

## Notes of Bristol Parks Forum Meeting held on Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> February 2021 on Zoom

Present: A list of all those present is held by the Secretary.  
Notes by Frances Robertson (BPF committee)



### 1 Welcome and Introductions

Mark Logan, BPF Chair

Mark welcomed and introduced himself, the committee and the speakers.

### 2 Items arising from October meeting

Minutes are published on the Forum website and were the link was also emailed out in a Parks Forum update.

Actions outstanding

- 2.1 Grass cutting - this topic will be covered elsewhere on the agenda.
- 2.2 Flood strategy has been published – [consultation feedback](#)
- 2.3 RHS

Susan from Friends of Troopers Hill was leading on this. For the FoTH meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> February 2021 there was an item on their agenda to formally disassociate themselves from the RHS because of the way they promote weedkillers etc on their website. But on the morning of the meeting, Susan received an email and also had a conversation with senior representatives of the RHS. They were very clear that the RHS position is that weedkillers should only be used in a very targeted way and for very invasive species and they have made a commitment to change their advice on their website and they had held a meeting the week before this Forum meeting to progress that.

Susan stated that in all other aspects RHS are clearly putting out wildlife messages so FoTH decided to continue to participate in the RHS initiatives – It's Your Neighbourhood & Pride in Parks.

Mark congratulated Susan on behalf of the Forum for her perseverance and the positive outcome of her dealings with the RHS.

### 3. Impact of Covid and plans for future BPF meetings

The Committee had discussed this and do not envisage any face to face Forum meetings this calendar year, 2021. We have a wide diversity of membership across age groups so not everyone will be vaccinated for a long time. If anything changes members will be told.

It has been suggested that long term some meetings will be held on Zoom to see if that attracts people who cannot always attend in person. Perhaps alternating meetings might be done in that way. It would probably be too difficult to broadcast in person meetings on Zoom especially if people attending remotely wanted to participate in discussions.

This will be kept in mind as we progress through the year and beyond.

#### 4 Bristol & Bath Parks Foundation

Charlee Bennett, Director BBPF

Charlee explained the Foundation's plans for 2021 included online training and support for park groups. Charlee gave an update on the current situation and training for first part of this year.

It was a slow year last year for everyone but the Foundation is starting to build some momentum now and she is hoping that during April / May people will be able to be back out working outdoors.

#### Projects

- Netham Park - ongoing.
- College Green  
Refurbishing the green areas post Greta Thunberg attendance at the Climate Strike rally in Feb 2020. The crowdfund money was being use and the Foundation is working with Cathedral (landowner) and BCC (lessee) and they hope to increase wild areas particularly around the Cathedral.
- Love Your Park – hope to continue with that work during pandemic

The Foundation has received grant funding from Isla. The Foundation have asked what people would like to do more and 4 key themes have emerged

#### 1 How to introduce more nature with Parks

This ties in well with the Bristol Ecological Emergency response. They were exploring this and planning to hold a conference on 20<sup>th</sup> March. Will appeal to people not only wanting to get involved in their parks but also wanting to do more with their own garden for wildlife.

The Foundation is working with BNHC to launch City of Nature Challenge on that day

#### 2 Fundraising

They are taking a broad and diverse approach, making strong applications and busy writing more grant applications

#### 3 Volunteer recruitment and retention

#### 4 How to use social media

<b>Your Park training events</b>	<b>Date/time</b>	<b>Find out more and book:</b>
<b>Accessing Grants</b>	Wednesday 7 April, 5 pm - 7 pm	<a href="https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/your-park-training-accessing-grants-tickets-137595434649?aff=parksforum">https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/your-park-training-accessing-grants-tickets-137595434649?aff=parksforum</a>
<b>Recruiting and Retaining Volunteers</b>	Wednesday 21 April 5 pm - 7 pm	<a href="https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/your-park-training-recruiting-retaining-volunteers-tickets-137593703471?aff=parkforum">https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/your-park-training-recruiting-retaining-volunteers-tickets-137593703471?aff=parkforum</a>

<b>Using Social media</b>	Wednesday 19 May, 5 pm – 7 pm	<a href="https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/your-park-training-using-social-media-tickets-137594766651?aff=Parkforum">https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/your-park-training-using-social-media-tickets-137594766651?aff=Parkforum</a>

## Funding

Charlee’s post is now permanent, Sue Sanctuary’s contract has been extended and they are recruiting for a Fundraising Manager as they still need to become financially sustainable and need to develop all the fundraising schemes that charities have. The Fundraising Manager will be on a 1 year contract.

