



Bristol Parks Forum

Notes of the Meeting of the Bristol Parks Forum held on Saturday 11th March 2023 at the Bowls Club, Victoria Park

A list of attendees was taken and is held by the Forum Committee.

1. Welcome and Introductions

Len Wyatt, Chair of the BPF welcomed everyone and thanked the Bowls Club and Victoria Park Action Group (VPAG) for hosting, and helping organise the meeting. Len introduced:

- Parks Forum Committee members present.
- Bristol City Councillors present: Cllr Tessa Fitzjohn, Ward Councillor for Bedminster
- Bristol City Council Officers: Richard Fletcher, Parks Services Manager; Kit Beaumont, Heritage and Estates Manager; and Helen Jones, Employment Navigator on the Inclusive Career Pathways programme.
- Charlee Bennett, CEO, Your Park Bristol and Bath.

It was noted that a number of Committee members, Councillors, City Council officers and Parks Groups had sent apologies.

Tessa Fitzjohn, as a member of VPAG provided a short introduction to Victoria Park, what the group are doing and their future projects. Tessa offered to take people on a short tour of the park after the meeting.

2. Matters arising from October 2022 meeting.

Outstanding actions from the meeting were:

Richard Fletcher to provide written statement on Community Asset Transfer process.

Richard pointed the meeting to the website and related policy at:

[https://www.bristol.gov.uk/residents/people-and-communities/community-centres-and-facilities/community-asset-transfer.](https://www.bristol.gov.uk/residents/people-and-communities/community-centres-and-facilities/community-asset-transfer)

Action: **Link to be distributed in an Update.**

Sarah West from Eastville Park – Report on how parks and green spaces have saved money for other Council services. Website: [What is the real value of public parks?](#)

Action: **Link to be distributed in an Update.**

Your Park – To provide weblink to raise funds for Your Park when you shop. Already had been included in an Update, and included on front page of the Forum's website.

Action: **Link to be redistributed in an Update.**

3. Report from the Parks Forum Committee – What we have been doing, responses on planning issues etc.

Len explained that the Committee had met four times since the last Forum meeting.

He explained that they were discussing how do we operate – who covers what etc. They looked at Committee representation from South Bristol – and have approached a couple of people who are considering whether to join the Committee. And of course, the subjects the Forum would hear about at the meeting.

On the City Council's 2023-24 budget proposals the Forum held two on-line briefings for Parks Groups; and attended three Council meetings to put forward the Forum's position.

The Forum Committee sent in a response on the Forum's behalf in response to the Local Plan consultation in January. This strengthened the position on the loss of public parks and green spaces so that any further losses would be unacceptable. The response called for better provision of parks and green spaces in some areas (eg: Central Bristol) – including the idea of a new large park. Representatives from the Forum's Committee are due to meet Cllr Nicola Beech, Cabinet Member (whose responsibilities include City Council's strategic planning) to talk about the Forum's response to the Local Plan consultation.

A formal objection was sent in by the Committee to the planning application for a Local Development Order to provide powers for the creation of a District Heat Network. The powers would potentially allow the network to be installed across some parks and green spaces across Bristol. The objection questioned whether there was a need for the order to be as extensive as it was proposing to be and asked for further consultation to be held with local communities when more detailed proposals were being developed. Since submitting the objection, the Forum Committee attended a meeting to discuss with Council about the proposed LDO and the Forum's objection. Representatives from the Bristol Tree Forum and Bristol Civic Society also attended the meeting.

[Post meeting note – Since the Forum meeting was held, a Development Control Committee has considered and agreed an amended LDO which removed parks and green spaces from the Order, but did not extend the consultation process about the work]

A response was also sent in to the proposed St Phillips Development Framework. The Forum's response emphasised the need to improve existing parks, to provide green pocket parks/play spaces, and a new large green park in that area.

Also related to Planning, the Committee has discussed the Forum's approach regarding planning consultations and applications. It was felt that local groups should be encouraged to respond themselves to consultations and applications. If the Forum / Committee have the resources responses will be made to consultations and planning applications; if there is no group available and there is an interest for parks/green spaces generally; or if there are parks of city-wide importance involved.

