

Notes of Bristol Parks Forum Meeting held Sat 26th February at Summerhill Methodist Church, St George

1. Welcome & Introductions

Those present introduced themselves. A number of members were attending for the first time. A list of all present is held by the Bristol Parks Forum Secretary.

BCC Councillors present:

Cllr Ellie King, Cabinet Member, Public Health, Communities and Bristol One City

BCC officers present:

Richard Fletcher, Parks Services Manager; Mary-Jane Wilshire, Parks Development Officer

Your Park officer present:

Judy Gowenlock Project Officer

2. Matters Arising & Actions from last meeting

- i) Battery Tool training – will be taking place. Contact Ella Hogg, Volunteer Coordinator, Parks Department for more information
- ii) Cycling & Walking infrastructure – there will be a chance for Parks Groups to have a look at our policy at the meeting as paper copies were on the table at the back of the room and the Forum will be going public on consultation within a few weeks.
- iii) Waste survey – Frances reported that the Committee had raised the issues with Richard Fletcher but she had not yet sent the final report with details per park to Richard but would do so as soon as possible. A key response from Richard was that there was no policy as such about litter bin types, sizes etc. He recognised it could be helpful to address this. Sarah from Hillfields Community Garden queried whether there had been a response to the survey from them. Frances (subsequent to the meeting) confirmed that the Friends of Hillfields Park had responded and it was noted that the Community Garden is within the park.

3. Brief presentations, where we are now - plans / challenges / opportunities for 2022

i. Green spaces – increased use, planning issues

Len Wyatt, BPF committee.

Len explained that the Bristol Parks Forum Committee felt that there needs to be discussion about how the Forum deals with Planning issues ranging from the citywide Local plan to individual sites. If Forum members have views on what was being raised then they should please let the Forum Committee know, as we need to find a way forward on this.

Len referred to three areas as examples, the loss of specific sites Western Slopes, Northern Slopes Brislington Meadows etc.

He flagged up that there is pressure on existing sites for redevelopment – developers are starting to put large numbers of people in geographically small places – e.g. Western Harbour, Callowhill Court etc. [See Len's Presentation notes here](#). This could mean that existing places are being developed with the introduction of dense housing where the nearest park, for example, might be Castle Park and the increasing pressure on an already very busy park would be immense.

Len referred to one near him in South Bristol where developers were planning 11-14 storey housing but no green space nearby and public realm green space within the development is small. The nearest park to that development would be Victoria Park. So pressure of usage on existing parks is an issue.

There is also need for a new park in central Bristol. The Forum raised this in its response letter to the City Council's Budget Consultation – [see letter here](#). Len commented that there are examples, for example in Nottingham and other cities of unused retail spaces being turned into green spaces.

Len asked Forum members what does your group think?

- Is this the right time to raise these issues?
- How do we, not just the Committee, as a Forum take this forward?
- Is it reviewing our Terms of Reference or Developing a position statement?
- Responding to the new Parks and Green Spaces strategy – and the new Local Plan?
- Or something else?

A copy of his notes would be circulated and Groups are asked to respond to help the Forum Committee formulate a position on behalf of the Forum. **Action: ALL**

ii. Parks & Green Spaces Strategy

Mary-Jane Wilshire, BCC Parks Development Officer

Mary-Jane explained that she had been in a range of BCC roles including working in Planning. She has been working in Parks Department for the last 1.5 years and her role is to develop and support development of PGSS.

The last Parks and Green Spaces Strategy (PGSS) was published in 2008 and was very technical piece of work designed to feed into planning decisions and used a system for standards based on quality, quantity and distance and influenced planning decisions for a long time and enabled S106 [planning gain] contributions. But in 2013 or 14 when planning law changed from S106 contributions to CIL [Community Infrastructure Levy] and that broke the link between development and parks.

It has been over 13 years since the last Strategy was published and lot of change has taken place at local and national government, including 2 x emergency strategies being published in Bristol [Climate Change and Ecological] and health issues around access to open spaces and supporting at local level how services open up parks and how to ensure that park provision is equal across the city so that people in health deprivation have equal access to open spaces. Bristol's One City Plan is also about being more collaborative with communities and city partners to unlock expertise and resources and tackle issues and opportunities together. So a new plan PGSS is needed. At the same time there has been a backdrop to all this of austerity and Parks Service budget having to make savings year on year. So today it is a very different situation that when the last strategy was developed.