Parks Forum members will be kept informed about the conference and other Foundation work.

The Foundation will be making recordings, videos, pdfs for sharing for those who are unable to attend the conference on the day.

## 5. BPF Position Statement on Cycling and Walking Infrastructure

Len Wyatt, Committee Member

Len had prepared a consultation [paper which had been circulated](#).

Len was thanked for his work in putting this together.

He has been looking at the Parks Forum’s Vision and attending Cycling Forum and Walking Forum meetings and he explained that this presentation from him was to give you some of the reasons behind it and explain what is in the document.

Please respond to Len’s consultation document

### [Len’s presentation](#)

He felt it is fair to say putting in new cycle and walking infrastructure in parks and open spaces can be quite contentious with some users. He explained that Bristol City Council wants to see an increase in extent and quality. Len has also been at Bristol - Bath Path discussions – note the route is a Park not a highway. Cycling and walking is going to be more encouraged.

This consultation paper is just for Parks Forum members at the moment. Len is trying to find way to enable Park members to be more involved. He has developed it based on information that he has picked up from meetings and documents.

Bristol Parks Forum is no longer looking to have a position statement on this as part of our Vision so it could be we have a framework document or similar. Once he has received groups responses it will be looked at again and can be consulted on again at wider level.

Thanks were passed on from Parks Forum Committee to all those individuals and groups who have taken time to feed into the Forum about this, including non Parks groups.

## Conclusion

Some members may be from a group that has no experience of having one of the new modern paths and [LCWIP](#) so Len asked that everyone thinks about what it would mean for their group if they had to do this in their area.

Council cabinet members, officers and Forums with cycling and walking in their portfolio have been sent this.

A lot of our Parks Groups include cyclists and walkers amongst their members.

#### Discussion

##### Jo St Andrews Park

St Andrews Park is small and by laws allow for people to cycle through but it is not a bicycle ride just a cut through. Saw the sign on the path in Len's presentation about permissive cycling but pedestrians first. Would we have to get permission to put these in place? Is that part of this document or is it a small issue.

Len thought this is not a small issue but not covered in this document. [see later]

This is about, for example, situations where things have gone wrong and everyone is emotional and committed to parks, walking and cycling and left people a little "bruised" by those experiences.

The Roundel photo is from NSI and it is useful but depends on your situation. First port of call would be the landowners.

Lois (Redland Green) asked whether that pedestrians first logo was available via Parks Department as it is interesting and a good message. Len suggested that anyone interested should ask the Parks Department as it has been available in the past as they had installed it.

Andy from Friends of Brislington Brook said he has two hats on. As well as a Friend of Brislington Brook he is also a keen cyclist but Nightingale Valley and St Anne's Woods do not lend themselves to sharing paths with cyclists and prams for example and he would rather no cyclists at all came through. Len said that prams tend not to be thought about.

Len said that there is a plan for a cycle route through Nightingale Valley. This draft document is trying to see our way through as we don't want to see another situation like we had with Victoria Park in the past

Andy also said that the path is not suitable for bicycles because of bottle necks and mud – especially splashing of pedestrians. Len replied that they had made the same argument on Northern Slopes but were overruled by the Council's Planning Dept and there is now a 3m wide reprofiled path which is shared use.

Len felt that Parks groups do need to keep an eye on it, and there is a lot that could be done to improve the situation.