A review of the Forum's terms of reference (ToR) and what it means for BPF groups has begun. The TOR (2017) was designed in a way that would not discourage groups from joining the Forum. Initial outcomes of the review are that advice to all parks groups is that if they are involved in planning issues, or funding applications, it is important to make sure that groups are as transparent about what they do and are as representative of park users / the group's membership as they can be. This may mean the group needing to be formally constituted for instance.

4. Bristol City Council Parks Budget and the Big Parks Conversation

Rob Acton-Campbell from the Forum Committee summarised the work that had been undertaken in order to respond to the consultation on the City Council's 2023-24 budget.

Forum Committee representatives had met twice with Cllr Ellie King who holds the Cabinet responsibility for Parks. Rob pointed out that the issue had attracted the second largest response (after Libraries) to the Council.

He thanked all those who have taken part in discussions, responded to the consultation and also thanked the Council for listening and responding as positively as they have done.

Rob updated the meeting on a discussion between Cllr King; Jon James, Head of Service, Natural and Marine environment, Bristol City Council; Charlee Bennett, CEO Your Park and himself about how to take forward the Big Conversation proposal that the Forum had put forward.

The Big Conversation is an initiative to try and find ways of avoiding the annual cycle of discussions about budgets, which typically include discussions on ways of avoiding significant cuts to that budget. It is critical that somehow the city finds a way of managing and improving our parks and green spaces better. The Conversation may have to examine all the possible ways of achieving this.

The proposal is that the Conversation will be mentioned in the forthcoming Parks and Green Spaces strategy consultation and embedded in the Strategy, as a means of highlighting the initiative. Then a small working group of Cllr King, Jon James, Rob and

Charlee Bennett will be set up, possibly consisting of the same people as mentioned above to deliver the initiative. A much wider Steering Group would then form, with Rob and Ted Fowler representing the Parks Forum.

The Conversation needs to be wide ranging, covering issues such as community asset transfer and changes to the way Bristol's parks and green spaces are managed.

Beyond that no further details are known at the moment.

During discussions it was pointed out by Forum members that the initiative must involve Groups and individuals working as volunteers on the ground. There has been a tendency in the past to rely on those who are working as paid workers in the area of interest for formal organisations, which means that sometimes the actual reality on the ground for volunteer Groups is missed.

Richard Fletcher reported that a revised budget for the Parks Department was being worked on, which would include the purchasing of new equipment to help with delivering future priorities in the management of our areas.

5. Bristol City Council Strategies and other Initiatives

Hayley Swift from Community Development, Bristol City Council had been due to speak about her work with the Parks Department, but was unwell so was not able to attend.

Richard Fletcher introduced the update on the various strategies which were being prepared. He mentioned that work on these strategies had been affected by the need to enable staff to work on the budget proposals.

Kit Beaumont then presented information on progress and potential timetables for the Strategies. <http://www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/BPF110323Strategies.pdf>.

He explained that all future dates shown are provisional.

- Parks and Green Spaces – Public Consultation June to July 2023, with a submission to Cabinet in October.
- Allotments and Food Growing – Public Consultation June-July 2023 (6 weeks); with a submission to Cabinet in October.
- Tree and Woodland – which links into the One City Plan and land in Council ownership. Engagement Feb to March 2023. Submission to One City Group Sept onwards and then City Council to follow.
- Managing for Nature – public engagement Feb to March 2023. Approvals linked to the Parks and Green Spaces above.

Additionally, information was shared about:

- Maps of the areas covered by the Parks and Green Spaces Strategy; and the existing land typologies being used.
- The locations of existing allotments; and their density in each Neighbourhood areas.
- A potential approach to tree planting at the Wedmore Vale Open Space in South Bristol.
- A map of the potential nature recovery network in Bristol by habitat types – Woodland, Wetland and Grassland.
- Maps of the habitat distinctiveness and potential for improvement score in relation to the Nature Recovery Network.
- A map showing the relationship between areas of deprivation and the level of satisfaction with parks and green spaces.
- Maps showing the quantity of formal green space; informal green space; natural green space; play space and overall green space.

Kit noted that the Parks and Green Spaces strategy will set a direction of travel and scale of ambition, creating an evidence base to identify where there are needs. Headline actions and detail for the first five years would be provided. However, it is not an implementation plan.

Forum members raised questions about the implications of budget pressures on the delivery of the ambitions, even with S106 and Community Infrastructure Levy money being available. Kit answered that there is going to be a level of uncertainty about how things can be taken forward.

