



Bristol Parks Forum

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

Statement to Full Council – 21st February 2017

Bristol City Council Budget 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
- Bristol's Parks and Green Spaces strategy needs to lead the way in including public and preventative health, the local economy, climate change, air quality and biodiversity contributions within it, in line with CLG committee recommendations.
- Core parks budget needs to be maintained as there is no viable proven alternative available
- Additional funding sources should be developed but cost neutral budget is unachievable

The savings proposals within Neighbourhoods & Communities in the 2017/18 budget being discussed today (Appendix 1-3) includes three separate items under the same heading of 'New ways of delivering parks and open spaces'. Together these represent a saving of £425,000 from the Parks & Green Spaces budget, a little over 10% of the net budget.

While we appreciate the difficult financial position that Government cuts have put the Council in; it is clear that any further cuts to front line staff will have a noticeable effect on the service provided by Bristol Parks. There will be more reports of bins not being emptied, grass not being cut and benches etc. not being repaired. Councillors should ensure that any savings they agree will not lead to less staff on the ground and a resulting spiral of decline in our parks.

We also consider it vital that the vacant Head of Parks post is filled as soon as possible to ensure that the parks team is managed effectively and that there is a clear line of responsibility to ensure that standards are maintained.

Our major area of concern relates to the description against these items which is also repeated in the Corporate Strategy, it says:

'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.'

Since these proposals came forward last month, we have met with Cllr Asher Craig to begin this ‘robust exploration’. Service Director Gemma Dando also spoke to us about these plans at our recent meeting.

We welcome the fact that the Council is intending to involve the Parks Forum in this process and on our part we are approaching it with an open mind. Given the national political climate it is clear that any move away from reliance on public sector funding will be a benefit.

In our statement to Scrutiny and to Cabinet we said that:

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.

Having reviewed the report of the Communities and Local Government Committee, and the evidence submitted to the Inquiry, we have not changed our view.

While it may be possible for some of the larger parks raise sufficient income to cover their costs, we agree with the CLG Committee’s statement that ‘local authorities should consider their parks to be part of one portfolio, rather than as disparate individual sites’.

Cllr Craig indicated to us that if the review over the next few months fails to find sufficient alternative income sources then the cuts proposed for 2018/19 & 2019/20 would be reviewed to ensure that the Parks Service continues to be viable, we trust that the Councillors will support that position. The review will require input from someone with knowledge and experience of fund raising and commercial activities.

The CLG Committee stated that local authorities should work with Health and Wellbeing Boards to prepare and publish parks and green space strategies that would “include the amenity and leisure value of parks and green spaces, and how they will be managed to maximise their contributions to broader local authority responsibilities and agendas—for example public health and preventative health, the local economy, climate change and flood risk mitigation, air quality, and biodiversity”

We urge Councillors to ensure that Bristol takes the lead on producing such a strategy which will potentially unlock further funding streams.

In conclusion we repeat our view that there is no magic wand. Whatever model is used core funding for City parks needs to come from the Local Authority.

We call on all Councillors to reiterate their support for our much loved parks & green spaces and reject any cuts to the service that are not replaced by reliable long-term funding from other sources.

Bristol Parks Forum Committee

Mark Logan (Chair), Sam Thomson (Vice Chair), Rob Acton-Campbell (Secretary)

Derek Hawkins (Treasurer), Hugh Holden, Fraser Bridgeford, Sian Parry

For Bristol Parks Forum

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