



# BPF

# Bristol Parks Forum

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

[www.bristolparksforum.org.uk](http://www.bristolparksforum.org.uk)

## Parks & Green Spaces Strategy Funding

### *How Bristol's Parks were Saved!*

#### ***Bristol Parks Forum***

Bristol Parks Forum (BPF) was established by Bristol Parks as an umbrella organisation for community park groups and organisations in the city with an interest in their local parks and green spaces.

The forum is supported by Bristol City Council but acts independently and is currently the only 'community voice' that is dedicated to all of Bristol's green spaces.

The forum's three main roles are:

- to offer an opportunity to share ideas and experience;
- to act as a consultation body for the Bristol Parks service and other agencies;
- to influence decision-making, including the allocation of resources.

You can learn more about the BPF at [www.bristolparksforum.org.uk](http://www.bristolparksforum.org.uk)

#### ***Parks & Green Spaces Strategy***

Bristol's Parks and Green Space Strategy (P&GSS) was adopted by the city council's Cabinet on Thursday 21 February 2008.

The strategy sets out an ambitious plan over the next 20 years for ensuring that people have access to good quality parks and green spaces of different types, close to where they live.

Copies of the strategy can be downloaded from:

<http://www.bristol.gov.uk/parkstrategy>

The Bristol Parks Forum was involved in the development of the strategy throughout 2007 and fully supports the strategy as adopted. However, prior to its final adoption, the City Council brought forward proposals on the funding of the strategy that the BPF found completely unacceptable. The BPF played its part in a campaign in early 2008 to get the financial arrangements changed. How this dispute came about and how it was resolved are described below.

## ***Discussions on Funding in 2007***

The P&GSS had been discussed at BPF meetings from 2006 onwards. During the summer of 2007 park groups were involved in the extensive public consultation exercise run by Bristol Parks. Towards the end of the consultation period there was a question and answer session at the Parks Forum conference on 15 September with both Parks officers and Cllr Rosalie Walker who was the Council Cabinet member responsible for parks and green spaces.

The most controversial aspect of the strategy was that in order to fund the proposed improvements to Bristol's parks it would be necessary for some of the current 'park' land to be sold. There was a strong element within the BPF membership who took the view that all green space should be protected and that any sale was unacceptable.

After much discussion the BPF as a whole came to the view that the sale of some land was acceptable provided that this was land that was shown to be of 'low value' in terms of its benefit to the community and to Bristol's biodiversity. The BPF also took the view that the proceeds from any sales must be invested back into Bristol's Parks.

This decision was against a background of increasing pressure for housing land Bristol. It was clear that many developers and others saw green space in the city as 'undeveloped land' and would continue to propose areas for development. The adoption of a strategy with clear standards for the area of green space to be provided in Bristol and a process for deciding areas for disposal would prevent the loss of green space in an ad-hoc manner.

Towards the end of the consultation period in 2007 (on 15 September) Bristol Parks Forum held its annual conference. Senior parks officers and Cllr Rosalie Walker who was the Council Cabinet member responsible for parks and green spaces answered questions about the strategy.

On funding the two major issues were how much of the £87m envisaged for investment in parks would need to come from land disposals and what percentage of the proceeds from sales would be committed to parks.

From the record of the question and answer session (see <http://www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/bpfQAsconference07.pdf>) it can be seen that on the first point Richard Mond for Bristol Parks responded by saying:

“£36M is expected to be raised from sale of open space”

On the second point Cllr Rosalie Walker stated:

“I cannot say how much, but at least 80%. It is still in the melting pot – 80% is better than nothing.”

At this point there was heckling from the floor saying that it should be 100%.

Another issue that was raised was whether the £87m was for capital only – not maintenance, the answer was 'yes'.

Although the BPF did stress that proper funding of maintenance was vital, the BPF should perhaps have pursued the issue of where funding for maintenance would come from further. However at that time all the focus was on capital. Capital receipts from

the sale of parks against the need for capital to be invested. With £36m coming from the sale of open space £51m would need to be raised from other sources such as 'Section 106' and National Lottery and other grants. To raise £36m from sales and with 80% to be reinvested some £45m worth of open green space would need to be sold.

