



Bristol Parks Forum

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

Bristol Parks Forum: Zoom Meeting Saturday 27th June 2020

Special meeting on Climate and Ecological Emergencies

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

Peter – Manor Woods Valley Group (MWVG)	Martin – Manor Woods Valley Group
Rob Acton-Campbell* - Friends of Troopers Hill & Secretary of BPF & Chair Bristol and Bath Parks Foundation	Susan - Friends of Troopers Hill
Alex Minshull –Sustainable City and Climate Change Manager– Bristol CC	Becky Belfin – Nature Conservation Officer – Bristol CC
Ella Hogg – Volunteer Coordinator, Bristol Parks – Bristol CC	Nick – Chair of Friends of St Georges Park
Anna – Chair of Manor Farm Community Hub CIC – representing Maskelyne Avenue Green Space	Eileen – Friends of Old Sneed Park LNR (FoOSP)
Jon – Montpellier Parks Group and Friends of St Andrews Park (FoSAP)	Sue – Bristol Xtinction Rebellion (XR)
Alison – Redland and Cotham Amenity Society	James – FoSAP and XR
Sarah* - Friends of Eastville Park (FoEP)	Jo - FoSAP
Andy - FoEP	Ian - FoOSP
Frances* – Friends of Badocks Wood (FoBW)	Len* – Northern Slopes Initiative

Apologies: Mark Logan (BPF Chair) due to Coronavirus related work.

Meeting Chaired by Rob, Notes taken by Len

1. Purpose and background to meeting.

Awareness of the potential implications of both climate and ecological emergencies has been rising over a number of years. The City Council has declared formally that these are emergencies. In the Forum's February meeting MWVG had raised the issues, and offered to prepare a paper for the now cancelled May meeting. Due to

the continuing Coronavirus 19 lockdown it was decided to start this work by holding a Zoom meeting to find out what people were thinking about.

The Council had published a city-wide One City Climate Strategy (for details see Appendix) and was in the middle of recruiting a climate emergency project manager; and an ecological emergency project manager. Rob is involved in the One City Ecological Emergency Action Plan working group representing the Bristol & Bath Parks Foundation.

The meeting consisted of a general sharing of fears and hopes; and presentations by Alex, Becky and MWVG. Followed by questions and discussions. As the questions and discussions were wide ranging and the time involved treated as space to talk, the headings used to record comments made are the note makers own.

Appendix – has links to further information which was mentioned in the discussion which people may wish to look at.

Parks has been used as shorthand for Parks and Green Spaces

2. Fears and hopes for the future

Where similar statements were made by people – these have been combined into one.

- Decrease the funding available for Parks due to need to support economic recovery
- Rolling back of improvements to Parks
- Further delay to Clean Air Zone proposals which are needed to support our health and well-being
- How do we hold onto improvements in noise and air quality due to lockdown?
- How do we hold on to people noticing wildlife more?
- Getting our parks groups momentum back after so long not meeting or doing things
- The implications of commercial funding initiatives versus what is the function of a park
- The opportunity for rewilding – can parks be sanctuaries and accessible to everyone
- FoBW had proposed a resolution for their group to enable consideration of the emergencies and make changes on the ground.
- Struggling with hope – XR and Greta related action our are biggest hope. XR reported that there is a campaign in Bristol in 2/3 weeks' time about clean air. Wants to work with other groups.
- “Normal” got us into this situation, we cannot return to “normal”
- Large numbers of people following Parks Friend groups through Social Media – how do we convert this interest into people taking action and getting involved with us.
- How do we engage with more of the community around us?
- All environmental groups have learnt new things – how do we get politicians to do new things?
- There are a lot of great aspirations – but they won't happen, will they?

- We need to make sure that the changed understanding of the importance/use of parks, brought about during the pandemic lockdown, becomes mainstream.
- Before the lockdown down it was a hard slog to get people to be involved in Parks – how do we learn/what do we do to avoid the hard slog now.
- Let's make parks a statutory service, which has to be funded.
- We are still increasing our population and number of houses – what does that mean for Parks?
- Need to create wildlife corridors and join up green infrastructure areas through our planning system.
- There are increasing numbers of applications to remove trees in Bristol – how do we get people to understand the effects of their actions such as removing trees – on themselves, the community, the environment etc.
- How do with help people with their understanding of, and connection with, nature at their level, when they will have less time in the future to do so.
- There is a chance to build up interest in tree planting activities on our sites.
- Does remote/home working improve the chance of improvements in air quality, fewer offices and more interest in parks.
- How do we use the interest in swapping things – and growing plants in local areas.

