



Bristol Parks Forum

*Campaigning to protect and enhance all public green space
in the City of Bristol.*

See our Vision for Parks & Green Spaces at

www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/vision

Dear Managing More Green Space for Nature Team

Managing more green space for Nature – response from Bristol Parks Forum.

The Bristol Parks Forum Committee is writing in to respond to the above consultation, further to my email to Becky Belfin on 26th March 2023 asking for an extension of time for comments until today. I apologise for the delay in submitting these.

The Bristol Parks Forum is the only community voice dedicated to all publicly owned parks and green spaces 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/>

Our Approach

Our response to the consultation has been driven by the following considerations.

1. Increased importance of parks and green spaces to people and wildlife
2. Increased recognition of the health and well-being benefits of parks and green spaces.
3. Declarations of climate and ecological emergencies by the City Council

The importance of parks and green spaces, is now better understood than ever. Publicly accessible parks and green spaces are critically important in times such as during the Covid-19 pandemic when they were used by many people to improve their health and well-being. These areas are also important for their role in providing areas which can be used for activities such as play, nature education, foraging for blackberries, running, walking, walking the dog, socialising and learning new skills etc.

Our response:

We welcome the work done so far in delivering this initiative, which is a critical contribution to our City's response to the Climate and Ecological Crises.

Our comments below have been structured as far as possible to match the questions used in the online survey. However, where there is a need to consider more than 1 or 2 options in response to a question, we have expanded the scope of our response.

A number of our comments are designed to provide a view on how best to take the work forward from here. This is because by the very nature of individual parks and green spaces, care is needed to ensure that any changes brought forward in the management of those sites are not based on a "one size fits" all approach which is detrimental to people and/or wildlife.

What habitats and features would you like to see created or restored for nature in parks and green spaces. Please select your top three priorities.

Taking a Bristol wide approach to this question, means that it is very difficult to actually to decide on a top three priority.

What is perhaps more important is making the measure fit the context it is located in, and the ability to maintain the feature in the longer term. This has to be within the potential for climate change to alter our weather (eg: drier, warmer, wetter, and more extreme) and other factors which in turn affect habitats (eg: soil conditions and characteristics, water availability etc).

There is in our view a danger in the "nature recovery network" approach which for the West of England concentrates on Woodland, Grassland and Water Features to over emphasise the importance of those features, against what might be there now – or able be to provided, which are not in those categories. There needs to be flexibility within this to enable existing features and mosaics of habitats of value to remain.

For instance, species such as badgers are known to use both woodland and grassland habitats, and variety of other habitats. To over emphasise one (eg: woodland) at the expense of the other (eg: grassland) could jeopardise the continued presence of that species on the site.

Currently, features which could be beneficial to the recovery network, would have little value in other regimes such as planning decisions (eg: young woodland). This means that the work of one part of the Council, could easily be undone, if not just removed, by decisions by another part of the Council. We ask that the Council finds ways of removing that risk within other regimes so that they support the Network in the locations where work is being carried out, (eg: within the forthcoming Local Plan).

Do you agree with our approach for prioritising which sites we manage for nature.

As a starting point, the approach this far, is welcomed.

However, we ask that another piece of work is done on a site by site basis.

This would involve auditing and reviewing two characteristics of the site:

- 1) the requirements of the species already present to see how the effects of any management would impact on them (eg: badgers, or species that like disturbed habitats).

- 2) How the site is used by people and wildlife. This could be done by assessing the functions for which the site is used, either as a whole site, or part of one.

One positive way of finding out that information would be to actively engage with the relevant local Parks Group.

Do you have any of the following concerns about green spaces being managed for nature?

It was reassuring to see this question included, as often questions identifying constraints to the success of initiatives are missing.

As you can see from our statement on the importance of parks and green spaces on Page 1 of this letter, the value of parks and green spaces has many aspects, not just nature.

We would highlight to you how quickly views of how accessible a green space is generally, and also usable for recreation purposes it is, can change even over one growing season when entrances and paths are left overgrown or at worse fly-tipped.

It is known that for some groups of people, the perception of how safe a place is, even from standing at the entrance, overrides the value of the actual site.

On some sites we are aware that overgrown vegetation and fly-tipping can lead to significant fires being started with the fire brigade being called.

We agree that it is important that areas managed for nature still look cared for and not abandoned to ensure that there is better public support for the new regimes.

**What information about wildlife would you like to see or have access to in relation to parks and green spaces?
Do you have any other comments or suggestions regarding managing green spaces for nature?**

We ask that this work is fully explained in the forthcoming Parks and Green Spaces Strategy and explained in a way that enables full participation in the wider consultation.

Another suggestion we have is that the Council has effective lines of engagement/communication with the local community (including those that use the site, or live next door) about what is happening on their park and green space. Effective means relevant, timely and well explained.

There is a need to ensure at the start of a management season that there is a list of potential activities which may be undertaken on site available to people, emphasising the reasons for the changes which are on the way. The reasons should be based on the agreed management plan for site.

Within the Forum are Groups who help manage the Council's Parks and Green Spaces. Experience from those Groups should be used to inform site specific discussions about management and potential enhancements. This information could be used to help understand issues which may be expressed by the local community.

We would like to be kept informed of progress of the initiative via the info@bristolparksforum.org.uk email address,

We have copied this response to:

Cllr Ellie King, Cabinet Member for Public Health, Communities and Bristol One City;

Cllr Kye Dudd, Cabinet member for Climate, Ecology, Waste and Energy;

Jon James, Head of Service, Natural and Marine Environment; and

Richard Fletcher, Parks Services Manager

Yours sincerely,

Len Wyatt

Chair

For Bristol Parks Forum Committee

31 March 2023