Mary-Jane said that the forthcoming PGS Strategy will be more about creating a framework for partnerships bringing people together with a shared interest of parks – health interests and empowering community groups to do more. So the Strategy has been started by the Council from premise of wanting to bring community together. Therefore they are starting with a co-design process. Mary-Jane and Kit Beaumont job share and benefit from work stream leads. There are experts who are coordinating priority themes which broadly reflect community and shared solutions: health inequality, skills and employability, nature, sustainable food production, climate change and green grid – connections between parks to support connections between wildlife for example. These will include looking at people and wildlife – e.g. improving streets and public realm; and getting support from a range of skills and inputs across the Council.

Mary-Jane explained that there is a Project Team which reports to a Project Board which consists of Heads of Service and Service managers across the Council. The Project Board is chaired by John James [Head of Service for Natural and Marine Environment] and they report to DMT [Directors' Management Team] Patsy [Mellor, Director, Management of Place] and Stephen Peacock [Executive Director Growth and Regeneration].

There is a Project Steering group. The group is interested in health and nature about which lots of groups are concerned. 15 reps were at the group the previous week.

She explained that they have set up a community engagement exercise, engaging with “anchor” groups, community partners, etc. and this includes the Friends of parks and open spaces groups. 5 questions were sent to Friends of groups from Ella Hogg [Parks Volunteer Coordinator] and looked at by an external consultant.

There is a priority group working on Theory of Change – what are the goals we are aiming for and what are the resources needed to achieve these?

Co-design groups are meeting virtually. Divided into two main topics to reflect the Council’s way of working. Place – looking at Nature Recovery, Food, Climate Change and Green Grid are on 8th and 29th March
People – looking at Community and shared solutions, skills and employability are on 10th March and 31st March
Draft theories of change will be presented to partners and community groups who have not yet been involved. The first workshop will be about identifying options and the second will be looking at priorities against resource availabilities. A 3rd workshop – dates yet to be decided – will be planning the delivery.

The Parks & Green Spaces Strategy is to be written up by summertime 2022 for consultation in September 2022.

Anyone who has any questions or comments should contact Mary-Jane by email her:
mary-jane.wilshire@bristol.gov.uk

iii. **Your Park - The Work of the Charity & Support for Park Groups**

Judy Gowenlock, Project Officer, Your Park Bristol & Bath –

Your Park was previously called Bristol & Bath Parks Foundation.

Judy reported on 9 highlights that they had achieved last year and a talked a bit about this year.

Judy joined Your Park in June 2021 so she explained that some of these 9 highlights predate her joining Your Park.

- Isla Foundation Training – after consultation with parks groups about skills needs etc and identified 4 different themes – 15 expert speakers with 200 attendees
- Park Activator pilot in Netham and ? Park – funded by Comic Relief and Merchant Venturers – e.g. nature enhancement, nature connection play dates, etc and recently working with Somali community members and English practicing in the park etc
- College Green wildlife project – following Greta Thunberg visit and funds raised to repair College Green. Judy listed details of planting that has taken place over the past 2 years
- Match funding - £5000 – allocated to the Love Your Park Community Fund. Other fundraising initiatives led to £12000 being raised.
- **Love Your Park Community Fund**
Voscur advised them on their programme development and the first round was announced in Love Your Parks week in July 2021. Your Park received 39 applications. 18 of these were shortlisted and considered by a panel of 8 experts. 13 grants were awarded: 10 in Bristol and 3 in B&NES . Since then they have seen groups who received grants grow and develop and evidence of how a small amount of money can make a big difference.
- Group litter pick
- Name change B&B Parks Foundation to Your Park Bristol & Bath

- Research using grant from Quartet . The focus of the work was on carers. Noted that 3 out of 5 of us will be a carer at some time. The research looked at parent carers and carers of those with dementia. The report is to follow
- Clinical Commissioning Group grant for green activity for health (Judy has details)

Next year

Next year they will learn from what they did last year. They are expanding their work.

Judy said it was nice to see people here at the Parks Forum who were nominated for, and some of whom you're your Park's volunteer awards.