3. Climate Emergency – Alex Minshull – BCC – Presentation can be found on www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/AlexEcoMtg270620.pdf

Using the One City Climate Strategy (see Appendix) as a starting point, Alex highlighted the following points:

The Strategy sets out the following:

- Principles involved – Fair, Collaborative, Transformative, Learning and Evidence Based.
- 10 areas of work – Transport – Buildings – Heat decarbonisation – Electricity – Consumption and Waste – Business and the Economy – Public Services – Natural Environment – Food; and Infrastructure Interdependencies.
- He identified four areas where parks could make a contribution – Transport – Natural Environment – Food – Infrastructure Interdependencies. This was challenged in the following section as a view was that Energy and Waste could be also be areas where parks could contribute positively. Further details on page 7.
- There were two potentially relevant goals to achieve by 2030:
 - The natural environment in Bristol will be restored, protected and enhanced to deliver climate change benefits – against these were two objectives about new developments and the overall natural environment – linking to maximising carbon sequestration in carbon sinks, climate resilience and health and well-being.
 - As the climate changes, we will adapt to limit damage to wildlife, whilst supporting opportunities for recovery and protection of species – against these were two objectives about access to quality parks (10 minute walk) with sufficient tree cover to provide refuge for citizens during extreme heat; businesses and organisations are wildlife friendly

by providing habitats or sponsoring green infrastructure developments to recover wildlife lost due to climate change and urbanisation.

- Under Natural Environment heading Alex drew out the following points:
 - Take practical action now – building on what is already happening
 - Improve our understanding of vulnerability of parks and wildlife to climate change; how can specific green spaces help?
 - Build the case for investment and funding to help realise the potential of green spaces and wider green infrastructure; and this will have to be across funding streams.

4. Ecological Emergency – Becky Belfin – BCC – presentation can be found here www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/BeckyEcoMtg270620.pdf

Becky highlighted the world wide and UK facts that have contributed to declaring an Ecological Emergency. See State of Nature report in Appendix.

At the UK level:

- Habitats are fragmented.
- Over 400 species lost in the last 200 years
- 41% of species studied showed a decline in abundance
- 15% of species are at risk of extinction

Bristol – 96% decline in swifts and starlings between 1994 and 2014 – 20 years.

Actions needed: (See Lawton Report and Nature Networks in Appendix).

- Stopping destruction of habitats
- Protect, enhance and linking existing wildlife hotspots and nature rich protected areas
- Manage other land sympathetically for wildlife; and make our food and farming system more wildlife friendly and sustainable;
- Stop the routine and unnecessary use of pesticides
- Need to create Nature Recovery Networks that allow local wildlife to survive and thrive – including greening of cities – building more, bigger, better managed and joined up habitats.

Who can play a part?

- Individuals and communities – wildlife gardening – work to create wildlife rich green spaces – reduce consumption of products produced in way which damage wildlife habitats worldwide – switch to more eco-friendly alternatives.
- Organisations – help care for places where you are based; review and reduce the impacts of your supply chain on habitats worldwide.
- Local Authorities – need to build a planning system to protect and enhance nature's recovery; manage parks to benefit wildlife – to benefit the city and people; support and invest plans and projects to monitor and improve the state of local wildlife.
- Central Government – must deliver a strong Environment Act currently in parliament that maintains and strengthens protection for wildlife as we have left the EU by using:
 - Legally binding targets to improve the environment and biodiversity

- Enact a duty to establish nature recovery networks – to provide space for wildlife to recover and be enjoyed by people
- An independent watchdog is required that can take action against the Government and Local Authorities if they break the law.
- Enact strong measures which protect and recover wildlife in Agricultural and Fisheries Bills in parliament
- More targeted funding for projects that restore wildlife and help create the Nature Recovery Network.

Becky emphasised the need to understand our baseline as it stands now. There were surveys of many green spaces going on, including reviews of the categories of green space typographies used in the 2008 Parks and Green Spaces Strategy. The typographies being reviewed were those based on natural and informal green spaces. The view was that these could be used to create more wildlife benefits through initiatives such as habitat creation. This would feed into the Future Parks project.

5. MWVG discussion paper – circulated before the meeting. Paper can be found here www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/MWVGEcoMtg270620.pdf

The paper had posed a number of questions (see below) based on the group's early consideration of the crises and the wider issues which could affect our response to the crises, with the view that "doing more of what we already do will just not cut it".