## ***January 2008 Proposals***

The strategy was initially due to be considered by Cabinet for adoption in November 2007, but this was delayed to January 2008. The publication of a report and the revised strategy and as part of the papers a week before the 10 January Cabinet meeting were the first time that the BPF were able to see the final version. To the surprise of the BPF the financial information in the version submitted to Cabinet had changed from that in the consultation version.

The two key clauses on funding in the report said:

15. The financial model for the strategy has identified that the capital costs of bringing the city's parks and green spaces from an average current quality of 'fair' to 'good' over 20 years is in the order of £87m at 2006 prices. This capital could be raised through a combination of developer contributions (Section 106), grant and existing resources, and capital receipts. The current Corporate Land Policy allocates all receipts from land disposals to the council's overall investment priorities. However, it is proposed to make an exception to this, by which a minimum of 50% of receipts from all open space disposals will be allocated to parks and green space reinvestment – with the % allocated to this purpose increasing as the strategy progresses.

16. In response to concerns from consultees over the need to sustain this quality level following capital investment (as highlighted in paragraph 9 above), it is proposed that life cycle costs (calculated over the anticipated 15 year life of green space assets) are funded as a significant part of the programme. Life cycle costs will be determined by scale of capital invested (ie the larger the level of investment in years 1 to 5, the higher the costs of replacing assets in years 15 to 20). This funding will be achieved by converting capital contributions into recurring revenue income.

More detail was given in the section on finance, the main points were:

- The additional cost of achieving 'good' grounds maintenance is estimated at £1.4m pa by year 20 (ie. 2026) at 2006 prices, this was to come from revenue budgets and Section 106 money.
- Maintaining standards following improvement will require recurring reinvestment (life cycle costs) estimated at £4.2m pa. It is proposed that capital contributions (S106 and capital receipts) should be used to establish a recurring revenue budget for this.
- The Capital cost of bringing the city's parks and green spaces up from an average current quality of 'fair' to 'good' is estimated at £87m in total (£4.35m pa over 20 years) at 2006 prices. It is proposed that this capital is raised through a combination of:-

- Developer contributions (Section 106) = £15m
- Grant and existing resources = £21m
- Capital receipts from land sales = £51m

The publication of this report led to a flurry of emails amongst members of the BPF and in particular a group of five which included the chair, Fraser Bridgeford and vice-chair Hugh Holden and became an ad-hoc committee. The other members being Alison Bromilow, Ben Barker and Rob Acton-Campbell. The full implications of the changes gradually became apparent as they were discussed.

With only 50% of land sales being retained it was clear that £102m worth of land would need to be sold to meet the capital requirements. The requirements for the life-cycle costs were not so clear but the options seemed to be either an ongoing sale of £4.2m worth of land each year or investing a lump sum and using the interest. On the assumption of a return of 5% on capital, investing a lump sum of some £84m would be required to raise £4.2m/yr. If this capital was raised through a similar split to that suggested for the £87m then £49m would need to come from land sales. Since the 50% rule would also be applied here then a further £98m worth of land would need to be sold giving total of £200m.

Bristol Parks confirmed that for the purposes of the strategy they were working on an average land value of £1m per acre. This gave us what was to become the headline figure of 200 acres of parks to be sold.

### ***The Campaign in 2008***

With the papers for the Cabinet meeting appearing only a week in advance and it being so soon after New Year it was difficult to mount any sort of campaign before the meeting. However the 200 acres figure gave a good hook for the press so the headline in the Evening Post on the Day of the Cabinet meeting was 'Threat to City's Parks'. There was a quote from Fraser Bridgeford the Chair of the BPF saying:

"It's not good news. It's unacceptable, especially at a time when the city is looking to maintain its parkland.

"We have contacted cabinet members to highlight our complete contempt for the approach and the changes that have been made.

"This has yet again blown a hole in any trust in public consultation processes run by Bristol City Council."

The BPF also drafted a statement that was submitted to the Cabinet members before meeting (see <http://www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/bpfCabinetStatement.pdf> ).

