

Minutes of the Bristol Parks Forum held 17th October 2020 on Zoom Present

BPF Committee : Mark Logan, Rob Acton-Campbell, Frances Robertson, Len Wyatt, Derek Hawkins, Sarah West.

Other Park Group representatives: 20 representatives from 18 other park groups or organisations across Bristol.

Bristol City Council: Jon James (Head of Parks), Ella Hogg (Volunteer Co-ordinator), Richard Goldthorpe (Placeshaping Manager, BCC City Design)



1. Welcome and Introductions

Mark Logan, BPF Chair

Mark welcomed and thanked everyone for coming to the Parks Forum's first online meeting. It was the first time this had been held on Zoom and was due to the continuing Covid 19 pandemic.

Attendees were asked to provide feedback and also to let the Committee know if people struggle with this form of meeting.

Action: ALL

2. Annual General Meeting

Mark noted it has been a difficult year for all. He expressed his thanks to the rest of the committee, especially Rob Acton-Campbell, Len Wyatt and Frances Robertson for all their work over the past 6 months. Mark explained that he has been less able to be active on Parks Forum business during this period due to his working on pandemic related work in his day job.

3. Election of Bristol Parks Forum Officers

Chair

Mark Logan was re-nominated as Chair of the Forum.

There had been no other nominations for this role and Mark Logan confirmed that he was willing to stand again but if anyone else wanted to stand to let the meeting know. No one else volunteered. Put to the vote - Mark Logan elected to be Chair unanimously

Vice Chair

There had been no nominations for this role.

Sam Thomson has been vice chair of the Forum but has had to stand down due to other commitments. Sam was not present but thanks were given to be passed on to her.

There had been no other nominations for this role but as a committee if Mark is not available for meetings one of the other members of the committee will take on that role. If anyone comes forward we will take that to next meeting

Election of committee

The current Committee were willing to stand again and no new nominations or offers had been received.

The Committee standing again for re-election were:

Chair – Mark Logan

Rob Acton-Campbell - Secretary

Derek Hawkins – Treasurer

Frances Robertson – Minuting secretary

Len Wyatt

Sarah West

No other nominations were received. Existing committee less Sam elected unanimously. The Forum now has a Vice-Chair vacancy.

The Forum would welcome more members on the Committee, please email if you are interested.

4. Financial report

Derek Hawkins

Derek reported that there had been little financial change over the past year. The end of year balance in the bank account is £3,791 of which £177 came from Friends groups to help fund the meeting room charges for the group.

It was noted that the balance is money the Forum holds on behalf of Friends of Castle Park and ParkWork

Derek had no other matters to report.

Mark Logan commented that it was useful to have money to fund meetings. There is no reason not to receive funds meanwhile so groups can continue to donate to the Forum and we can discuss if we want to spend any on groups activities or perhaps a donation to the Bristol & Bath Parks Foundation.

Tessa – VPAG – reported that VPAG is celebrating an anniversary next year and putting together a project on climate change, social engagement queried. She wondered whether BPF or BBPF can hold funds for them as VPAG does not have charitable status and some funders require this.

Rob agreed that BBPF as can but noted that there are a lot funds you can apply to that you do not need to be registered charity for. Also noted that BBPF cannot do this for lots of small projects.

5. Ecological and Climate Emergency Strategy BPF response

Len Wyatt

[A report prepared by Len](#) had been circulated and he gave a brief presentation about it.

Len explained that the background to this report was that in September the Forum sent out a survey and the report reflects the responses that were received.

Fewer groups reported they are doing climate change actions than ecological action but all groups who responded were doing something on the ecological emergency. Groups found that a lot of things they were already doing were in line with the actions to tackle the ecological emergency.. It was noted that there was some rewilding in parks areas where groups were working with landowner to let nature take its course.

Len reported he had analysed the responses and considered possible future actions and also the relationship with the Parks Forum Vision. It was noted that the Vision is fairly general so actions for change can be put under the existing headings or the Forum might wish to change them.

It is clear that we need to do something and Len noted that Bristol's Mayor says do not wait for the City Council to do something, but just do something. Len said however we do need to work with the City Council in Parks.

He reported that the Friends of Badock's Wood Group were taking a motion to their AGM resolving to take action to support the Emergencies strategies.

Len recommends people look at the actions in the report to see if the groups are already doing something similar and if not is there something that another group is doing that they could do too.

It is felt that it is also useful to be able to say that a group is taking actions on these emergencies when applying for funding, writing PR etc.

Len found that the Zoom meetings that had been held on the topic had given an opportunity to hear interesting stories from groups about how they have got to where they are on the matter. He also noted that whilst Bristol is very good at doing things there could be things happening elsewhere that we can share so interaction with other areas and hearing their stories will be good.