##### Q Steven – Greville Smythe Park / Cumberland Basin (South)

We have past experience of one in 2012 in Western Harbour area but plans were not put forward for Planning permission instead Council contractors, EDM, were just told to build it. At present there is also a very active skate park building – do not know who is driving that or permitting it. Whilst it is good to see a broader demographic it is a maintenance issue. The area under the bridge

approaches are being developed very rapidly (despite being in a conservation area using new and recycled materials) with no plan at all. How does one find out who is permitting that?

A Mark Logan – if it goes through a Park, then Parks Dept should be in control of that and should be able to answer.

Q Peter – Manor Woods Valley Group

Is lighting being discussed at all? Concern as an ecologist that the routes pass through nature conservation areas and that there would be appeals for lighting the paths because it is dark half of each day, but lighting would not be good for nocturnal ecology.

A Len – lighting is one of the concerns within the topic list. Am happy to talk to anyone about how we dealt with it on Northern Slopes as a conservation issue and how we have lights on and off – this was a compromise.

Q Andrew VPAG – Thanks to Len for doing all this work after our experience in VPAG.

Mark Logan agreed it has been useful because can be really hard just to find all the information. It may not solve your problems but might help in solving those problems.

**Action - Parks Groups were asked to respond by 28<sup>th</sup> February 2021.**

## **6. Ecological and Climate Emergency**

Standing item on agenda going forward.

Thanks to Susan for her work on influencing outside organisations – e.g. RHS, and an example of the contribution Forum members can make.

### **6.1 Update on grass cutting issues & meeting with BCC**

It was explained that grass cutting is one of the issues that had been discussed by the Forum and the Forum had undertaken a survey of groups' issues on grass cutting. Then the Forum had held meetings specifically on grass cutting from which list came up of issues. The Forum Committee had followed that with a meeting with Parks Department which gave everyone a greater understanding of what issues on both side are. Issues of information flow – both ways. We are working through responses from Richard and Becky and probably at next Forum meeting in May will have more to say on it. It is something we are addressing, and Parks Dept are working hard on, as they recognise there are some issues and we are talking to them. It is not forgotten and we are working on it.

Richard Fletcher (BCC, Parks Services Manager) explained that in terms of grass cutting the Forum has asked if Parks Dept can provide information about grass cutting regimes digitally and he will talk to their officers to see if they can do this. In future is definitely part of their plan. Parks Dept want to go to more mobile based data with staff access on tablets and phones to mapping data which makes it easier for Parks to change regimes and operatives to follow changed regimes. So first step is that Parks Department has transferred to a new asset management system with effect from Jan 2021. This is not an overnight solution and getting everyone using the new system and hardware will take time and this will also be linked in the future to online information for Parks groups.

It was asked whether information re grass cutting could be posted in notice boards in parks but Mark Logan felt that noticeboards would need to be updated a lot.

There have been discussions about increasing areas for scything, but the issue is that there is already a shortage of volunteers for scything areas which are already listed for scything. Ella Hogg is working on recruiting more volunteers for this and is hoping to increase training once we can do face to face training again. Looking at areas with long grass, maybe even on College Green, which might even be suitable for scything.

## **6.2 BCC plans to address these emergencies**

The One City Climate Strategy and One City Ecological Strategy published is a city wide document not a City Council document. City Council is now producing its own Ecological Emergency Plan. Sarah Jackson has been appointed to put that together. We are hoping that Sarah will be part of the event Charlee talking about and we may invite Sarah here or hold a separate meeting on the ecological emergency plan with her.

The council's Climate Emergency Plan is not ready yet but have been told they are recruiting more staff.

Also Nature Recovery Network is undertaking work on looking at how to fill in gaps.

There is a lot in the Ecological Emergency Strategy about increasing wildlife and in One City Plan – Habitat surveys are needed to establish a base line so know where we are starting from. Key thing is parks groups will be asked to do more surveys and looking at key indicator species. A lot for Parks groups to get involved in.

Parks officers under pressure this year. 10 years ago there was more than twice as many staff then as now and there is more work now not just because more people are using parks but because the Ecological Emergency response is on top of existing workload.

