

**Bristol Parks Forum Committee:
Statement to the Resources Scrutiny Commission Emergency
Meeting.
22/23 November 2022.**

Council budget proposals 2023/24 and beyond.

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

The Forum has a vision for all publicly owned parks and green spaces in Bristol by 2030 which can be seen at: www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/vision

This Statement has been prepared by the Bristol Parks Forum Committee.

Our Statement is based on these issues:

- The urgent need for more detailed information about what the financial figures in the consultation actually mean for the Parks Department and the way it operates.
- The need to cancel the cuts proposed.

1 URGENT NEED FOR MORE DETAILED INFORMATION ABOUT WHAT THE FIGURES MEAN

The Bristol Parks Forum is working to ensure that our members have the best information available to them, so that they can give informed and reasoned responses.

Without additional information, there is a real risk is that people will provide responses based on emotion, rather than the financial and operational need to provide a quality parks service that is capable of maintaining its parks and green spaces.

The information in the consultation provided lacks adequate explanations or detail. We request that the Scrutiny Committee asks the Council to address the points below, and the answers be made publicly available by the Council. Where necessary the Council should update the consultation questionnaire.

The consultation information currently shows the following:

- A catch all statement with no detail: *“Review the council's green spaces to enable community or alternative management, reducing the council's costs. Stop, reduce, change or pause activities to make savings and reduce staff costs”*
- An increase in the budget in 2023/24 of £ +1.39 million
- Followed by a subsequent decrease in budget in 2024/25 of £ -2.89 million
- No further savings or increases have been detailed for following years

We need a clear explanation of what the first statement means.

We need to see what the 2022-2023 budget is so that the effects of the proposals can be put in context.

We need to have an explanation for the rationale behind the significant increases and reductions to budgets; and how the Parks Department is expected to achieve being cost neutral (income matching expenditure)

We hope that the proposal does not include volunteers taking on the liabilities of the Council as landowner and land manager of parks and green spaces.

If it does, it should be understood volunteers may be unable to sustain any commitment in the longer term. Volunteers should be seen as the “cherry on the cake” rather than the “cake” itself.

2 CANCEL THE CUTS

The Parks Department over recent years has taken many cuts in its funding, but still as far as it possibly can, provides a critical service to the people and wildlife that use our parks and green spaces.

You are all aware that parks and green spaces provide many benefits, including but not limited to improved health and wellbeing, pollution and climate change amelioration, water storage and flood prevention, resilient ecosystems, cooling effect (mitigation to urban heat) and healthy soils in which to grow food.

We are extremely concerned about the very detrimental effects the cuts will have on both the short- and long-term future of our Parks and Green Spaces. These free to access public resources must be protected for the health and well-being of future generations. This cannot be achieved by the proposed cuts.

Our message is simple – Bristol City Council - cancel the cuts.

We request that the Scrutiny Commission asks the City Council to provide the information and carry out actions set out in 1) above; and calls on the Council to cancel the cuts proposed.

Thank you.