Martin – Manor Woods Valley Group – commented that actions are important but perhaps even more important is a shift in the mindset but rather than concentrating on individual actions which whilst important worth thinking about everything we do through an ecological lens. E.g. if organising a picnic in a park for local community have it with an ecological theme.

Susan – Troopers Hill – reported that her group along with a couple of others had put in for the RHS its your neighbourhood and pride in parks awards. However they had found disturbing RHS documents online giving advice to gardeners about how to kill a range of “weeds” from their lawn and a list of weedkillers available to gardeners and whilst caveated that the RHS was not necessarily endorsing these products there were 4 pages listing them including glyphosate. She has spoken to SW in Bloom and Friends of Troopers Hill will be putting forward a resolution if they do not change their position.

Mark Logan suggested that the Forum should be writing to the RHS about this and he will work with Susan and put mailshot out to Forum membership for agreement on position to RHS.

Action: Mark Logan & Susan

Peter - MVWG – noted that there is no current alternative to glyphosate for certain jobs such as tackling Japanese knotweed so he thought this needed to be careful worded.

Jo – Fo St Andrews Park - asked Len if her group can add to the list of actions. She also queried how that learning from others will be expanded?

Len felt that groups were struggling more on what the climate change issue was about. As an example NSI had started by talking about low carbon and what that might mean for the group.

Len re is happy to collate information from groups as we go along. Mark suggested that groups email the Forum any further information about their actions on either or both emergencies and these can be collated and reported on at the next meeting.

Action: Parks Group to email to BPF any further information on their activities and actions on the Ecological and Climate Change Emergencies and these will be collated for next meeting.

6. Grass cutting in parks

Len Wyatt

[Len had circulated a report](#) and gave a brief presentation.

The Committee had asked for information from groups about grass cutting regimes in their areas following groups raising concerns.

Similar numbers of groups responded as had responded on the Ecological Emergency survey. There are some frustrations not just with grass cutting but general management and communications. There were some shared issues between groups. Grass cuttings – early mowing – seemed to be brought forward compared to what was expected, undercutting in some areas and overcutting in others, and late hay cut.

Groups were urged to read the paper circulated as there are useful points from groups and Parks. Len’s analysis was that most common issue was communication on grass cutting between Council staff and groups.

Bristol Council's GIS Pinpoint lists the mowing regimes in each Park which can be clicked on. Few respondents had noted what the relationship was between the regimes on there, in any management plans and what is actually happening on the ground.

As previously reported, the Parks Forum Committee members will be meeting with Parks Department to talk about the issues raised and before that will hold a pre meeting to finalise topics and Forum concerns. Sue said she would like to attend the Forum pre meeting.

Action: Committee

7. Parks Service Update / Future Parks

Jon James, Head of Parks

7.1 Future Parks - [presentation](#)

Jon reported that the Future Parks Project has been in train for close to 12 months now. It is about transformational change to our parks and green spaces. Bristol is one of 7 Local Authorities that received funding (including Edinburgh and Plymouth).

The Project is looking at ideas for new ways of working. Also looking at health, business opportunities, transformational change, ecology etc. He reported that 160 ecological surveys are being done in Bristol (Jon did not have details of where these were taking place and one which sites)

The Project is also looking to business opportunities to help fund parks.

He noted that Health is a big driver – have a natural capital account and can quantify that in terms of how this can save health service money in terms of physical and mental health. There is a tool which is work in progress and once they get it right he believes it will be very useful tool.

There has been a 30% increase in use of parks and green spaces in Bristol this year. This was particularly important as some neighbourhoods have little access to private outdoor space – e.g. gardens. As a result of the response to the pandemic, more people aware of the importance of Parks for health and wellbeing, not just in Bristol but across whole UK.

They are working with the local Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and other health partners.

The Future Parks Project is about half way through and Jon noted that there is now a need to review where they are. It is a flexible programme. They are looking at what changes need to be made and looking at the pilots – Eastville and Lawrence Hill before going out for Expressions of Interest (EoI).

BCC had successfully applied for extension funding of £238K. This will allow the project to deliver more outcomes but also gained them more time to do this. But there are key things to be done to achieve funding. They must achieve the mid-point review and there are challenges to address as part of the programme and work. Part of the review is to ensure that the project is still fit for purpose. This is being reviewed with the Future Parks accelerator team from the National Trust.

There are things they are already excited about – e.g. our volunteering and the way Ella is doing that, they like our health initiatives and other elements of trying to address the Project to make it more fit for purpose.

Expressions of Interest will be about how we can work with businesses, use parks better etc. Initially it had been the intention to include every park in Bristol but the accelerator group says this is ambitious: how would they deal with 2-3 organisations coming forward for every site in Bristol ? They need to undertake a phased programme rather than do it all at one go so that they can make sure they respond properly to anyone coming forward and try to manage and meet their expectations. Therefore there is a need to make sure in the first phase that they have a manageable number of sites going forward. Jon said they want to make sure there is a good spread geographically and demographically.