Susan (Troopers Hill) noted that Parks allow "What Three Words" coordinates to be given in the reporting but she wondered whether Parks grounds staff have smartphones to access that information? Richard Fletcher said no but he would note that and take that back to his staff.

Cllr Craig suggested that it might be a good idea to invite Cllr Afzal Shah as the climate strategy is in his portfolio and there is a cross over with Parks and Green Space, allotment strategies and emergencies etc. – **Action, Mark Logan to consider invite to Cllr Afzal Shah**

## **7. Parks Service Update**

Richard Fletcher (BCC, Parks Services Manager)

### **7.1 Covid and Budget updates**

All Parks' sites have been very popular and busy during 2020 and, for example, Eastwood Farm had been extraordinarily busy.

They were looking at the effects of weather and extra use and he explained that if they do have to undertake any reparation or restoration works during next year then we will.

Whilst high visitor levels have increased income through catering, there has been no income at all from events. Also the income from the Cemeteries and Cremations side had been lower this year. Meanwhile costs gone up as a result of covid – e.g. toilet cleansing – but other Council funds were paying for that not the Parks' Budget.

In terms of Parks Service although it has been very busy they have not been able to take on seasonal staff this year due to Covid and had staggered work times etc during 2020. Have had low levels of staff affected by Covid but that has increased during this winter. There have also been impacts on staff of home schooling.

In terms of the Council's Parks budget for next year, the revenue budget is not expecting too much change although they are expecting better income performance through 2021/2. An application for capital funds has been put in and will ask Cllr Craig, who is present, for an update.

Cllr Craig responded by saying that in relation to the budget setting process all of our service heads and leads had to make pitches for 2021/22 and she said that pitch put forward by Parks Team has all been included for the full budget meeting so if the budget passes a significant amount of capital monies will be available for remedial and priority works.

## **7.2 Future Parks Update**

It was reported that there had been a lot of dialogue over last few months between Future Parks national leadership and Bristol Future Parks. There is a sense that the Bristol Future Parks project is too ambitious in the timescale that they have. The Bristol team are not sure that was quite right but it is about getting to grips with what will be delivered within the funding window and what will be happening in the longer term.

They had given a presentation a few days previously to Future Parks Leadership and this might lead to a change of scale of Bristol Future Parks between now and 2022.

Richard explained they know they want to go out for Expressions of Interest (EoI) to run services etc in Parks to communities and businesses in 2022. They will start doing that process in May 2021 and it will be on a restricted number of sites to test it and ensure it is not too ambitious and that responses do not overwhelm Parks Services either so that they can be dealt with correctly and professionally. This will be done in in phases to ensure can get best out of each phase. Richard will mention to Jon James (Head of Parks) the need for a written update to the Forum.

A meeting on Thursday looking at setting them up for long term as how they can change internally in the short and long term to support communities, to get the best out of their commercial approach and that it is site appropriate. It is about setting a foundation for the next 25 years and how much base line work is done for that between now and 2022.

**– Action Rob (BPF, secretary) to distribute written update from Jon James at conclusion of discussions on future of the project**

## **7.3 Parks & Green Space Strategy**

Mary-Jane Wilshire (BCC Parks Service)

Mary joined the City Council in June 2020.

Mary explained that her presentation had been updated the previous day around the FPA that Richard spoke about. She is happy to receive comments / questions via email. Her email address is [mary-jane.wilshire@bristol.gov.uk](mailto:mary-jane.wilshire@bristol.gov.uk)

The details are in the presentation

<http://www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/BPF130221PGSSOverview.pdf>

Mary said that members of the Parks Forum are welcome to get involved in any of the working groups. She will also be convening quarterly strategy group meetings

Sarah West (Friends of Eastville Park) said that the presentation and information was really interesting and sounds good about how will they engage with communities. She was frustrated that the process had been running for some time that but it is difficult to reach people at the city council to engage with this. She queried whether Mary- Jane was the only person.

