

Benefits, Costs and the Future of Green Flag Scheme in Bristol

This brief identifies the benefits and cost for implementing the Green Flag Awards. To begin the process we need to look at what Green Flag Award is and means.

The Green Flag Award scheme recognises and awards the best green spaces in the country. Much like a public beach being recognised as having Blue Flag Award status or a city centre being awarded a Purple Flag, The Green Flag Award brings with it a wealth of benefits, from the status of being affiliated with a prestigious awards programme through to tangible benefits such as creating a safe and welcoming green space to be enjoyed by all.

Benefits for Bristol Parks, Estates Management and Team Members

Having successfully achieved Green Flag status for 11 parks across the city, through the support of the Council, our contractors and immeasurable dedication from 'Friends of Groups' and other volunteers – the Parks & Estate's management team has gained valuable knowledge from the preparation for and judging process which brings together a range of expertise both from all sectors of the environmental and horticultural industry. Listed below are a few of the Green Flag management activities and 'Best Practices' that are incorporated as a standard throughout the city for the lasting benefit of all parks and open spaces.

- How to create a sense that people are positively welcomed into a green space.
- How best to ensure that the site is a safe and healthy environment.
- What people can expect to find in the way of standards of cleanliness, facilities and maintenance.
- How a green space can be managed in environmentally sensitive ways.
- The value of conservation and care of historic heritage.
- Ways of encouraging community involvement.
- Methods of promoting and marketing a site.
- Opportunity to benchmark and exchange ideas with other park managers.
- How to create a coherent and sustainable management plan that incorporates all the 'Best Practices' of the Green Flag Award process – and provide the same criteria to the day-to-day management as a standard across the city.

Bristol has benefited from different types of sites going through the award process. Our sites range from: Destination Parks, estates, urban parks, nature reserves, city centre space and locations with a wider variety of user groups.

Factors influencing the selection of sites includes:

- Geographic location.
- Level of economic commitment required to bring the park up to the Green Flag standard.
- Strength of Friends of Group involvement.

Benefits for the City of Bristol

A Green Flag Award for a public park is an excellent example of achievement and provides communities and Council staff with a great sense of pride. There are many benefits for the citizens of Bristol and for Bristol as a destination, such as:

- A raised profile and an improved public image.
- Best value and service improvement.

Winning a Green Flag Award visibly demonstrates to the local community and councillors that a clear improvement has been made to the site.

- Potential Tourism and Residual Revenue
 - John Hallett, Managing Director at Destination Bristol, said: “Green Flag awards are frequently used to communicate the quality of the parks and open spaces as a way to attract visitors to Bristol – in the same way that the Purple Flag status of Bristol’s nightlife offering attracts visitors to the city centre.”
 - This is an important consideration, however actual visitor number cannot be confirmed in.
- PR & Marketing / Green Flag Award Website
 - Award winners have the opportunity to use the Green Flag Award logos on all of their publicity and marketing materials
 - Every winner has their own dedicated page on the new Green Flag Award website. This is customisable and a whole range of content can be included, such as a description of the park/green space, contact information, telephone number and website address.

Costs of Applying for and Achieving Green Flag Award Status

The cost of achieving a Green Flag Award comprises a range of costs such as application fees, infrastructure works and allocation of resources. Application fees for instance are based on the size of a site and its location. They must be paid each year you wish to enter for the Award. While each site is different based upon improvements required, etc., on average totals £9K per site in the first year of application – and an average £1.5K per year per site to maintain and re-apply for Green Flag status. Going forward, the commitment of resources to maintain current number of 11 Green Flag sites is approximately £16,500 per year.

Below see costs for the four newly awarded Green Flag sites in 2012. Please note that management plan costs associated with St. Andrews Park is reflective of typical costs for this line item. Management plan costs in 2012 were lower due to utilising some of our contractors to help write management plans.

Park locations	Application Fee	Infrastructure investment	Management Plan Writing Costs (W) and Production Cost (P)	Total Costs
St. Andrews	£185.00	£6200.00	W + P £6000.00	£12385.00
Redcatch	£185.00	£4000.00	W £0 P £500.00	£4685.00
Greville	£185.00	£8500.00	W £0 P £500.00	£9185.00
Candford	£185.00	£9500.00	W £0 P £500.00	£10185.00

Disadvantages of the Green Flag Scheme

- Disproportionate investment and resource allocation.
 - To ensure that the criteria are met investment is required.
 - Not all parks and open spaces will receive the investment – creating different quality levels across the city.
- Them and Us culture.
 - Raises questions regarding why one area receives investment and not another.
- Sustainability in the current economic climate.

Provisions for improving park standards.

It is recognised that the quality of parks and open spaces differs across the city. While we are unable to address all quality issues at once, a program of works is being completed by our teams including: Woodland and Wildlife team, Horticulture improvements team and the Fix - it - Team along with our daily activities from our grounds staff. Further improvements will be made through the recent investment of the Capital Stimulus fund. Support is also available if grant applications are sought, through the Neighbourhood Engagement team.

On Balance – the Future of Green Flag Award Sites in Bristol

With consideration of the current economic climate and the initial investment required to bring further sites to Green Flag standard, the Council will not be looking to increase the number of Green Flag sites in the foreseeable future. On balance – I believe the process of achieving Green Flag status has provided the Parks and Open Spaces management team and front-line employees with a breadth of knowledge and best practice that helps us to deliver a better public service. It is my recommendation that we maintain the current Green Flag Awards to continue Bristol's ability to be recognised for its quality parks and open spaces. Furthermore, in keeping with the City of Bristol's long association with the green movement (UK's first cycling city, home to the Soil Association) and the Council's commitment to sustainability and green living and tourism, having 11 Green Flag sites supports this drive.

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