Fortunately for Bristol's parks the Cabinet was unable to adopt the P&GSS at the January meeting because of a technicality over the reproduction of the maps which was raised by a Liberal Democrat Councillor.

The following week the full council held a 'State of the City Debate' and the BPF again made a statement highlighting the issue (<http://www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/bpfStateoftheCity.pdf> ).

The BPF also urged all their member groups to email their local councillors to ask them to help 'Halt the Sale of Green Space'.

By coincidence the next meeting of the BPF was due on the Saturday following the State of The City Debate (19 Jan). Prior to this meeting there was some email discussion over who would attend from Bristol City Council with the BPF keen that Rosalie Walker should be there to answer for the change from 80% to 50%. In the end it was agreed that a group of representatives from the BPF would attend a separate meeting on Monday 21<sup>st</sup> January with Cabinet members including Rosalie Walker and the Leader of the Council, Helen Holland.

Peter Wilkinson as Head of Bristol Parks attended the Saturday meeting. The minutes (<http://www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/BPFMinutes19Jan2008.pdf>) record only some of the anger that was expressed at the meeting about the last minute change that many saw as a conspiracy and an indication that the previous statements had been misleading. A reporter from the Evening Post was also there which ensured more press coverage the following week with the headline 'We'll Fight to Stop Parks Being Sold Off'.

Given the apparent difference in position the meeting on the Monday was surprisingly productive. The BPF under the guidance of Fraser took the initiative and issued an agenda. It became clear that the change from 80% to 50% had been driven by those departments in the Council who wanted more capital for other projects, while the funding for 'life-cycle' costs had been added by Bristol Parks in response to the consultation on the P&GSS. It seemed that in the rush to get the figures put together before Christmas no-one had worked out the full implications for the area of land that might need to be sold. When council officers did work through the figures they came to a figure of 166 acres to be sold, the main difference with the BPF being that by using the money to reduce borrowing a better return than the 5% assumed by the BPF could be obtained.

No figures were agreed at the meeting but the BPF made its position clear and got some clarification of the Council's position. It was agreed that the BPF would meet again with Richard Mond and Peter Wilkinson of Bristol Parks to try and reach an agreement.

That meeting was in fact held on the following day and in the meantime there was an exchange of emails with various spreadsheets showing possible figures. The meeting found a way forward and further emails followed the next day. The end result was an agreement that both the BPF and the Cabinet could support.

## ***The Agreement***

The agreement as reported in the BPF statement to its members at the end of January was that:

- The cabinet is proposing to ring-fence 70% of money raised from sale of land for parks.
- The area of land needed for funding the PGSS and keeping improved parks up to good standard has now been agreed as 90 acres, [2.4% of park land].

- The council has confirmed that land sold off will only be 'low recreation value' land. The funding model will be reviewed in 3 years and if insufficient land is found to be available the effect on the strategy will be assessed.
- The disposals programme will not be driven by need to find money for other departments or issues.
- In addition, the council intends to increase maintenance spending to start to redress the historic shortfall by £400,000 in the 2007-8 budget and further in the medium term budget proposals 2008-2010.

As well as moving from 50% to 70% the requirement for land sales was reduced by decreasing the requirement for 'life-cycle' maintenance funding from an additional £4.2m per year to £3.2m by taking into account the fact that some of the current funding for this from the core parks budget and grants would continue. The likely income from grants for capital funding was also reviewed with the predicted income over the 20 year life of the strategy rising to £21m from £11m.

These principles were included within the wording of the revised P&GSS that was adopted by Cabinet in February with the support of the BPF. Although the 80% figure was not achieved, the fact that the 70% figure was included in the document made it a much firmer commitment. The most important point for the BPF was though that the third bullet point above was written into the strategy as:

"should there be insufficient 'low value', marginal land available once the area planning process has been concluded, the council will review the ambitions of the strategy and consider alternative funding sources."

The area planning process, the production of 'Area Green Space Plans', is now underway and should be complete by the end of 2009. The BPF is keeping a close watch on this process and will be ready to fight again if this promise is not kept.

These figures were of course all based on pre credit crunch land values, but the council has publicly stated that it will delay implementation of the strategy if necessary rather than sell land at the current reduced values.

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