Main plans for this year

- Seeking long term funding to expand activator programme
- Increase capacity for improving health outcomes
- Continuing to support community groups and Friends group directly and through anchor organisations*
- Well park – green social prescribing project in April
- Research on barriers to unpaid carers using parks
- Fundraising – Anna Fisher
- Queen's Platinum Jubilee Year

Judy asked would the Forum consider doing something on Sat 4th June for the Jubilee – e.g. community picnics in Bristol and whether Your Park could apply under one banner for funding and then a number of groups then come under that banner?

Action – groups please email judy@yourpark.org.uk if you are interested

[*Anchor organisations are organisations that are rooted in the area – ranging from large organisations such as NHS to Community organisations.]

iv. Parks Operations

Richard Fletcher, Head of Parks Service, BCC

Bristol Future Parks

Richard reported that a pilot was underway to get more activity and raise more income for parks. Monitoring and promoting sites in the city to encourage people to invest in broad ways and the breadth of the call was very wide. Process of Expressions of Interest finished at the end of December 2021. They had received 30 submissions for the 5 selected parks. 7 were from businesses and the rest from community organisations, charities and individuals.

The Stage 1 assessment took place in January 2022.

The Natural History Consortium is undertaking an assessment exercise to evaluate the pilot: was it logical, was it accessible etc

Ecological Emergency

Becky Belfin has moved to be the Project Officer for Managing for Nature. Her work will include looking at reducing Council pesticide use in the city and this goes beyond Parks to other services – e.g. highways who use glyphosate. Becky is looking at how the Council can reduce or cease the use.

These two issues will have a big impact on parks management. They will be building on changes that were started in 2015; looking at how can Parks Dept can manage for nature whilst still providing other functions of parks that people enjoy. How do they use machinery, do we need new machinery, training staff etc etc

There is also a Communications Plan which will look at bringing hearts and minds with the Parks Dept. Richard commented that whilst a lot of social media may be about managing parks more for wildlife, at the same time

most of complaints that come into Parks staff are about not cutting grass enough. There is a communications issue around managing parks and green spaces for wildlife

Within the Council, Parks Department delivers grounds management for housing – so looking at a review of this and there will be new service level agreement.

Modernisation of ways of working is taking place, e.g. using mapping systems on IT tablets for staff so that they can get, grounds instructions – e.g. mowing - and updated instructions if they've changed, when they actually arrive on site. There are other grounds maintenance companies which already operate that way, and Parks Dept has been waiting for the procurement process to go through. Once these systems are up and running Parks staff can then share with Parks groups what is being done in that year, and where they are in the process.

Tree Planning

Bristol City Council Cabinet on 8th February 2022 agreed a Tree Planting Strategy and Plan. This lays out how the Council will make a contribution to the tree canopy of Bristol. It is noted that they cannot just plant trees anywhere as they have impacts so there is a need to be sure tree planting is not harming other habitats. Right trees right place. They are looking at streets as well as parks. This is an important piece of work and Richard hoped the strategy will be adopted by early 2023. National Heritage Lottery Fund application from the Council for the development phase of that project was submitted in February and they should hear the outcome in the Summer. It is focusing on restoring heritage and is a £3.5 million pound project.

Allotment and food growing strategy.

The current BCC strategy is quite old and there was a need for the Council to update it. There are a number of targets in the One City Plan around allotments and food growing. Work that needs to be undertaken includes having to determine what land is suitable for food growing, what demand there is for allotments etc. Richard reported that there are in Bristol 96 allotment sites, 4,500 plots, 4000 tenants and a further 8000+ on the allotments waiting list.

Public toilets

Facilities management service will maintain and clean them in the city and parks. This started temporarily in lockdown but is now permanent, however there are issues with parks toilets and Parks staff are still involved in them.

Ash Die Back

This is a big subject which Richard said he would need to talk with the Forum about at later date. Ash trees are suffering a high mortality rate though more information about this is being gathered. It is recognised that infected trees can become unsafe and the Council is working on how they tackle that at the moment.

What's Going well

New resources: Allotment Team and Tree Service

Hartcliffe green social prescribing going well

Delivery of capital investment – £700K capital investment in Parks

£1.2m of schemes should be concluded by end of this financial year.

