



Bristol Parks Forum

representing resident led park groups and citywide organisations; and working to get a positive future for Bristol's publicly owned Parks and Green Spaces.

Bristol Parks Forum: Zoom Meeting

Saturday 8th August 2020

Special meeting on Climate and Ecological Emergencies

Attendance: *people on Bristol Parks Forum (BPF) committee

Peter – Manor Woods Valley Group (MWVG)	Martin – Manor Woods Valley Group
Rob* - Friends of Troopers Hill & Secretary of BPF & Chair Bristol and Bath Parks Foundation	Susan - Friends of Troopers Hill (FoTH)
Stuart Gardner – West of England Nature Partnership (WENP)	Isis, Youth Worker – Future Proof Parks
Andy – Friends of Brislington Brook	Ruth – Narrowways Millennium Green
Domenica – COVID-19 Student Response Network	Noah – COVID-19 Student Response Network
Martyn – Friends of Royate Hill	Nick – Chair of Friends of St Georges Park (FoSGP)
Anna – Chair of Manor Farm Community Hub CIC – representing Maskelyne Avenue Green Space	Tessa – Artist/Engaging Audiences
Jon – Montpellier Parks Group and Friends of St Andrews Park (FoSAP)	Sue – Bristol Xtinction Rebellion (XR)
Alison – Redland and Cotham Amenity Society	Derek* - Friends of Stoke Lodge
Sarah* - Friends of Eastville Park (FoEP)	Jo - FoSAP
Steve - FOSAP	Kate – FoSGP
Frances * – Friends of Badock's Wood (FoBW)	Len * – Northern Slopes Initiative (NSI)

Apologies: Mark (BPF Chair) due to Coronavirus work; Becky Belfin and Ella Hogg, Parks Dept, Bristol City Council; Richard Goldthorpe, Place shaping Manager, Bristol City Council.

Meeting Chaired by Rob, Notes taken by Len

1. Purpose and background to meeting.

This meeting was the 2nd meeting about these emergencies following on from the initial meeting on 27th June 2020. Minutes of that meeting had been circulated.

Parks has been used as shorthand for Parks and Green Spaces. Information included from the ongoing Zoom chats which took place during the meeting.

2. Updates

2a – One City Ecological Emergency Strategy – Rob

Rob updated the meeting that the proposed plan discussed at the last meeting, was now to be a One City Strategy which would cover the whole city.

Work continues to get it ready for September, and it will need to be signed off by the One City Sustainability and Ecological Board and then the Mayor's office.

As in the earlier Plan there are four main headings in the Strategy:

- Space for nature – with a link to nature recovery network, Green Infrastructure (GI) strategies etc
- Pesticide reduction
- Pollution / plastics
- Our wider footprint – how people in Bristol can deal with their eco footprint around the world

The Strategy will need to set some measurable targets - e.g. targets currently in climate strategy might be brought forward; and set goals for whole city. It will be then up to each individual organisation how they achieve those.

For example, regarding pesticide use, the strategy will have some targets for reducing pesticide use. Organisations will be asked to declare current use of pesticides to collate base data and then can monitor progress for future and see if that is being reduced.

Discussion:

How is wildlife involved – as there could be a tendency to think that wildlife is not important? Rob confirmed that the Space for Nature section is aimed at wildlife – and is the biggest part of the Strategy.

How are human ecology/the effects of nature on humans – health and well-being etc being covered? Rob explained that it is in the Space for Nature section and covered by education. While people have caused the problems – people can also contribute and benefit from the recovery.

2b – West of England Nature Partnership – Nature Recovery, Green Infrastructure Strategy – Stuart Gardner

Supporting information at:

Joint Strategy Green Infrastructure Strategy <https://www.westofengland-ca.gov.uk/west-of-england-joint-green-infrastructure-strategy/>

Nature Recovery Network <https://www.wenp.org.uk/nature-recovery-network/>.

There are searchable maps on this site – click on “view maps online”.

Stuart described how mapping activities had been carried out for 3 types of habitat (Grassland, Woodland and Wetland) in the West of England area (all four local authorities). This had looked at the current areas of these habitats – connectivity between areas – and future opportunities for restoring links and improving connectivity.

The idea is to make these habitats – bigger, better, more and joined up (Lawton 2010). WNEP had been working with Local Authorities, including planners; Highway Authorities, Network Rail etc.

In the future the idea is to have a prospectus of projects – ready for organisations to invest in – which achieve these improvements.

WECA and North Somerset had published a Green Infrastructure Strategy which describes this work and how it is going to be taken forward.

The 8 outcomes of the strategy are:

- Resilient ecological networks
- Greater resilience to climate change
- Sustainable water management
- Health and wellbeing
- Sustainable places
- Valued healthy landscapes
- Sustainable/local food
- Resilient economy

The Strategy should be informing other organisations’ strategies, plans and initiatives.

