street continue to function as key public transport and vehicle routes, however there is a need to continue to enhance the public realm and improve the area for increasing pedestrian and cyclist movement.
Challenges:
1. Conflicts between pedestrian, cyclists and vehicle through traffic.
2. Poor quality public realm and street clutter.
3. Highway dominated junction constraining pedestrian movement.
4. Negative visual impact of parking.
5. Poor connectivity across heavily trafficked roads.
6. Negative townscape impact of vacant sites or poor quality buildings.
7. Poor quality ground floor relationship with the street.
8. Poor legibility for pedestrians and cyclists.
9. Imposing or out-of-scale buildings.
10. Poor condition and underused heritage assets.
11. Compromised setting and lack of public interpretation of heritage assets.
Lewins Mead is an area that has already seen significant change throughout the evolution of the city, and is once again experiencing major change. This is manifested both environmentally and through a significant shift from offices to more residential use. As redundant office buildings and sites have been redeveloped to provide both residential and student accommodation, there is significant potential for improvement to the strategic pedestrian links between the Central Promenade and Broadmead, and between the Old City and Christmas Steps.

**Issues:**

- Slow to deliver active use on ground floors in the short term/ before being fully developed and occupied.
- High volumes of private vehicle traffic and bus movement along Nelson Street creating tensions between pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles.
- Securing regeneration and revitalisation of sterile ground floor uses of 1960s buildings along Nelson Street.
- Tackling the canyon effect along Nelson Street and Rupert Street to create a more human scale environment.
- Enabling north-south movement across heavily trafficked routes.
- Reflecting increasing residential population in general street design and public realm.

**Opportunities:**

1. Promoting ‘meanwhile’ active ground floor uses to help the transition to a more vibrant and engaging public realm.
2. Utilise development opportunities to introduce human scale and activity to ground floor elevations.
3. Maximise activity from public transport links and key pedestrian and cycling routes to support more vibrant street frontages and uses.
4. Increase green infrastructure and street trees within Rupert Street and Lewins Mead to extend the recent enhancements associated with the Centre and Frooms gate Park.
5. Improve the setting of listed buildings and historic assets through public realm enhancement and sensitive redevelopment.
6. Improve pedestrian crossing points to allow clear and convenient north-south connections.
7. Utilise positive association with bold and iconic street art to support the changing identity and intensified use of the area.

**KEY - Exemplars**

1. street cafes, California, USA
2. buskers, Shoreditch, London
3. New Street, Brighton
4. artwork bus stop, Baltimore, USA
5. Moonraker Halls, London
6. Trent University, Nottingham
7. public realm, Newcastle University
Lewins Mead Place Plan

Vision
A vibrant modern quarter to live, study and work. Taller buildings set within an exemplar public realm of boulevards and lanes, well served by public transport. Busy and inviting streets are lined by cafes, residential foyers and common room facilities and are characterised by generous pavements, good quality materials and street trees. The contribution of confident and dynamic public art adding to the quality of the area for residents and students.

Objectives
1. Enhance the livability of the area for residents and students.
2. Continue to raise the standard of development and promote design excellence to ensure energy efficiency and biodiveristy as an integral element.
3. Improve the legibility and public realm within Nelson Street as a primary pedestrian and cycling link between the Centre and Broadmead.
4. Provide better quality environment at public transport stops to enhance passenger experience.
5. Increase the extent of active street level uses appropriate within the flood zone.
6. Enhance accessibility and use of Fromesgate Park and St James churchyard as valuable green space.
7. Restore and reuse the listed buildings at Bridewell.
8. Promote alternative strategies for off-street parking which will release Fairfax Street car park as a redevelopment opportunity.

Supporting transport measures
The area will be directly served by the new MetroBus System and will continue to be a focus for public transport facilities. The recent dismantling of raised walkway decks introduced in the 1960’s has increased the need to improve the pedestrian environment at street level. Continued public realm enhancements need to accommodate more intense by use by pedestrians and cyclists balanced alongside space for public transport users.

Key public realm and movement projects
Nelson Street - Recent improvements need to be extended to the junctions with Fairfax Street, Bridewell Street and All Saints Street to create a continuous good quality link to Broadmead for pedestrians. The corridor will incorporate a segregated cycle facility.
Rupert Street - A focus for public transport with increased space for bus passengers and an upgrading of stop facilities. Significant improvements to the street level environment provided by the Fusion Tower, the Courthouse and New Bridewell developments provide good examples to be replicated on other schemes to establish a coherent and more generous public realm.
Lewins Mead - The street will continue to take through traffic, however there is a need to incorporate safer cycling provision as part of reorganising the existing road space.

Key development projects
LM01 Fairfax Street
A comprehensive redevelopment of the Fairfax Street car park and Sterling House offers an opportunity to significantly improve both the buildings and public realm in this prominent location as well as better influence the movement of cars, service vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists. There is an opportunity to increase the scale of buildings particularly with regard to Sterling House to deliver a more efficient use of the site.
LM02 St Johns Court, Nelson Street
St John’s Court is an example of where changes to the permeability of the raised walkways have had a particularly negative effect on the way in which the early 1970’s development relates to the area today. The building complex which straddles both the Lewins Mead and Old City sub-areas has a particularly negative affect on the way in which the historic townscape. Part of the group has recently undergone refurbishment and there has been a gradual increased use of this important city block.
LM03 Old Bridewell
The listed group of buildings including the former police station, fire station and law courts add to the grain of the area, and are an important remnant of the historic townscape. Part of the group has recently undergone refurbishment and there has been a gradual increased use of this important city block.
LM04 Nelson House / Trafalgar House
The original refurbishment of these former office buildings to student halls provided the impetus for the more recent trend of residential and student conversions that are helping to transform the Lewins Mead area. However, the buildings are beginning to look tired, and the ground floor uses particularly onto Rupert Street are in need of revitalisation if the block is to continue to play a positive role in the area.
Further investment into the building envelope is required to improve the visual appearance of these blocks and maintain their attractiveness as student halls.
Proposed development: restore
Proposed development: reinvent
New public spaces and improvements to existing public spaces
Active ground floor uses (cafes, restaurants, shops)
Active building frontage (regular doors and windows, balconies etc.)
Existing and potential new focal building
Key public space enhancement
Public realm improvement corridor
Pedestrian routes (primary and local)
Cycle routes
Enhanced existing Bus Stop
MetroBus Location