£480 pounds of new schemes for 2022/23

£1.2m of schemes in 2023/24

There are a lot of capital schemes.

£3m capital maintenance scheme ongoing since 2021, £600K of that to be spent next financial year.

Internal landscaping and construction team are doing 100s of jobs all over the city – paths, steps etc. Richard reported that this is working well.

Volunteering numbers across the city are growing well as are their achievements. The volunteer awards were really great and even though awards were online it felt a lot of support from across all those present.

Challenges

- Delivering “managing for nature” policy change.
- Sports asset transfer – number of sites to be managed by 3rd party or community groups
- Increased costs of repairs
- Summer operations and resourcing. Parks rely on ~21 seasonal staff but they had been unable to recruit the staff but were still trying. Richard felt this was probably because of other employment opportunities available.
- Training opportunities for young people. These have not been available for a while but from April 2022 it is hoped that Parks Department will have the resources and capacity to offer this. 4 places will be allocated initially but this may be extended.
- Development in the city. A lot is happening across the city which does require the Parks Manager to get involved and this takes up time.

Questions & Answers

Chris from Snuff Mills raised concerns about the new parking charges and the impact on volunteers. She queried whether there is a possibility that volunteers can have some free parking permits / ticket so that when they come and help at a park they do not have to pay.

Richard Fletcher explained that Parks Department can offer one of two things: reimbursement or a permit but he would prefer to reimburse people as the permit situation is difficult with Parking Services managing the parking. He suggested that if the Friends could reimburse their volunteers then invoice Richard that would be the most workable solution at the moment.

Lois, Redland Green, commented that there is a permit scheme for allotment holders which was a system that might be applied but they still have to pay a reduced rate. She thought a clear process needed to be set out.

Richard felt that it was just a trust issue and he was willing to live with that.

He explained that the parking charges are being implemented to raise income for Parks and increase the throughput at some places e.g. Oldbury Court and Blaise. This was the reason why the issuing of lots of permits is problematic.

For the time being he asked that volunteers who have to pay to park should keep a record until system is worked out and then reimbursement will be sorted out.

Martin Manor Woods Valley Group commented that it was good news about the policy for managing for nature and he felt it was even better knowing that Becky Belfin will be working on this.

He noted that regarding issues of communication and friends groups they can sometimes be surprised – sometimes pleasantly, other times disappointedly – when things happen and the comms is really important. Martin explained that the group really wants to hear what is planned for our spaces so that they can help.

He reported that green social prescribing is a new initiative in their area which they are supporting. Some of the residents in the Manor Woods Valley (MWV) area don't have access because of the entry barriers – e.g.

some people with wheelchairs and buggies cannot get in. He cited an example of a person with only a Zimmer frame who couldn't negotiate the entrance to Manor Woods Valley and that should not be happening. It is also a barrier to the green social prescribing initiative. Martin asked Richard to say something about what the Council might be doing? He noted that it was not just in MWV but that all along the Malago Greenway are barriers that need to be replaced by more friendly barriers. He asked if there are plans to do that, because he said if not Parks Department could expect a challenge under breach of equalities.

Richard Fletcher replied.

On the issue of engagement there are two common processes: identifying change, so happy to hear ideas, then next step is when mapped out they will be engaging on that. On the wider process, historically, staff whose role was engagement were moved out of Parks Dept then subsequently their posts were cut from the area they were moved to. He and his colleagues know there is an issue and at the same time there are growing areas of work. The Area Coordinators - Teija Ahjokoski, Steve Clampin, Caroline Ennion have a multifunctional job. There are fewer of them in these roles and they are also the engagement officers for their area of Bristol.

Regarding access points into Parks and Open Spaces; there are hundreds and some are better than others. Remedying that will be a huge job. If there are obvious ones that will make a very big impact then he will be very happy to have that conversation. Years ago there was a process of restricting motorbike access in Parks which itself was as much about protecting vulnerable people.

Mary-Jane Wilshire commented on the issue of Parks' Access and reported that the Disability Equality Forum was one of 7 organisations that have received a grant through the Climate Community Action Fund with Bristol Green Capital Partnership. They had identified this as a key priority and have a resource to progress the issue.