Mark Logan asked that Jon share their mid year review with the Forum and Sarah West said it was necessary to involve parks groups more rather than take a top down approach. Jon agreed that they could probably have better dialogue and making sure that they can do that is one of the challenges.

Eastville Park's pilot is a simulation. Future Parks are working with BBPF and others to test the approach they are taking so before they go out in February for Expressions of Interest they want to test the information they are putting forward. (Jon noted that the Expression of Interest description is probably not the best phrase to use for this.) He explained that they do not want to go out with information packs that only mean something to local government officers so they want to make sure that that paperwork is fit for purpose, so are just testing what they are doing.

Jon said he was sure that when they go to Eol in February and in phases they will learn something from that which will be useful when they go live.

Jon stated that Parks are responding to the ecological emergency and are mindful that it is a key criteria for measuring what the impact of the Eol would be on the site. Is it going to be a positive or negative on that site? Becky Belfin (Parks Conservation Officer) is doing the surveys to base line the information for each site to make sure sites can support what the Council is going to do. Have a huge amount of sites to cover.

It is not all about business but also about greater involvement with communities but he recognises that they have not done a great job at involving hard to reach communities. What can we do to engage with them? Business element is aimed at getting more funding to invest in parks.

In response to a query Jon advised the Forum to contact Becky for information about the ecological survey sites.

7.2 Parks Update

Jon James reported that due to the Covid 19 pandemic Parks were unable to employ any seasonal staff as no training was possible so they had had to reconfigure their work and staff. When they had to close play areas, car parks, catering outlets etc it was very frantic time at lockdown and unlocking and being Covid secure was even greater challenge and continues to be a challenge. But Covid has raised the relevance and importance of parks and green spaces and brought them to the forefront.

Jon explained that with a change of personnel at the Council, his remit within Parks and green spaces – as of the previous week – had changed and Jon's role now includes Harbours so he has picked up Blue as well as green infrastructure in Bristol – so Harbours, Parks and Green Spaces all under one heading now.

8. Green & Blue Infrastructure Strategy

Richard Goldthorpe, Placeshaping Manager, BCC City Design

Richard shared a presentation entitled – [Needs for a Green Infrastructure](#)

He explained that he is in Bristol Council's City Design Team in Planning

This piece of work is a gap in the cities thinking. He is interested in testing this out with different groups.

The following notes need to be read in conjunction with the presentation as they are based on Richard's commentary on the slides.

City Design works across the city on the built environment, streets, landscape – green and blue infrastructure (GI). It is a multidisciplinary team. They are looking at how we make these

connections both from a regional level and make it real within the city for parks and green spaces across a huge scale. The presentation showed the nature recovery network region. One of the questions being addressed is how do you bring networks into city and how do we reach out and connect with those.

GI is a network and should be a planned, managed and coordinated as a network. From large scale – countryside / to medium scale – estates / to small scale – gardens / micro grass, living walls etc

The assets perform functions – see next slide – and the functions bring benefits to the city. Small scale opportunities like living roofs and living walls – see slides

Green streets = e.g. slide from Harbourside and Whiteladies Road and urban hedges e.g. Easton Way

River corridors – slide of River Avon

All those green and blue corridors running through the city and out to the country – e.g. limestone ridge down to Clevedon (photo)

Nature recovery identifies grassland, woodland, wetland areas – and the gaps that need to be plugged in the networks of areas.

Planning policy – BCS9 Strategic GI network – map needs to be updated and tested and shown as the primary network

A multi-layer approach is being used. The primary network – see slide – includes parks and green spaces that touch those corridors but are some more isolated that do not connect and need to look at ways we can harness those in.

3 levels of network, The Green grid consisting – primary, secondary, tertiary which takes into account the need for green active travel

Slide sequence of how that might work – example using Frome, Avon, M32 corridor and mapped existing GI assets. Can see are really strong ones and some that are less connected. If speculate and apply primary corridors, - green , green grid – purple how can tie back to primary

Next level – orange – areas of development and change – places where tertiary network can work with individual developments to connect back into network.

Liveable neighbourhoods – St Paul's, Old Market etc encouraging walking and cycling, green streets and new pocket parks throughout city.

The situation would benefit from a GI Toolkit.

Already have information about heat vulnerability, green deficit, air quality etc so can overlay them then identify opportunities to help address the issues – street trees, meadows, pollinator planting, access to green space facilities.

This also needs to be tied in with lots of related work at the City council such as the ecological emergency work, Future Parks accelerator, etc

The Green Infrastructure strategy becomes a way to help coordinate how these networks can benefit the city. It can borrow from existing strategies and help inform future e.g. pollinator strategies, street drainage strategies etc. It should also inform developers in developing their spaces.