The questions were:

- How can the friends group model be improved on or is there a better alternative?
- How do we retain as many of the benefits to people and wildlife experienced during the Corvid-19 crisis; and how do we "build" back better, sustainably, collaboratively and fairly?
- With the health, well-being and prosperity of future generations in mind, how can we best support and challenge city plans for the long-term use of our green spaces?
- What contribution can we make to awareness-raising and the empowerment of future decision-makers and what support do local communities need in order to make an impact?
- How do we promote and support health, welfare and wellbeing services in non-medical social prescribing?
- How do we support collaborative work between all green spaces interest groups to help achieve the climate and ecological goals of the climate and ecological goals of the Climate Strategy and One City Plan?

MWVG added the following:

So, why is this the right time to **take stock and question** what we are doing:

1. We are in the middle of a **health emergency** – probably not unrelated to the pandemic. The wholesale global destruction of wildlife habitats is bound to bring wild animal viruses closer to humans.
2. The Black Lives Matter movement is shining a light on **climate injustice**. And the relative absence of visible black and minority ethnic people from environmental groups and from parks groups, including our own, concerns us.
3. The causes of climate overheating have been **paused** during this pandemic – but not for long. Already, air pollution in central Bristol has returned to illegal levels.
4. But the great hope is that there is a **new and renewed interest in nature**. And in its power to contribute to mental and physical wellbeing. So perhaps this is a route into raising awareness about the ecological emergency.

We need to address all of these issues, together, if we are to succeed with any one of them.

The last paragraph of our paper asks how we can harness the potential alliance of the **many and varied green space interest groups** to ensure that it isn't just friends' groups or Bristol City Council, or environmental groups - but everyone, working together to tackle the emergencies. Imagine, for a moment, a 'friends' group expanding its influence into the back gardens and other green spaces adjoining it, with holes in fences to encourage wildlife to wander further afield, and then into other 'wilded' gardens and green spaces further afield. We could develop green arteries linking the countryside through parks, nature reserves, verges, school grounds etc. etc. to the city centre. Just like we're currently attempting with cycle routes. Now that would be significant!

MWVG continued with some "outrageous" thoughts.....

- What are we going to do with the conflicts between what we need to do for the climate emergency and the ecological emergency? It is inevitable that they will occur.
- Is rewilding – letting nature take its course – rather than manage habitats the way forward?
- Do we have to stop "gardening" our parks/nature reserve – especially if nature wants to be something else and to create large scale areas of ecological benefits?
- Why aren't we growing biomass on parks to be used to create energy?
- Can we use parks to get energy out of the ground – eg: ground source heating?

- What does carbon neutral management of parks look like? Do we stop using diesel tractors (especially the larger ones) and other equipment?
- What do the targets in the One City Climate Strategy and Plan actually mean?
- We are impatient for change – what can we do now.....

6. Questions and Discussions

Understanding current situation and looking forward

When we have all the results of surveys etc – what happens – how do we answer the questions and concerns before us – is it about doing something at our scale – and/or working with others and/or getting changes made?

How do we look at things holistically?

Let's describe priorities and get on with it!

When people say something isn't viable – what does that actually mean – is it not viable now because of the way things currently are – or something else?

How often does not viable mean not economic; which means other benefits are lost in that decision? Maybe we need to stop and think more.

Would the book by Rob Hopkins - From What Is to What If: Unleashing the Power of Imagination to Create the Future We Want be helpful? See appendix for further details.

Doing stuff now – rather than wait....

Strategies, plans and surveys are all very well – but we need to do stuff now. Is it about changing the way we manage our sites as groups? See discussion on changing site management regimes below.

Influencing people's behaviours

Environment Agency are working on changing the way they communicate with people, using the ideas of the Behaviour Impacts Team ("nudge unit"). Could this be a way forward to help people reach out to the wider community? See Appendix.

Benefiting communities

If social prescribing is being used in some parks – can this be expanded? What is involved – is it about getting people confident on navigating themselves around a space if sign posts are present – or something else?

Using Parks to support other parts of initiatives:

Parks could help with other climate change priorities – such as waste and energy?

Waste issues are big news at the moment in parks as lockdown lifts. If we improve how parks waste is collected and treated, would that help the Climate Strategy. One view – it is a minor influence on climate change carbon footprint issues compared to others; but some considered it would be symbolic – e.g. putting recycling bins in Parks and an overall improvement in the condition of parks.

Energy – Owen Square park provides ground source heating for Easton Community Centre – could this be expanded to other locations?