The following points were raised in the meeting:

- There is a need for the Managing for Nature project to have long term positive impacts.
- The Tree Strategy must avoid double counting trees which are existing and being planted. It is also important that there is good communication about what is happening.
- The previous Area Green Space Plans were extremely valuable to groups to use for raising funds. Kit replied that they may be refreshed at some level of detail.
- The data presented here, could also support funding applications.
- There is a need to ensure that the locations and benefits of blue spaces (watercourses/water features) are fully reflected in the strategies.

- Will the previous Green Space Strategy target of 18m² per person be retained, and used for decisions?
- Is there going to be information about the condition of assets (eg: Play Spaces) in the Strategy?

6. Strengthening relationships between Parks Organisations

Sarah West and Ted Fowler from the Parks Forum Committee introduced a new initiative which has only just started which aims to strengthen relationships between Parks Groups; and between the Forum and other organisations including the City Council and Your Park.

As a first step Sarah and Ted had started mapping the existing relationships within the Forum, and to external organisations, which the Parks Forum already have which they are aware of. Using this information, they hope to identify where relationships were strong, or need strengthening, or there are gaps. This would then inform priorities and future work.

To help that work, they asked the Groups present to take a card and write on them the goals that their Groups were hoping to achieve; and what support to achieve them they would like to receive from the Forum.

Completed cards were collected in at the end of the meeting.

Action: The same invitation to be sent to the Parks Forum Groups not present in an Update.

7. Your Park Bristol and Bath – Update

Charlee Bennett, CEO, Your Park updated the meeting about the ongoing work from Your Park.

The Your Park Saturday event for Parks Groups in Bath and Bristol, in the Engine Shed at Temple Meads Station in February was very well attended with just under 100 people attending.

Having published a report on accessibility issues which people are experiencing when using parks and green spaces [Your Park Bristol and Bath](#) are now working with AccessAble and specific individual Parks Groups to undertake accessibility Audits of their parks and green spaces.. A template for audits and how Groups could communicate information to help people use their parks and green spaces was being created and will be distributed.

For Bristol Walk Fest in May 2023 (<https://www.bristolwalkfest.com/>) a number of sensory walks were being organised by Your Park working alongside SENSE <https://www.sense.org.uk/about-us/>

Your Park had been successful in getting grants from:

- West of England Combined Authority (WECA) for support work to make parks and green spaces more pollinator friendly (part of Bee Bold initiative).
- National Lottery Fund to be used for their in-house mental health in nature therapy service.

Work continues to develop a neighbourhood area approach to helping people with their mental health issues by spending time in natural surroundings. This project is currently concentrated in Hartcliffe and Withywood.

Your Park is also supporting Avon Wildlife Trust's training events across Bristol, which are aimed at encouraging and equipping people to volunteer in their parks and green spaces.

An application had been made to raise £5million in funds to support Your Parks work. Charlee asked if anyone who was willing to take part in charity events to raise money for Your Park (eg: running the Bath half marathon), could they contact her.

8. Strengthening the Parks Forum Committee

Len presented Rob Acton-Campbell with a small token of thanks from the Forum for his work as Secretary to the Forum over many years. A similar acknowledgement would be posted to Mark Logan who had been Chair.

Len introduced the Forum accounts for 2022, which had not been considered at the October meeting, due to time constraints. The Accounts had been circulated before this meeting. He asked the meeting whether they would approve the accounts. The meeting approved them.

The Committee is currently without a Vice-Chair and a Secretary. The Secretary role is currently being shared across the Committee this means that our ability to support the Forum is reduced. The role can be shared between people if necessary; and support will be given.

The role includes working with the Committee to:

- pull together and send out the Forum Updates newsletter and other all Forum mailings;
- organise the Forum meetings (3 a year) in different locations across Bristol;
- help with correspondence and emails to the Forum and ensuring replies are sent as appropriate / needed (in consultation with Chair and other Committee members).

It could also involve helping to update the website and running the Forum's Twitter account.

In response to a question about the level of commitment/time needed. Rob replied that much depends on what is going on; and how much time the person or people can give. It could be as little as a few hours some weeks, but more at other time.

Another view from the Forum members was that there needs to be a separate social media and communications role.

No-one at the meeting was able to volunteer to be Secretary.