Mary Jane explained that she is the programme manager and has just a recently recruited a communications person following change of personnel, who has just started. In terms of engagement, Hayley Swift is employed by the Community Development team who is leading on engagement for the Future Parks programme which is most closely linked.

Richard Fletcher said that the Parks and Green Space Strategy is to absorb the Future Parks work and it will be much easier for communication in future as they will know who is communicating on what.

Mark Logan said he could see this gathering pace very quickly and from the Parks Forum perspective there is a huge potential for engagement and we do need to be involved in this. Forum members interested please contact the Parks Forum Committee so that we can cover all of the working groups.

Steven noted the statement regarding the need for an excellent quality park or green space within 10 minute of home as this comes straight to the Western Harbour issue and Richard confirmed that this comes from the One City Plan. He said they are also likely to adopt Green Flag.

Steven responded that he was seeing Greville Smythe Park / Cumberland Basin (South) coming up again and again on developers plans and yet the whole Cumberland basin area had had large numbers of people pouring out for exercise during the Covid pandemic and the loss of it the Park would be key.

Len made the observation that when the Council talks about Future Parks he feels unnerved as to where existing Parks Groups fit in. Having listened to the Scrutiny Committee on the previous Tuesday evening he had struggled with the language being used by Future Parks officials in relation to Parks Group. The Committee kept talking about the role of Parks Groups as it seemed that there was not any acknowledgement of the value of existing parks Group in Future Parks responses.

Caroline (Arnos Court Park) Noted the ambition to have green space / quality within 10 minutes of everyone's home and queried whether any mapping had taken place. Richard confirmed that they do have maps of 10-minute buffer around each site but that was not the same as the excellent quality criteria. He was sure Parks could provide a map that tells where the gaps are in terms of provision but not of excellence as they have not taken green flag measurements yet but will involve communities and our plan is to work with you on this.

Caroline felt that having that information would be really useful for residents who may know there is a green space near and might decide to start up a friends group.



Parks Service is assessing the viability of each of their parks and green spaces and should be able to do that going forward and develop and strengthen that piece of work.

Gill (Canford Park) commented that Parks Dept has always been scratching around for money and she had been flabbergasted when she learnt early on that Parks are not a statutory duty on councils. She wondered whether Covid showing how important parks are might mean this is the time for people to start pressing for a statutory duty although she did not know if that might help them get more money. For people's mental as well as physical health she felt we ought to be pressing for this.

Mark Logan advised that the statutory duty is being pressed for nationally but not gained too much traction at the moment.

Jo (St Andrews Park) – noted that information on BCC website never has a published date. She has written every year to the website saying please put a date on the document because more than once she had used a document from the Council's website that has turned out to be superseded. She has never had a reply. She explained that there needed to be basic reference date – not an “website updated today” message - but each document has to clearly referenced.

Richard explained that Parks Dept has high ambitions for the website going forward and are working with those that manage online content to see how they can make significant changes and will keep you informed.

Lois was concerned that there have been quite a few incidents in Redland Green where personal trainers have been putting ropes and bungee type elastic things on lamp posts and trees then pulling on them full weight exercising. The Friends of Redland Green have had word with them about cost of the impact of this, but when Parks are doing lettings trainers should be told they are not to damage any infrastructure or trees in Parks. They can cause a lot of damage. This has been reported to Parks. The Friends got a very aggressive response when they spoke to one person.

Richard explained that most of the time this is not done as any licenced activity but nothing anyone can do about it unless there is “harm”.

Frances (Friends of Badock's Wood) queried if dog walkers and personal trainers now had to be licenced activities in the Parks as this was raised some years ago.

Richard said this was put on hold but they are looking at this again and would at the very least require them to have a risk assessment and insurance even if they do not charge for time being.

Mark Logan thanked to everyone for attending the meeting. Please email [info@bristolparksforum.org.uk](mailto:info@bristolparksforum.org.uk) if you have any further comments on queries.

Next Meeting  
Sat 15th May 2021