Education

Parks are important for education and inspiration for children

Changing site management regimes

Should we encourage rewilding – what does this mean in urban context? It is important to have a definition of what we mean by this in an urban context. The need to be able to reinstate ecological processes managing parks and wildlife sites in the city could be very challenging. For example, it was flagged up that it could take a very long time and the initial result would most likely be expansion of brambles across parks and open spaces.

Should we allow ecological processes to manage themselves?

Does this mean that there is no management – or some management? Noted that currently some nature reserves in particular are managed for species diversity e.g. coppicing, hay cuts etc.

How long would it take to achieve results – 10s or 100s of years.

If yes, to the above – which parks or parts of parks? Not all sites would be suitable for rewilding?

Are there safety and access to parks implications in the light of the changing site management regimes?

Could hand equipment/ herbivores and/or horse drawn equipment be used to manage parks? How about returning to cuts for hay etc to be used elsewhere rather than disposed of? Noted that hay from public parks may not be used as animal feed due to potential ragwort, dog faeces, litter, glass etc present.

What is tolerable to the wider community – no management – less management – a change of the functions for the park?

Changing other influences

How do we link up parks into green and blue corridors for people and wildlife – though either parks or planning systems? How do we reach out to private landowners who have a critical part to play in this?

What are the implications of a condensed planning process being suggested by the Government?

This group

Group would like to continue to focus on this work – but would be open to others to get involved as we need input from as a diverse range of people as possible.

7. AOB

Rob mentioned that Future Parks initiative will be restarting their Future Parks Community Consultation events – using Zoom – next week.
Rob to circulate details.

Actions arising from discussions.

Action	Who
How do we get this group to better reflect the diversity of people involved in Parks in Bristol?	All
Prepare a paper for the next meeting to reflect today's and other discussions and responses	MWVG
Pass on details of the South Gloucs group making money out of selling coppicing products from their site.	Susan (FoTH)
Using Troopers Hill to provide heat for East Bristol Care Homes – contact needed	Susan to send suggestion to Alex who will pass it on to suitable colleague
Possibility of using goats to manage vegetation	Becky
St George area want another Future Parks Event to encourage diversity of participation. St George's not listed for an online event.	Rob to talk to Future Parks.
Draft minutes of meeting to be ready on Monday for comments...	Len

Next Meeting on this subject to be on Saturday 8th August at 10am – using Zoom.

This list is of books/reports mentioned during the discussion, which are available if you wanted to find out more about the issues being discussed.

One City Plan A working document setting out what Bristol should be like in 2050. Includes environmental targets alongside others. <https://www.bristolonecity.com/>

One City Climate Strategy Sets out the approach that Bristol will be taking towards tackling the climate crisis. <https://www.bristolonecity.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/one-city-climate-strategy.pdf>

State of Nature Report 2019 - Documents how human impacts are driving sweeping changes in wildlife in the UK. As well as an overarching assessment of UK flora and fauna, there are separate reports for England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales to look at each country in more depth. The reports pool data and expertise from 53 nature conservation and research organisations, a partnership unparalleled in UK conservation. <https://www.bto.org/our-science/publications/state-nature-report/state-nature-report-2019>

Making Space for Nature – The Lawton Report. This has influenced the Government’s 25-year Environment Strategy and forthcoming Environment Bill. <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130402154501/http://archive.defra.gov.uk/environment/biodiversity/index.htm>. Go to the bottom of the page.

Behaviour change for nature: A behavioural science toolkit for practitioners – examples of how the way you communicate could affect people’s behaviours; and ways you can change what you do which may help. <https://www.bi.team/publications/behavior-change-for-nature-a-behavioral-science-toolkit-for-practitioners/>

Nature Networks: A summary for practitioners – Natural England Research Report NERR082 Information on how to best take forward the development of Nature Networks – which are part of the Nature Recovery Network work going in the West of England. <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5144804831002624>

Rewilding – Isabella Tree The story of how the Knapp Estate in Sussex was handed back to nature in 2000 and what happened. <https://www.isabellatree.com/books>

From What Is to What If: Unleashing the Power of Imagination to Create the Future We Want – Rob Hopkins The founder of the international Transition Towns movement asks why true creative, positive thinking is in decline, asserts that it's more important now than ever, and suggests ways our communities can revive and reclaim it. <https://www.waterstones.com/book/from-what-is-to-what-if/rob-hopkins/9781603589055> Other booksellers are available. Due in paperback in December.