Action: The Forum Secretary job description would be amended by the Committee to provide a better description of what is involved, and circulated to Groups to see if they could find a volunteer or volunteers.

9. Any Other Business/Other information

a. Boys in Bristol

Website: [THE BRISTOL PARKS PROJECT - Boys in Bristol Photography | Two Professional Photographers](#)

Karol Miksza and Krystian Maliszewski introduced their work as professional photographers based in Bristol, who are seeking to put something back into the community.

One way of doing that is to provide a photographic service to parks and green spaces groups to help promote their space and what they do, so that people are encouraged to go out and explore. This could be linked into a list of what is happening in the park, what can be found, what the Council is doing, messages for social media channels etc.

They are also happy to run free photography workshops.
They showed examples from their work in St Georges Park.
<https://boysinbristol-stgeorgepark.mypixieset.com/>

Comments were raised that the St Georges Park work was some of the best photos people had seen of parks.

Karol and Krystian have been working on the idea of setting up a virtual walk around a green space as part of the project.

If groups wanted to contact them, they can do so through the website link above.

b. Helen Jones – Bristol City Council – Inclusive Career Pathway

Website: [Inclusive Career Pathways – One Front Door](#)

Helen introduced the City Council's work to help people back into employment. Her work is dealing with parks and community green spaces related employment and training opportunities, while another team were working on health and social work-related opportunities.

This means that her team can help people find work and training opportunities; and help employers find employees. This covers not just the City Council's own employment opportunities but other organisations too. Training could be arranged for courses such as Horticulture Level 1. Post 16 work placements could also be available. She is targeting people in less well-off neighbourhoods in Bristol.

Helen is also working with Ella Hogg (Volunteer co-ordinator, Parks Department, City Council) and Hayley Swift (Community Development also in the City Council).

She would welcome people looking for work; and those offering training and work contacting her. Her e-mail address is helen.jones@bristol.gov.uk

She confirmed in response to questions that the initiative can cover freelance workers, provide workshops to help people gain skills and work with schools.

c. Dougal Matthews – BS Wildlife Groups and Explore Near Me in '23

Dougal introduced an initiative via the BS Wildlife Facebook Groups which covers all of Bristol and some surrounding areas, to get people to explore this year different parks and green spaces, than they do usually.

As part of this, information was being gathered about where people could visit and what was there – including parks and green spaces. Information was also going to be provided on the use of INaturalist app, Big City Nature Challenge, events being held by partner organisations (eg: Avon Bat Group, Avon Wildlife Trust) and people's experiences of what they found on their visits etc. Tree information from the Bristol Tree Forum about which trees can be found in your local area was also being added, and could be expanded to cover groups of trees, rather than just individual trees. Over time the information could be expanded.

The BS Wildlife Facebook groups between them had over 6,000 people in contact with them, so the initiative could reach a significant number of people.

d. Peter Loy-Hancock – Manor Woods Valley Group – Managing dogs in Local Nature Reserves

Peter prompted a discussion, as a dog owner, about how best to manage dogs in nature reserves that were causing concerns about how they behave. This could include chasing wildlife, jumping up at people, scaring or fighting other dogs, and leaving dog poo behind. Even with by-laws in place about keeping dogs on leads and people clearing up after them it is very difficult for those by-laws to be enforced.

There is research that 80% people who may be nervous of dogs or neuro-diverse were avoiding parks because of the risk of meeting dogs.

The discussion covered the positive role that dog walkers have by regularly visiting and keeping an eye on things. It was also observed that it was a small number of dogs who were causing the problem.

Examples of things that had been tried including – circling dog poo with paint, arranging free Dogs Trust training events in the park, formal dog events such as Dog Shows to encourage people and dogs to visit the park in a more formal setting. Examples were given of ways of talking to dog owners whose dogs may have been causing the problem to put them back on their leads.

There was a view that more dog bins (or in fact any enclosed bin) are needed to be provided at all entrances.

e. Emailed updates.

Tessa from VPAG said that she found the Forum Updates circulated in emails extremely useful. Others agreed.

Len closed the meeting by thanking everyone for attending; and suggested that if you found the meeting helpful, please tell other people in other Groups about what happened and encourage them to come along.

10. Next meeting

To be held at the Greenway Centre, Southmead, Doncaster Road. Bristol. BS10 5PY. – 9.30am on Saturday 1st July 2023.