



Bristol Parks Forum

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

Statement to Cabinet – 30th January 2017

Bristol City Council Corporate Strategy & Savings Proposals

Parks & Green Spaces Maintenance

from Bristol Parks Forum Committee

Key Points

- Parks and Green Spaces are one of Bristol's key attractions they need to be treated as a vital asset, not as a burdensome cost liability
- Core parks budget needs to be maintained as there is no viable proven alternative available
- Cost neutral budget is unachievable

We welcome Cllr Asher Craig's statement at the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board that 'we need to look again at whether the savings targets can be achieved'. We look forward to further discussions on parks funding in the near future.

In the interim we call on the Mayor and Cabinet to declare their continued ongoing commitment to maintaining Bristol's parks & green spaces. The Corporate Strategy should be revised to make it clear that while all options for reducing costs & increasing income from parks will be considered the Council will continue to provide the necessary core funding if other options do not close the gap.

The statement below was submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board meeting on 19th January but was not listed in the Public Forum due to a BCC IT glitch; though we understand it was later circulated to members. It explains why we consider the current proposals to be unachievable.

Bristol Parks Forum Committee is aware of the budget pressures that the Council is facing as a result of the cuts imposed by the Government. We are also aware that the Parks are not a statutory service – see our submission to the Communities and Local Government Committee, Public parks inquiry - www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/CLGCsubmissionFinal.pdf

We therefore anticipated that cuts would be proposed for parks in these budget proposals, but the scale is for greater than we anticipated and in our view unachievable.

The proposals state in relation to parks:

"We want to work towards making the cost of running our Parks Service cost neutral to the council. There will be a robust exploration of the options available resulting in a detailed plan for the long term future. This might include looking at commercial business models, increasing our income and working with communities."

Budget savings over the next 3 years are proposed to be:

2017/18 - £425,000; 2018/19 - £632,000; 2019/20 - £2,862,000

Total over 3 years = £3,920,000

During the consultation period we met with Cllr Asher Craig and made it clear that we were open to looking at new models for managing parks (including trusts); exploring ways in which community groups could take a more active role and ways in which income could be increased. That remains our position; we are willing to take part in 'a robust exploration of the options'.

These proposals envisage that a way will be found to ensure that the current level of maintenance of parks can be maintained at zero cost to the Council.

In our view managing parks on a cost neutral basis is totally unrealistic and undeliverable. We simply don't believe it can be done – if it could then undoubtedly other cities would be doing it.

The Government Parks Inquiry has been considering the funding of parks and is due to report soon. Submissions to the inquiry came from all parts of the country, including many Local Authorities. At one of the oral sessions considerable time was given to looking at whether trusts could take on running parks. It is clear that a trust is only viable with sufficient funding, either in the form of a large endowment or in the form of a guaranteed income from the Local Authority.

You will be aware that Bristol Parks Forum, Bristol City Council, and LUC secured funding from the UK 'Rethinking Parks' Programme run by Nesta in partnership with the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Big Lottery Fund in 2014, it was one of 11 projects to have received funding from 209 Expressions of Interest. See www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/parkwork/

Rethinking Parks was specifically aimed at finding ways to bring new funds into parks or reduce the cost of running them. ParkWork was one of the more successful projects in that the value of work being completed is significantly above the cost of running the project. But in terms of the overall Parks budget the savings are small – and that is true of all the other projects.

The submissions to the Government Inquiry and our experience working with Nesta support our view that a cost neutral budget is unachievable. Examples from around the country include:

Liverpool's attempts to achieve a zero budget came up with no clear answer (no overriding answer or silver bullet) after a twelve month investigation jointly led by local entrepreneurs, local government officers, academics and horticultural experts.

Sheffield estimated that they would require an endowment of at least £100m to establish a viable trust; they worked with the National Trust to review this option and concluded that there were too many unanswered questions and risks.

Parks in Milton Keynes are managed by a trust – a trust that was given a large endowment (in the form of investment property) at the time that the City was established.

Even if sufficient funding could be found to allow the establishment of a trust to manage Bristol's parks then the time that it would take to put together funding, the legal processes and the number of other partners that would need to be engaged in such an activity would make a three year timing unattainable.

There is no magic wand. Whatever model is used core funding for City parks needs to come from the Local Authority.

Bristol's parks and green spaces form a key part of Bristol's attraction for residents, business and tourists. Parks are the most used leisure resource in the city; used by more than 80% of Bristol Residents. Parks also provide documented health benefits and have huge potential in the developing field of 'social prescription'.

The level of investment required for our parks and green spaces is on a par with that of our new arena. Arguably providing more benefit for all.

The current proposals need to be revised; parks need ongoing funding from revenue or a large capital investment to set up an endowment. The council is duty bound to approve a workable/achievable budget and if these proposals are followed that will not be achieved.

Bristol Parks Forum Committee
Mark Logan (Chair)
Sam Thomson (Vice Chair)
Rob Acton-Campbell (Secretary)
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