

Sink the BRI road !

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Three years' ago there was much discussion about a possible new, comprehensive, hospital for Bristol. That hope has evaporated and we are back at the default position. The BRI will remain the principal hospital in Bristol for the next 50 to 100 years. The planners now have a major responsibility to create a modern, accessible, pleasant hospital.

All major hospital development in Bristol now centres on the BRI (Children's Hospital, Cardiothoracic Unit, etc). The future of a new North Bristol Hospital seems to be increasingly uncertain now that PFI is coming under such a cloud.

There is a well-accepted view, supported by evidence, that a pleasant environment is an important factor in helping patients to recover. The cricket pitch at Frenchay and the rose-beds at Southmead are greatly appreciated by patients and their families, as well as the staff.

One of the problems of the BRI is that it is unbelievably congested. Even if the ward windows are not obscured by dirt – the only view is of a concrete wall 3 feet away. Can anything be done to improve the quality of the BRI campus? Possibly!

The hospital could be made infinitely more attractive if the constant flow of polluting, noisy, traffic on the roads bisecting various elements of the BRI site could be re-routed. It may well be that this could be achieved by, partially or totally sinking, the roads (upper Maudlin Street and Marlborough Street) so that traffic goes through an underpass. Access to the hospital would be via an access road. The remaining area, previously occupied by the main road, would be landscaped – grass, trees, a pool, and even ducks! The area is reasonably flat and patients would not have to climb steep hills in order to get to the landscaped area.

Some will undoubtedly say that the cost of such an enterprise would be prohibitive. At present we don't know. A variety of funding sources are possible. For instance the Bristol City Council would be asked to contribute—bearing in mind that it was they who insisted that the BRI should remain in the centre of the City! We propose that a firm of structural engineers be invited to assess the technical practicability of the idea.

The development could make the BRI visually much more attractive and more welcoming to patients and staff. In these days of competition between hospitals for patients the project could become an income generator! Imagine a photograph of the landscaped area on the front of the BRI brochure –ducks and all!

We are keen to canvass views on the topic from patients (and potential patients!), the City Council, the Civic Society, health-care staff working at the BRI and indeed everyone who has something constructive to say. Please reply using our new blog address or by e-mail to RLH. Comments will be included in future editions of “ news and views”.