It was noted that the Environment Bill which is at Committee stage in the House of Commons; and the proposals to change the Planning System announced on the 6th August, would affect the way this work is taken forward.

Discussion:

Sounds really great for wildlife, but if we are having problems with people in parks, how can we get people more involved in parks and wildlife?

The Student Response Network mentioned that they are working with the City Council on adapting the BCC climate strategy to cover COVID related issues; and examining barriers to its implementation; and how engagement with decision makers and communities could be carried out.

It was mentioned that art can act as starting mechanism to get people connected to their parks – and potentially change attitudes. See Section 3 and 4 below.

It was observed that there is so much going on at the moment!

2c - Bristol Green Infrastructure Strategy – Rob for Richard Goldthorpe

Supporting document at: www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/GIWorkstreamAreas.pdf

Rob reported that Richard is responsible for the Bristol level Green Infrastructure Strategy. In addition to mapping the GI in Bristol, he has been analysing which areas of work, policies and plans GI needs to be included. See document.

The intention is to review the Wildlife Network sites mentioned in the Local Plan and realign them with the Nature Recovery Network. This will create “A roads” which will be linked together – and then link other parks into these “A roads”. New developments would have to contribute to the green infrastructure network.

Work will be undertaken to get the Strategy into Planning Policies, Parks and Green Space Strategy, Tree planting programmes, tidal and flooding strategies (eg: River Avon corridor), food and allotment strategies, future parks accelerator programmes, active travel, street trees, nature recovery strategies, landscape enterprise networks etc.

Discussion:

Again, really great to be considering wildlife in this way. There are opportunities for people who would normally go to the gym – to get involved in using parks for exercise. Need to build on this.

It was mentioned, as an example where networks are critical, that there used to be Grayling butterflies on Troopers Hill, but it would not be sensible to re-introduce them if there is nowhere else suitable for them to go other than the Hill.

2d - Our Air, Our City – Bristol XR – Sue

Thanks for the invitation and for sharing what you are doing.

XR believes that the City Council is not acting fast enough on air quality which affects every one of us. XR aware that there are a lot of existing groups doing activities and would like to grow partnerships. It is not just about air quality – but air quality inequality.

XR held a meeting on 18th July – well attended with schools, climate groups, unions, representatives from Black environment groups and Bangladeshi communities. During meeting held a people’s assembly allowing people to come up with ideas and share them. For instance, connection made with soon to be launched “liveable neighbourhoods” campaign.

Could we build a partnership with you and groups – could be part of a reset of ideas? Needs to be start of a conversation.

Discussion:

Parks groups are struggling to get community involvement at the moment, even when holding events which have drawn interest from the community. There is a need to do things bottom up and get more community involvement.

It was suggested that Arts projects could help with this.

Involvement of parks in air quality is really important – especially in the future when the city is full of pollution and the climate hotter. It would be good if the Forum could be involved, rather than individual groups. Would need to be an active engagement.

It was mentioned that Parks are the lungs of Bristol - protecting us from the ravages of pollution.

One approach to engagement is where local people adopt an area of a park to improve it such as has happened in St Georges Park. See 3 below.

It was noted that the Parks Forum has a big reach but the committee is a small group of people who are also engaged in their own parks groups too. We will need to focus our activities.

It was suggested that groups could inspire and connect with other groups to achieve results.

3. Discussion – including updated paper from Manor Woods Valley Group.

Paper at: www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/MWVGEcoMtg080820.pdf

Due to the constraints of time it was decided to concentrate on the role of Parks Group and Parks Forum rather than the City Council.

3a - MWVG – Paper

Martin and Peter highlighted the opportunities listed at the start of their paper that MWVG wanted to achieve.

- Contributing to the Bristol One City target to double tree cover and wildlife
- Becoming a more representative community group
- Trialing more flexible volunteering and community involvement approaches
- Championing zero and low emissions developments in the local built environment
- Campaigning for joined-up local and national policies that recognise the connections between climate, nature, equality, health and education.
- Focusing our work not only on Manor Woods Valley Local Nature Reserve but also on the nature networks of all the green and blue spaces surrounding it.

They noted that there are lots of emergencies which are interlinked.

They observed that a number of things are likely to drive change – carbon neutrality – and nature networks being two of them.

Looking at planning applications it is easy to see that developers are not taking these emergencies seriously even though there are planning policies in place; and big statements in organisation's green policies.

Referring to planning applications for individual homes, they had observed that planning applications were including gas boilers which are due to be phased out in 2025

and did not include electric vehicle charging points. There was the question why the planning system allows this in view of the emergencies.

It was observed that developers can promise anything to get planning permission but will not then deliver on those promises. For example, it may be suggested that a new green space can be 10% of the proposed development site – but the area is often created on the space that is not worth building on and not linked to anywhere else so not part of the wider wildlife network.

If you think about it – all the gardens around our parks – could contribute to a huge increase in green infrastructure. Therefore, we need to engage with our neighbours – extend our influence to get more permeability for wildlife – using surveys of the users and non-users of the green spaces.

