

Bristol Parks Forum Committee:
Statement to the Communities Scrutiny Commission.
3rd October 2022. Item 10 – Parks and Green Strategy Update Report

The Bristol Parks Forum is the only ‘community voice’ that is dedicated to all publicly owned parks and green space (POPGS) in Bristol. We work with Bristol City Council to ensure our POPGS are well looked after and to help local groups to enhance their green space. More information about us can be found at <http://www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/>

The Forum has a vision for all POPGS in Bristol by 2030 which can be seen at: www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/vision

In preparation for this Statement, we consulted our members for their views of the report. Comments received are reflected below.

The new Parks and Green Spaces strategy provides an opportunity to reset the way that the Council and others view and treat our POPGS. Our questions already submitted (see Q references here) and statement are designed to clarify points and hopefully strengthen the emerging Strategy. Where there are links to our Vision for 2030 these are noted as *V statements*.

The critical importance and value of our POPGS for the health and well-being of people and wildlife, especially during the COVID pandemic, has been generally accepted. Recent research and publications (Q3) have further highlighted that value. (See references). But often we believe the importance and value of POPGS are not considered fully in decisions about their maintenance and future. *2030 Vision link – Places that have a positive influence on our well-being.*

In part this is because of the way that POPGS can be seen as a uniform resource to be used – which can lead to a “one size fits all approach” to them. This can be refined by analysing what the functions and characteristics of each space (or even parts of spaces) are now and what they could be in the future (Q1). An example of this would be considering these factors when considering the location and detail of new infrastructure.

In defining the attributes of a Quality Park, there seems to be a gap in the presentation on how the natural green environment is to be covered. In addition to the formal designations given to POPGS we believe that functions and characteristics are a useful tool (Q4) to help define attributes. *2030 Vision link – Places where wildlife thrives and where our heritage is protected and explored.*

POPGS can be a source of pride for the local community – and also create a lot of interest in how they are maintained and what is their future. We believe that there needs to be a recognised and defined standard to which the Council, parks groups and communities can aspire to and achieve. The Green Flag Initiative (Q2) is one such initiative. <https://greenflagaward.org/> . *2030 Vision link – Excellent in terms of quantity and quality.*

The 2008 Strategy rightly raised expectations that some POPGS may be improved due to new resources being made available in the future. However, the financial crash, plus decisions on the funding available to local authorities and POPGS, against other priorities

have made those expectations difficult to achieve, especially for funds for revenue maintenance held by the City Council. It is critical that the Strategy inspires people and gives them confidence that their green space will be well maintained (Q5) so that the space can achieve health and well-being benefits for people and wildlife. Where there is uncertainty about funding this needs to be made clear. *2030 Vision link – all points.*

In the presentation the Local Plan feeds into the plans and documents which in turn feed into the Strategy, but there is no link the other way. The 2011 and 2014 Local Plan, and through the retention of the existing green infrastructure policies, the 2018/9 review, is informed by the 2008 Strategy.

The importance of the role that the Local Plan in POPGS cannot be overemphasised, for the way that some green spaces which are critical for many reasons, can be changed into housing and development; and how existing spaces can be used to support planning applications by promises of improving them.

The two-way links between the two documents need to be defined. Otherwise, the risk is that the growing well documented concerns about the disposal of green space; will be matched by the concern that existing green spaces in some parts of Bristol cannot support the significant growth in the number of people living nearby. An example of the latter is the area around Castle Park where hundreds if not thousands of new homes are to be built or are under consideration/proposed. New green space (not just public realm) will be required and the strategy should facilitate that in relevant areas. *2030 Vision link – excellent in terms of quantity and quality, and available in all areas of the city.*

In the Statement above, we have used the phrases “parks groups” and “communities”. We believe that while this is a false split, it is critical to ensure that the Strategy acknowledges and builds on the existing work being carried out by Groups and others; and the work by the Council and others to encourage future parks groups, so that POPGS are used and supported by a more diverse range of people in line with their functions and characteristics (Q1, Q7 and Q8). *2030 Vision link – Hubs of activity that empower local communities.*

We also received comments on:

- Changing the strategy so that it is called the Parks, Nature Reserves and Green Spaces Strategy to better reflect the range of POPGS involved, and to link better into the ecological initiatives such as Nature Recovery etc.
- The need to have assurances on the speed that actions in the Strategy will be delivered once published, especially those dealing with the Climate and Ecological emergencies.

Thank you

References:

World Health Organisation (WHO), 2017, Urban Green Spaces: A brief for action.

[Urban green spaces: a brief for action \(who.int\)](#)

The Parks Alliance, 2020, Making Parks Count – The Case for Parks. Parks the Smart Investment. [Making Parks Count – The Case for Parks – The Parks Alliance](#)

Univ of Exeter, 2022, https://www.exeter.ac.uk/news/research/title_910082_en.html