



Bristol Parks Forum

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

Parks and Green Spaces Budget Consultation

Briefing for groups and Forum members

The consultation can be found on the Council's website at: www.bristol.gov.uk/parksconsultation

A pdf version of the consultation which might be useful for printing off for discussions with your group is at www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/ParksConsultation.pdf

The BPF committee has discussed the consultation and further to requests from our membership is providing some guidance in the form of this note which is intended to help parks groups and individuals understand and respond to the consultation by 29th January.

The Committee are urging all Parks and Green Spaces groups and users whatever their feelings towards the situation to respond to the consultation.

These notes raise points which are additional to those made in our open letter to Cllr Asher Craig sent after the Council meeting in November, see www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/LetterCllrCraigNov17.pdf

The Consultation currently being run by the Bristol Parks department is looking at ways in which to either generate income from parks or reduce/change levels of service to achieve an overall cost saving to the council. It also considers alternative ways to manage the City Council's Parks and Green Space assets which are fundamental to the survival of our city.

Income generated by the new ideas will replace monies allocated to the parks department by the Council. Proposed savings will mean the council will no longer need to fund these activities.

The consultation is split into 3 sections

1. Additional revenue income streams (6 proposals)
2. Reduction in services provided (7 proposals)
3. Other options being considered (2 proposals)

The final question No 20 asks if you or your group can help in delivering the Vision set out.

Groups and individuals are invited to rate the individual proposals from strongly agree to strongly disagree. There are then text boxes at the end of each section where you can give more details.

Observations from the Committee

The consultation does not go into detail on how any proposal would directly affect any individual park or green space and is an overarching city wide proposal.

This poses the dilemma in response as how to respond. What if the proposal does not fit with aspirations or wishes for your park or green space?

The committee would recommend that you try to look at whether there is merit in the proposal for parks or green spaces in general across the city and answer accordingly.

The text box at the end of each section is an opportunity to raise any concerns or feelings you may have regarding any of the proposals. This is your opportunity to add specific comments regarding how they would directly affect your park or green space and what your concerns are.

There is then an opportunity for you to suggest any other ideas you may have that may not have been considered, if necessary write in separately to consultation@bristol.gov.uk

There are some links in the consultation to specially produced maps. In considering proposal 11 in particular it is important to look at the map at <http://tinyurl.com/parksplay> which shows areas where the minimum standards are met both for quantity and distance. The map may take sometime to appear when you click the link.

Sections

Income Generation

None of the proposals have come of any shock to the committee as these have been highlighted before by the Parks department in meetings with the committee and at the Parks Forum meeting in October 2017.

The committee has the following observation/concerns

Parks and green spaces are for the enjoyment of all citizens of the city and its visitors; and provide benefits to Bristol wider than the actual areas themselves.

There is a real danger that the current proposals could significantly change the nature and feel of our parks and green spaces due to the potential over commercialisation of the parks with advertising, events, and commercial activities.

A clear strategy of how such activities are approved and managed should be written and agreed/consulted on as a matter of urgency, before decisions are made on the final way forward.

Some proposals would mean the closure of areas of parks or green spaces either permanently or for temporary periods and as such should be widely consulted upon in addition to the current consultation. E.g. additional allotments, charging for in park activities, adventure golf, high level rope activities, and zorbing.

There is currently a legal challenge in London over the extent to which parks can be closed; the Parks Forum has previously expressed its objection to any events that require whole parks to be closed.

The proposals show the potential income generation from such activities, however they do not highlight what investment may be required in the parks and green spaces or what other costs might be incurred. This may be in the form of enhanced maintenance or staff required to manage the activities from approvals, audits/enforcement and collection of fees.

A professionally qualified team should be employed by Parks, with the commercial experience and skills to effect these changes. The committee believes an essential first step is to reinstate the Head of Parks position, which was deleted 14 months ago as part of the emergency budget freeze. Only with such leadership can Bristol hope to achieve a future for its green spaces which is worthy of their value to Bristol as a whole.

Events and income generation in parks should be solely managed by the Parks team (or a future foundation or trust) not a separate Council department.

Reducing Existing Service Provision

In respect of the first of these proposals on formal sport we believe that within the parks budget parks maintenance & therefore availability of well-maintained parks & green spaces for informal sports, games, play for all should be prioritised over any subsidising of formal sports activities.

The vast majority of the saving however comes from proposal 8. The committee believes that this reduction in service provision is a worrying proposal and could severely affect the council's ability to achieve their vision of good quality attractive and enjoyable parks and green spaces in every part of the city/neighbourhood, both in the short, medium and longer term. We also believe that the Vision itself should be aiming for Parks to be among the best in the UK.

Many reductions to service provision have been made over the last few years in the interests of budget savings. The committee passionately believes that the level of provision currently is at a level that should not be reduced further.

In fact service provision should be enhanced to enable parks and green spaces being of a high enough quality to attract those fee paying activities that may be able to generate income.

Changes in the management regime (eg grass cutting frequency) or changes of function (eg grassland to woodland) should be primarily driven by requests from park users or environmental considerations not budget requirements.

We are particularly concerned about the impact of reduced grass cutting and leaf collection on grassland quality, which in turn affects how people see a park and its value. A perception

that a site is not being cared for can rapidly lead to a downward spiral with reduced use and increased anti-social behaviour.

It is understandable that the council is looking to reduce certain aspects of provision such as hanging baskets. While the wider benefits these bring to the city such as providing a welcoming attractive city to our visitors and residents need to be considered, we believe that funding for these could be found from other sources such as BID teams or sponsorship and should not come from the Parks budget.

Other proposals

Car parking charges where appropriate should be reviewed annually and any additional car parking charges to parks would require significant investment, monitoring and enforcement. This investment may be better used for other purposes that could generate income.

The committee is currently looking at trust or foundation models with the council. To date there is no “trust model” that we are aware of, that is suitable to take on the huge responsibility and diverse nature of Bristol Parks.

We believe that there is some potential for a Bristol Parks Foundation to take on some fundraising activities. See www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/BristolParksFoundation.pdf

We welcome (and will take part in) the continued investigations into this and into the potential for an application to the Nesta Rethinking Parks programme to help set up such a Foundation. However this should not distract from providing a well lead, competent, motivated and high performing parks department until such time as a suitable trust correctly financed and sustainable could be developed.

Finally, if Forum members would wish the Committee to consider saying points on your behalf about the wider issues please do not hesitate to send them to us by the 24th January.

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

7th January 2018

Bristol Parks Forum Website: www.bristolparksforum.org.uk