Sarah, Hillfields Community Garden

Regarding Richard's reporting that there were 96 allotment sites and 8000 people on the waiting list, how many more sites does the Council need to create and how many can they create?

Richard replied that there is a need to look at plot size. Also some people have multiple plots. Some people have large plots and one way to create more capacity is by cutting the size of these plots when they can. Some allotments have community growing areas which are very advantageous as gardening on a smaller scale as a group.

He commented that the same areas that have limited supply of allotments also have a limited supply of open space and recreation space so they are looking at other ways to do this, such as growing food in parks. He also explained that not everyone of the 8000 is still waiting. Some may not have removed themselves from the waiting list when they no longer wanted an allotment. This winter the Council has managed to make 14 extra plots in South Bristol. He felt the situation of plot size, waiting list etc would get better as it is managed better.

Stephen W, Cumberland Basin South, Greville Smythe Park, New Cut, raised concerns regarding developments and their impacts and effects on parks and open spaces. There is a need to look at the huge implications for developments which are built on the south side of green space –because of the future impact on the site use, the effect of shading on nature and how people are able to use the space. This is something to be aware of.

Stephen also cited a range of areas around the Harbour, Cumberland Basin, Harbourside, Greville Smythe Park, Sylvia Crow Park – all being impacted in terms of loss or intrusion on open spaces. The lack of proper planning and masterplans was serious. He pointed out that the height of developments is critical as, for example, the potential impact of new student accommodation on the Dings where a 6 storey development might not have an impact, as soon as they go to 9 storeys or beyond it will have a most definite impact because the buildings are on the south side. Even Castle Park will be affected. Whilst the St Mary le Port developments are generally

on the north and west site, the development on the heat storage site is potentially 11 storeys and that would be built on the south side of Castle Park and cast huge shade..

Mark Logan felt it was interesting that impacts on parks are not just of loss of space but also overshadowing. It is not just about the usage of the open spaces but the light and openness of a park is important and overshadowing and encroaching developments will change the dynamic.

Jill, Canford Park endorsed what Len was saying. She felt that pushing now for a new park centrally is absolutely vital. She can remember previous plans for St Mary's, but with the current Mayor keen on high rise, we need to keep an eye on this. She felt that a lot of people are concerned about Castle Park and the additional pressure on the park with all the new development. She stressed that we cannot afford to lose anything and need to watch the high rise proposals.

Mark L agreed and said it was important to look at the impact of developments on parks and to tie it up with planning policy not linked to the park. How are these linked and Len has highlighted them and not just about the buildings but the environment as well. There are people in Bristol who can help – e.g. [Neighbourhood Planning Network](#)

Lois queried whether it was worth the Bristol Parks Forum asking that something is put into planning policies about the height of buildings around parks and how the compass points will affect the open spaces differently.

Mary-Jane Wilshire said that she wants to look at planning issues and what weight do issues such as these have e.g. loss of light, overlooking, etc. Also the issue of health about which she said the body of evidence is growing. Mary-Jane stated that she is working with a researcher from Bath on a project called TRUDE to help them evaluate the cost to health services – e.g. negative health impact of removal of a park – in order to provide evidence as a material condition.

Lois commented that one example would be the Council or Park Group putting a bench in the sun for people to rest on then a building gets built and the bench is then overshadowed.

Stephen W, also noted that with office development on the up in Bristol again it is not just local residents but also staff would value open spaces near their work.

Mark L commented that Bristol built environment has changed and is rapidly changing still and we need policies that will protect green spaces in an ever changing environment and planning policy doesn't respond quickly.

He emphasised that is important we get these thoughts into these strategies.

Stephen W noted the removal of areas from the need to meet policies and strategies, such as enterprise zones, development zones, DS3 sites etc

There was a discussion about the development proposals for Broadwalk and the potential to open up the housing development on that site to Redcatch Park. No representative from Redcatch Park was present and Len had not spoken with them about it. Mark L commented that he had taken part in the online consultation and the developer had made much of the park improvements but Len felt it wasn't clear.

Jo, Friends of Eastwood Park commented that is what happened with Brislington Meadows. Planning proposals are not clear so you do not know what you are objecting to. In White Vale she said there was lack of enforcement by Council where green belt has been lost.