The group are going to be using information from the BS3 Wildlife Group to map green spaces locally.

3b - What are parks groups doing at the moment/hoping to do in response?

There was a concern that some parks are having significant problems with how people are treating them during and since lockdown – litter, fly tipping, vandalism. Some groups reported the opposite finding that people had taken it upon themselves to clean up their parks and green spaces during / post lockdown.

During the lockdown period there had been a significant increase in people interested in parks both locally and in the widest sense. How do we make more of this?

The need for getting soils to be carbon sinks was emphasised - and how do we create habitats and foraging opportunities for people. Is it back to the WWII Dig for Victory – can we release areas for allotments?

St Georges Park mentioned that they are working on a 2020 park management plan which will need to cover these emergencies. They are working on partial rewilding and would like to understand how species use habitats in the wider area – working with others such as schools. They also had a very active Whats App group which is creating an easier way of discussing what is going on.

Badock's Wood were looking at what had happened already and what is currently happening and future. Looking at using tools such as Every Action Counts for engagement.

Manor Woods Valley reported that people are using amenity areas – but not the long grass. More people are using the site – but there is more vandalism. They are getting people to report it in. There are more volunteers coming forward. They will continue with their work and would like to share the results with Forum members.

St Georges Park mentioned that they were getting people to “sponsor” a section of their park.

Narrowways Millennium Green had transferred their grass cutting regime of the Nature Reserve to management using hand scythes. They had also fenced off an area which has no human influence. Narrowways is run by a Trust so not under Council's mowing regime.

Troopers Hill reported that having a six person limit to the group and having to agree in advance, has focussed people's commitment to turning up for events. People have also borrowed litter pickers from them and regularly done picking. Some of the steps across the site are starting to wear out due to heavy usage.

XR said that they had experience of activism and getting things moving; and happy to share their experiences.

It was agreed that sharing information and experience about how people are responding to the emergencies would be a good idea.

3c - What should the Parks Forum be doing?

One suggestion was that the Forum should be encouraging the Parks Department to work more with Parks groups.

The mowing regime applied to some sites was an outstanding issue. The Forum committee had been due to meet with the Parks Department to talk about the mowing regimes / hay cuts etc but this had not happened yet due to Covid pandemic. Several of the groups present had raised major concerns about the hay cut timing this year and felt that the meeting with Parks Department should happen as soon as possible.

Martyn Cordey from Friends of Royate Hill had launched a "No to the mow" campaign; and had written to the Forum suggesting that barriers to changing mowing regimes (eg: presence of dog mess, ticks, litter etc) should be explored so that solutions can be found.

Groups would be asked to pass on their concerns regarding the mowing regimes in their areas, including hay cut issues to the Forum Committee.

As well as the Committee members already planning to attend the meeting about mowing, Peter Loy-Hancock (MWVG) and Martyn Cordery (FoRH) would like to attend. It was also suggested that it might be helpful to have AWT at the meeting. Rob to set up Forum meeting first then follow up with meeting with Parks.

It was suggested that the Forum already has a Vision that is consistent with the emergencies. The Forum Vision could be reviewed in the light of the ecological emergency strategy. Forum should sign up to both strategies and support individual groups to take action.

Examples of groups' work to tackle the emergencies – current activities and future plans - will be collected from Forum members to support taking forward this work. Rob, Frances & Len to work on an email to pull in responses.

3d – Other issues

A suggestion was made that the Parks Department be renamed as the Parks and Ecology Department, or a name which better reflects the expanding range of issues that the Department has to respond to.

At the end of discussion there was a view that there could be significant areas of mutual support and learning between Parks Groups and others. These could re-energise our work with communities and on tackling the emergencies.

4. AOB

There is a new grant application platform – free until May 2021 – then there is a charge. Once you have created a profile for your organisation – it tells you what grants you could be eligible for and helps you apply www.brevio.org.

Tessa Fitzjohn is interested in working with groups to pilot an arts and parks project. Contact her on tessafitzjohn@gmail.com

Rob mentioned that the Bristol and Bath Parks Foundation would be seeking funding shortly to support small scale projects.

Actions arising from discussions.

Action	Who
Parks Forum meeting of people interesting in mowing regimes to be arranged before the meeting with the City Council. Examples of concerns to be collected in.	Rob
Meeting on mowing regimes, including hay cuts, to be arranged with City Council.	Rob to arrange with Forum, AWT and City Council
Email to Parks Group on what they are doing now – and hope to do with future – to be sent early September – with replies requested by mid-September.	Frances, Len and Rob
Examine links with XR Air Quality campaign	Parks Forum Committee

Next Meeting – Climate and Ecological Emergencies:

A full forum meeting was suggested for the end of September, as all groups need to be involved with this. A Zoom meeting would be most likely given the size and nature of the Forum, and the potential for constraints on physically meeting up likely to be still in place.