



Bristol Parks Forum

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

BPF Statement 19th September 2010

Area Green Space Plans - Ideas and Options Papers

Bristol Parks Forum has publicly stated that it supports the Parks and Green Spaces Strategy and the development of the Area Green Space Plans, which are the "nuts and bolts" of the Strategy. This article gives some of the background as to how that support came about.

Bristol's public parks, nature reserves and other green spaces are part of what makes Bristol such a special place to live and are something that everyone in Bristol should cherish. Unfortunately due to a lack of investment over many years the quality of many of these spaces are not what they should be; the Parks budget has fallen by roughly half over the last 25 years and Bristol now spends, per head of the population, approximately two thirds of the amount compared to similar sized cities.

Bristol is a growing city and, whether or not quotas are imposed by central government, more homes will need to be built over the next 20 years. It will obviously be preferable for as much of this as possible to take place on 'brownfield' sites, but if we are to protect the Green Belt and avoid adding more congestion to Bristol's roads then space has to be found for many of these homes within the City, and not in its surrounding countryside.

Over the years running up to the adoption of the Parks and Green Spaces Strategy in February 2008 various bits of green space had been lost to developers and more were threatened, perhaps the most high profile being part of Castle Park. Green space was often sold, and residents only discovered after it had happened. Bristol Parks Forum wanted to see our green spaces protected, but we accepted that there might be some areas around the City that were of little or no benefit to the community and might be of more benefit if they were developed.

If green spaces were to be lost to allow Bristol to build the homes that it needs then we wanted local communities to decide on their amenity value first, and only then for them to be made available (or not) to developers. We also wanted to make sure that most of the money made from any sales by Bristol City Council would be re-invested to improve the quality of Bristol's parks for the benefit of everyone.

In our view the final version of the Parks & Green Spaces Strategy achieved these aims. The criteria on which any land would be selected for sale was clearly set out and 70% of

the money raised would go back into parks. There were standards set out for the quantity of space per person and for minimum distances to green space, if these standards were not met in an area space could not be sold. The Bristol Standard is 18m² per head ,and that is the only reason that older, more densely populated areas are not having to make land available for disposal. The strategy was based on a financial model that originally envisaged 90 acres of land being sold at £1m per acre, but it was clear that the final area would be determined after public consultation.

Another important aspect of the strategy was that once all Bristol's green spaces had been assessed then those spaces not selected for disposal would be protected at least for the 20 year life span of the strategy. The AGSP Ideas and Options documents have ideas for how these spaces could be improved, and we urge everyone to read these and give their views.

The strategy made it clear that any proposed land sales would only happen after genuine public consultation. That consultation is now in progress. The AGSP Ideas and Options documents make suggestions for possible disposals - everyone in Bristol now has the chance to have their say. The Parks Forum is an association of groups city-wide ,and as such does not have a view on individual plans; we believe it is up to local groups and communities, who know and value their green space, to formulate their replies. As a group we are encouraging all our members to respond and we will also putting pressure on the Council to ensure that everyone's views are properly considered.

The Bristol Parks Forum publicly supports the strategy and the process, but that support depends on the process being properly and openly followed. Following our request we understand that the Cabinet has put the date for a decision on disposals back from November to December. If the Council Officers involved find they need more time than this to consider all the responses then we will expect the date to be put back further. We have already requested extra officer resources to examine and collate replies, and expect this to happen. We will look at the report into the consultation carefully and if we do not think that issues raised have been adequately dealt with we shall publicly say so.

Bristol Parks Forum Committee

19th September 2010

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Bristol Parks Forum

Bristol Parks Forum was established by Bristol Parks as an umbrella organisation for community park groups and organisations in the city with an interest in their local parks and green spaces.

The forum is supported by Bristol City Council but acts independently and is the only 'community voice' that is dedicated to all of Bristol's green spaces. The forum's three main roles are to:

- offer an opportunity to share ideas and experience
- act as a consultation body for the Bristol Parks service and other agencies
- influence decision-making, including the allocation of resources

Bristol Parks Forum <http://www.bristolparksforum.org.uk>