What next?

The Green Infrastructure strategy is set out in One City Plan for 2021 so Richard is undertaking informal discussions like this one, and

- Making the case

- Identifying resources needed
- Project planning including engagement process

The Strategy is about coordination and provides guidance for groups wanting to have parks and green policy aspirations

Q&A

Questioner re Western Harbour development asked how does BCS9 and strategy below it fit in? Sarah West – my biggest question comes around the need to remove some of the space given over for cars which seem to dominate the city. When people are getting out of the cars then a lot of opportunities to improve infrastructure. She noted that the Mayor has put back plans for a congestion charge in the city. How can you achieve change?

Richard responded that there is a lot of change happening. Bristol Bridge has been closed, the old city centre is closed to cars. Changes have been made to the amount of parking – long term change – and this starts to create opportunities for pocket parks, trees, green streets, etc. He is optimistic that will be bringing more multifunctionality to the streets. There are places in the city where change is going to happen e.g. Western Harbour, but real test will be how we integrate green in that.

Alison commented that is good to see this strategy coming forward. She was concerned that there was no acknowledgement of the important link of front and back gardens. A recognition would be very helpful to stop the number of gardens losing which is also flood issues as well.

Richard said that front and back gardens in his mind in terms of planning policy and community are opportunities to create links that might exist. E.g. in Redcatch Community Garden AWT and others are working on a gardens Project

Len Wyatt queried how this strategy relates to Planning?

Richard explained that having a strategy helps get real delivery on the ground and it will be there as a strategy to inform future policy and environmental net gain .

Stephen raised the issue of protection of green spaces and road consultation. He noted that Richard had showed a slide of Avon new cut and maybe there is a wildlife corridor continuity all the way down the river and this was in the consultation on green spaces where proposals for linear protection along edge of cut. Had three wards of Southville, Bedminster and Hotwells been approached?. But all proposals went white in the consultation document map as they went into Western Harbour so for the whole water's edge the green protection strips stop at Greenbank Road etc so there is nothing putting that continuity of protection into the Western Harbour plans.

Richard said he was happy to pass on these comments.

Action: Richard Goldthorpe

Frances Robertson noted that there were SUDS requirements for paving over e.g. front gardens for parking above a certain area of square metres, but by Badock's Wood for example, one street has the majority of front gardens tarmac'd over and there seems to be no consideration of the cumulated impacts of such tarmacking. When it rains the water doesn't infiltrate as there is no soil but just flows into the drains and rushes straight into the wood at the bottom of the road and has an impact on sudden flash of water into the river. This is the case in lots of residential areas where the street drains go into the nearest river. Why is there no policy on re cumulative impacts of such tarmacking?

Sarah W agreed that sustainable drainage needs to be the only option in Bristol.

Richard said that GI strategy should address it and also should be addressed by surface water flooding policies.

Mark felt that it needs to be in the Green Infrastructure strategy to force that link.

Richard said it was good to think about parks and where existing green space can support sustainable drainage – e.g. Sheffield doing this and providing habitats - something to think about and how to support future projects

Mark noted that such schemes can be problematic, need maintenance and can end up being an eyesore.

Richard agreed that it was important to get it right and unlock all the challenges. Although they may not have got it right in the past they do have to get it right in the next 5-10 years.

Richard said he would feed the comments on drainage and cumulative impacts to the flood risk manager for surface water flooding. **Action: Richard Goldthorpe**

Rob noted that Bristol's Flood Strategy Consultation had just been published and he would flag it up. **Action: Rob**

Peter MVWG queried where are the Future Parks ecological surveys were taking place and Mark Logan said he would liaise with Becky who should know where they are. **Action: Mark Logan**

Tessa – Thanked Richard for a really great presentation.

She stated that Bedminster Green is synonymous with how not to start a development. They have never seen a strategy that looks at how they link into the wider green infrastructure. She said that from Temple Meads to West Street it is brownfield with short term buildings and will be developed so would be really interesting to see how that area fits into Richard's plan. At the moment it is all piecemeal and nothing proposed that fits into your strategy. Trees are being chopped back for example and they are losing existing green space. It is fantastic that there are these plans for the future but what about the current situation?

Richard explained that this is City scale work and will take time to produce but what he'd been talking about is the bedrock of what City Design does – and whilst it is not a strategy for Bedminster Green it is forming part of the City thinking.

9. AOB

Len commented that he sometimes reads the Mayor's State of the City address with trepidation and this year he noted that Parks got a mention and thanks to everyone for their work in Parks and this should provide encouragement to people.

Mark agreed and that there is a need to keep pressure up about the importance of parks and green spaces.

Date of next meeting to be agreed – probably by zoom.