



Bristol Parks Forum

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

Cabinet, 5th June 2018

Questions to the Mayor

Enhancement of Ardagh Tennis Courts

from Bristol Parks Forum Committee

Dear Mayor,

We are astonished that BCC will not be supporting Ardagh Community Trust's full application for a community asset transfer for the Ardagh site because BCC has now decided that it wants to retain some of the sports courts for use for a citywide parks tennis scheme.

We are further astonished that BCC is choosing to take this option which is the most expensive for BCC and will not achieve its own stated aims for any Community Asset Transfer process in that it will not remove ongoing commitments for BCC to maintain and manage parts of the site not included in the city wide tennis scheme.

This scheme appears to be intending to cherry pick profit-making assets out of a public site leaving the community-led group which has an alternative plan to maintain and improve them for public benefit unable to cover the full costs of maintenance of the whole site.

If BCC does not approve this decision - this site will be improved for use by the local community by a community organisation which has already secured external funding for this purpose & which would result in no ongoing costs to BCC for either management or maintenance. This decision does not make sense.

The discussions around this CAT have been ongoing for 7 years and it has been BCC that has consistently insisted that all assets within the site were taken over by the community if the community wished to retain this site at all. It was previously written out of Bristol's Sports Strategy as 'surplus to requirements' and saved from disposal for development by the community following publication of the citywide Area Green Space Plans and Site Allocations Model in 2010.

BCC have repeatedly made clear throughout the last 7 years that the community have been working to develop a plan for a sustainable future for the site that any successful CAT application must:

1. Include all of the assets at the site and
2. Result in no ongoing costs for either maintenance or management of the Ardagh site for BCC – in line with reductions being made to Parks maintenance budgets citywide.

BCC have repeatedly and consistently stated that it has no money to maintain the site, nor any interest in retaining any of the tennis courts. On this basis the Friends of Horfield Common (who are BPF members), formed the aforementioned charity, as required by BCC, have raised more than £400,000, and now has to suffer the consequence of an about turn in position by BCC, which could indeed jeopardise the future of the charity & this fantastic public asset.

The BPF wishes to make it clear that, in our view, reneging on a deal with a community organisation is not only immoral, but the bad faith displayed by BCC makes it impossible that we will be able to recommend to our members that they take on any responsibility for managing or assuming any responsibility for our parks and green spaces – this is not a position we take lightly and indeed we are shocked and incredibly disappointed and this does not bode well for trust between volunteer and community organisation going forward.

We strongly object to the proposal for BCC to spend £200,000 unnecessarily when there is an alternative, viable and sustainable plan in place from a community organisation which could retain the Ardagh as a community asset rather than a pseudo-privatised sports venue for use only by those who can afford to pay. This plan has been supported by BCC throughout it's development. Re-inclusion of parts of the asset into BCC's sports strategy to provide a 'more attractive offer' for an external (profit-making) provider, at the expense of the local community – including young people who have consistently reported that they want to see the courts at the Ardagh made available for use for a wider range of sports – rather than a tennis mono-culture is astonishing.

Bristol Parks Forum would like an explanation as to why this decision has been taken by the Mayor's Office – and why the Deputy Mayor for Communities' support for a community-led and sustainable community sports and leisure facility has been overruled in favour of a corporate project. How can such an event have occurred given that the charity was in the final stages of the CAT process before BCC decided – without consultation – to change its stated position? We oppose this decision which threatens the future sustainability of a large public parks asset. We are also staggered that at the same time BCC is claiming to have no money to spend on vital public services – which are resulting in cuts that the council's own executive describe as 'painful', 'difficult' etc we are witnessing this decision which appears to undermine all of the administration's commitment to working collaboratively with communities in the city

We believe that the process of the development of this CAT application – including the formation of the ACT - could have been used as a model for other groups to use in the future thus lessening the financial burden on BCC.

We object to the proposal for BCC to approve unnecessary spending on this Mayor's Office driven scheme at the Ardagh & implore BCC to act morally and in line with its stated position re: support for a cooperative council working in partnership by supporting the Community Asset Transfer process of this parks asset to a

community anchor organisation which can continue to provide free access for people to use its facilities which are in a public park.

Question 1: Please can the Mayor advise why BCC Sports agenda has been able to override any decisions made by Communities, Neighbourhoods and the Deputy Mayor for Communities (whose responsibility includes Bristol's Parks) regardless of the negative impact of this decision for the local community and park users?

Question 2: Does the Mayor agree that it would be preferable for public assets in parks to be run and managed sustainably – and by community-led non-profit making organisations rather than commercial providers? If so – why is BCC allowing this decision to be taken?

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

For Bristol Parks Forum
www.bristolparksforum.org.uk
info@bristolparksforum.org.uk

30th May 2018