



representing resident led park groups and citywide organisations involved in protecting and improving Bristol's green spaces

29<sup>th</sup> January 2018

To: Bristol Parks Department

Re: In response to The Parks and Green Spaces Consultation

We welcome the opportunity to feedback on the proposals for revenue generation and cost savings between 2019 -2020. Though the consultation states welcoming responses on the cost revenue generation and cost savings during 2018/19 by the time the consultation closes and has been reviewed comments taken on board we do not believe this will fit with the current Budget approval process.

Having looked at the 'vision' of the Consultation it is the view that this is more of an objective and does not inspire citizens of Bristol. We would strongly urge the council to reconsider this and change to something more inspiring and appropriate for our great city.

Overall Bristol City Council needs to be more ambitious in its vision for parks, we do not believe the vision statement is good enough, it needs to be more forward and outward looking and more inspiring. We want a city with green spaces that it can be proud of and boast about that are amongst the best in the country

The committee has the following observation/concerns regarding the sections of the consultation.

#### **Income Generation**

None of the proposals have come of any shock to the committee as these have been highlighted before by the Parks department in meetings with the committee and at the Parks Forum meeting in October 2017.

Parks and green spaces are for the enjoyment of all citizens of the city and its visitors; and provide benefits to Bristol wider than the actual areas themselves. There is a real danger that the current



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proposals could significantly change the nature and feel of our parks and green spaces due to the potential over commercialisation of the parks with advertising, events, and commercial activities

No mention of risk is mentioned in the consultation.

One of the largest risks to the income generation proposals is that many of these are weather dependant. What will happen if we have a poor weather year and as a result the income cannot be generated?

We would like written assurances that BCC will underwrite any shortfall in proposed income generation should this occur. In addition, it should confirm that should more income be generated in good years then this cannot be used for other services. A mechanism should be clearly worked out detailing these scenarios.

If BCC is able to raise more income than currently predicted then this must be used to prevent service reductions.

Timescales to implement these proposals are very tight and there is a real risk that schemes that could generate extra income will not be ready to be implemented and generate income by 2019/20.

Many of the proposals will require business plans to be developed and further consultation and approvals before they can be implemented., though we note there is no commitment to consult further on any proposals. We would like to see a commitment by the council to undergo meaningful consultations on individual proposals as many may prove contentious when the reality of the impact on particular green spaces is understood. We do not believe the council has sufficient internal resource and skills to develop these plans and consult upon their detail within the timescales, and as such puts further strain on achievable timescales.

A clear strategy of how – advertising, new activities and additional events are approved and managed should be written and agreed/consulted on as a matter of urgency, before decisions are made on the final way forward.

Some proposals would mean the closure of areas of parks or green spaces either permanently or for temporary periods and as such should be widely consulted upon in addition to the current consultation. E.g. additional allotments, charging for in park activities, adventure golf, high level rope activities, and zorbing. There is currently a legal challenge in London over the extent to which parks



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can be closed; the Parks Forum has previously expressed its objection to any events that require whole parks to be closed.

The proposals show the potential income generation from such activities; however, they do not highlight what investment may be required in the parks and green spaces or what other costs might be incurred. This may be in the form of enhanced maintenance or staff required to manage the activities from approvals, audits/enforcement and collection of fees. A professionally qualified team should be employed by Parks, with the commercial experience and skills to effect these changes. The committee believes an essential first step is to reinstate the Head of Parks position, which was deleted 14 months ago as part of the emergency budget freeze. Only with such leadership can Bristol hope to achieve a future for its green spaces which is worthy of their value to Bristol as a whole. Events and income generation in parks should be solely managed by the Parks team (or a future foundation or trust) not a separate Council department.

For all activities that generate income, monitoring and enforcement of the rules is essential as potential income streams will diminish if the rules are being seen to be flouted by others. It is not clear whether cost of such enforcement has been considered in the suggested figures for potential income. In some cases, it might be that these costs make the income so small that the proposals are not worth implementing.

### **Reducing Existing Service Provision**

In respect of the first of these proposals on formal sport we believe that within the parks budget parks maintenance & therefore availability of well-maintained parks & green spaces for informal sports, games, play for all should be prioritised over any subsidising of formal sports activities.

The vast majority of the saving however comes from proposal 8. The committee believes that this reduction in service provision is a worrying proposal and could severely affect the council's ability to achieve their vision of good quality attractive and enjoyable parks and green spaces in every part of the city/neighbourhood, both in the short, medium and longer term. We also believe that the Vision itself should be aiming for Parks to be among the best in the UK.

Many reductions to service provision have been made over the last few years in the interests of budget savings. The committee passionately believes that the level of provision currently is at a level that should not be reduced further. In fact, service provision should be enhanced to enable parks and green spaces being of a high enough quality to attract those fee-paying activities that may be able to generate income.



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Changes in the management regime (eg grass cutting frequency) or changes of function (eg grassland to woodland) should be primarily driven by requests from park users or environmental considerations not budget requirements.

We are particularly concerned about the impact of reduced grass cutting and leaf collection on grassland quality, which in turn affects how people see a park and its value. A perception that a site is not being cared for can rapidly lead to a downward spiral with reduced use and increased anti-social behaviour.

It is understandable that the council is looking to reduce certain aspects of provision such as hanging baskets. While the wider benefits these bring to the city such as providing a welcoming attractive city to our visitors and residents need to be considered, we believe that funding for these could be found from other sources such as BID teams or sponsorship and should not come from the Parks budget.

### **Other proposals**

Car parking charges where appropriate should be reviewed annually and any additional car parking charges to parks would require significant investment, monitoring and enforcement. This investment may be better used for other purposes that could generate income.

The committee is currently looking at trust or foundation models with the council. To date there is no "trust model" that we are aware of, that is suitable to take on the huge responsibility and diverse nature of Bristol Parks. We believe that there is some potential for a Bristol Parks Foundation to take on some fundraising activities.

See [www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/BristolParksFoundation.pdf](http://www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/BristolParksFoundation.pdf)

We welcome (and will take part in) the continued investigations into this and into the potential for an application to the Nesta Rethinking Parks programme to help set up such a Foundation. However, this should not distract from providing a well lead, competent, motivated and high performing parks department until such time as a suitable trust correctly financed and sustainable could be developed.



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Bristol Parks Forum Committee

Mark Logan (Chair), Sam Thomson (Vice Chair), Rob Acton-Campbell (Secretary), Derek Hawkins (Treasurer), Hugh Holden, Fraser Bridgeford, Sian Parry, Len Wyatt

Bristol Parks Forum Website: [www.bristolparksforum.org.uk](http://www.bristolparksforum.org.uk)