Mark L said it was important that we are networking

Richard Fletcher said he is brought into consultations at the design stage. It is easier to have conversations about development, passive supervision that helps with crime etc.

Castle Park – have identified how important it is and City Centre delivery plan, have tried to make sure park is central to development. Does not stop the issue of increase of density and numbers of users and to make sure Castle Park does function properly.

Frances, Badock's Wood, said she felt that it was important that the Bristol Parks Forum takes a strong position that building on Parks or undertaking developments that will impact Parks is not acceptable.

Lois commented that Castle Park was originally built on and it was also to be clear that just because some land was built on once doesn't mean it should be built on again.

Mark L felt that there needed to be a MasterPlan that says in x area will have to develop a park of certain size.

Cllr Ellie King said she was responsible for Parks, gardens and allotments. She explained that she and Cllr Tessa Fitzjohn sit on a planning group and are working collaboratively in a cross party way. She feels that there needs to be someone in the room from housing and planning. She explained that there is a great amount of housing need and cited that there are a lot people living in 1 bed flats with a whole family.

Frances had referred to Glencoyne Square and Cllr King said it is a good example of all the extra things that they are gaining such as a new library.

Cllr Fitzsimmons, Victoria Park Action Group, said that the local plan is actually being reviewed and going back to government to be processed and approved. All pretty much on the same level in what we want. Bristol does have a housing problem. She overlooks Bedminster Green where there is a battle over development there. She asked Forum members how much are you contacting your councillors? She explained that it is really useful when she gets an email from people flagging up planning issues because Cllrs are the people that push things forward because we are sitting on the local plan group. Really having a local planning group in the neighbourhood is helpful and she said they are fantastic.

Peter, Manor Woods Valley Group said that it was almost 2 years to the day since the launch of Ecological Emergency strategy, and he cited some of the aspirations. He wanted to know what progress has been made on achieving this increase?

Mark L added the question, do we even have the baseline data?

Richard Fletcher explained that as a Parks Service they will do what we can to deliver this. The space that we do have has lots of pressure on it for multi-function, sport, recreation, kick about, etc so cannot rush into it. He thinks that once they have got the plan, implementing it won't take too long. Of course that does not mean that the ecological and biodiversity changes will happen quickly and then it is important to monitor that what they are doing is the right thing. He said he was conscious that they could spend a lot of time spending money with not enough biodiversity impact. For example, there is a lot of talk about managing grass verges. It might not be, in the early stages, the best use of Parks resources now but has attractive visual impact. He also did not think that people realise that Parks have been changing the way they work [managing more for nature] since 2015.

Justin, Cottle Park Stockwood & St Anne's Park Brislington asked whether public toilets are reopening?

Cllr King replied that a budget amendment was passed not to reopen toilets but to put in portaloos for one year.

Referring to the query specifically relating to Fishponds, she said that whilst Parks toilets were not open across the road at one of the café bars is a Community toilet. She said it is a communications issue. The Council is also checking that community toilets lists are still correct. She went on to outline some of the issues of the costs and operations of the Council run toilets. Meanwhile, there are over 100 new community toilet members and she said that toilets in those places are better than the Council's own. The Community Toilet options need to be looked into and definitely some wards e.g. Ashley where there are none. Cllr King said that the Council needs to work with what they've got and also improve the communications so that the public are aware of these toilets.

Justin flagged up that public toilet provision is a health issue. Lois concurred and said it was a concern that during lockdown community toilets were not available because the cafes, bars, etc were closed .

[This is the link to the Council's website regarding public toilets and including the Community Toilets <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/streets-travel/public-toilets>]

4. Parks and Green Spaces Visitor Count

Frances explained that a few years ago Friends of Badock's Wood had piloted a visitor count. There were two parts to it a simple number of visitors count and a more detailed questionnaire. With the ongoing pandemic the Parks Forum Committee were suggesting that Parks groups could use the Count as a means of highlighting the usage levels in our Parks and Green Spaces in Bristol.

Len has proposed that the counts take place in April or May and that groups do them at the same time as each other if they can. [Noted that Bristol WalkFest is in May.]

[Count document is here for groups to download.](#)

[Completed example document](#)