

Bristol Parks Forum: Good News on Parks Strategy

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Author: Fraser Bridgeford, Chair, Bristol Parks Forum (BPF).

Since the Bristol Parks Forum meeting on the 19th January, representatives of the Bristol Parks Forum have been working with council officials and councillors create an acceptable funding proposal for the Parks and Green Spaces Strategy.

The original funding proposal presented to cabinet was unclear and significantly different to the one that had been consulted upon. This raised questions over the amount of parks and green spaces to be sold of to support the strategy, and how that process would be managed. The work over the last two weeks has resulted in a new proposal providing clarity in those areas that the Forum's representatives are recommending that the Forum members endorse.

Fraser Bridgeford of the BPF said "We met several times over the last two weeks with key cabinet members and senior council officers to develop an acceptable proposal and to allay the fears expressed by our members"

"We are delighted that we have a proposal that now has a clear and supportable funding model that will ensure the success of the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy."

The key areas of the new proposal are as follows:

- Ring-fencing of 70% of money raised from sale of land for parks.
- The area land needed for funding the PGSS and keeping improved parks up to good standard has now been agreed as 90 acres (2.4% of park land)
- Confirmed that land sold off will only be 'low recreation value' land. This means that valueable parkland will not be lost and that if insufficient low value land is available to fund the strategy then alternative funding will be sought and not funded through the sale of valueable parkland.
- The disposals programme will not be driven by need to find money for other departments or issues.

Fraser added; "The sale of any park land is a contentious issue. We are pleased that the Area Green Space Plans that will identify these 'low value' areas will be developed in conjunction with local communities and members of the BPF. This will give the public the opportunity to have their voice heard as the plans are developed"

BPF now would like all parties to support the proposal so that the Parks and Green Strategy is a resounding success for Bristol.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

RING FENCING OF CAPITAL FROM DISPOSALS

We have discussed the issue of the ring-fencing of money raised by selling off park and green space land. In the past it has been the decision of the council that money will not be ring-fenced for any departments but all placed in a central pot and allocated according to a set of priorities. For this reason there was no ring-fencing written into the consultation version of the strategy.

However, in view of the concern about the loss of green space and the lack of alternative funding for improvements to Parks the cabinet has agreed that it will ring fence 70% capital receipts from land disposals.

We are pleased to have this guarantee and welcome the council's acknowledgement that the disposal of Green Space and funding of the PGSS is a special case.

LIFE CYCLE COSTS

We have now had full figures for the funding of lifecycle costs and the mechanism by which these will be continued without further disposals being needed in the future. Life cycle costs cover the replacement costs of benches, play equipment, paths etc when they become worn out. The proposal is to use some of the money raised from land disposals, Section 106 developer contributions and grant income to form a pot to fund future replacement costs. The figures have been looked at again to reduce the amount of money that will be needed from selling off land so that the total is reduced. There is also a commitment that this is a once only way of setting up the 'life cycle' fund, and that after it is achieved no further land sales will be required.

CAP ON LAND SALES AND AREA GREEN SPACE PLANS

We have also had a commitment that no more land will be sold than that identified in the next stage of the strategy consultation as 'low recreation value' land. The 'recreation value' will include its value for nature conservation and other factors described in the strategy, the use of this term is intended to highlight that we are not talking about monetary value. As was pointed out at the Forum meeting, some land disposals where anti social behaviour is a problem - for instance as a focus for gathering or an area where fly tipping is a problem, would be welcomed by the local community and parks groups.

Bristol Parks' timetable to produce the 14 Area Green Space Plans is from now until the end of 2009. Within this each Area Green Space Plan will have its own timetable - perhaps over 4 months. The south of the city is likely to be the early focus.

Members of the public and BPF members will be involved in the process.

OVERALL LAND SALES REDUCED

As a result of the increased return from disposals the amount of land that needs to be sold is now 90 acres rather than the 166 acres that would have been necessary under the figures presented to cabinet on January 10th. The figure [45 acres] for funding the consultation draft Parks and Green Spaces Strategy has been found to be unworkable, and the amount of money needed to raise all our parks to good standard and to maintain them at that standard in the future under-calculated. We are confident that the new figures represent a robust funding model for achieving the parks we want.

The commitment to using the Area Green Space Plans to determine land sales means that Park Groups have a real opportunity to determine which areas of land will be sold. The community will be involved in making the decisions about what land is available for disposal through the AGSP programme that will start immediately after the PGSS is approved.