

Bristol Parks Forum - Presentation of Protect Our Parks Petition

Full Council 14th November 2017

Webcast:

https://bristol.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcast_interactive/317106/start_time/7404000

“You have heard from the various public forum statements how important parks are to the people of Bristol. They are important for health & wellbeing and for making this a city where people want to live and work.

People are passionate about their parks.

It is now almost 12 months since the idea of making parks ‘Cost Neutral’ was first raised. The Parks Forum responded immediately saying that this was simply not possible.

We understand the financial position the Council is in due to Government cuts.

This was not a case of whingeing or asking for cuts to be made elsewhere, it was pointing out the facts; raising sufficient funds from parks to adequately maintain them cannot be done.

This has been the conclusion of last year’s Parliamentary Enquiry and also of other cities – the funding parks is a national issue.

There are some examples that have been quoted as proof that cost neutral is possible – Milton Keynes has a trust running its parks – a trust that owns some £100m of commercial property to provide the core funding.

Heeley People’s Park in Sheffield is the largest community run park in the country, but it is by no means a large park. The Trust also has buildings that it can rent out to bring in revenue, but it still has to raise £45,000 in donations per year to fund the park. How many parks & green spaces in Bristol are going to be able to do something similar? Are they to compete against each other?

Setting up a trust to look after all of Bristol’s parks is an idea worth considering. But (unless you have £100m worth of commercial property you

are willing to give as an endowment) it will still need some core funding – this has also been the conclusion in Newcastle which is leading the country on ideas for new trusts.

As I'm sure Cllr Craig will confirm from her discussions over the past months, setting up a trust would be a long term project (7 to 10yrs) not a quick fix.

There is no doubt that some extra funding can be raised from our parks and we welcome some of the ideas in the current parks consultation. To make parks 'cost neutral' a budget saving of £4.5m would be needed. The proposals in the consultation are for an extra income of £840k.

Parks officers have spent almost a year looking at this; they have done a good job, but they have not found a magic money tree growing in Bristol's parks.

The consultation also suggests a £490k cut by 'reducing service provision' from April 2019, this is on top of £300k cut this year from money allocated for path repairs etc.

There have also been a series of cuts in previous years.

There is a gap of £1.6m between the figures given in the parks consultation (even if all the proposals for income and reduced service provision are adopted) and the income needed to make parks cost neutral.

We note that the Corporate Strategy & Budget consultation does not appear to show this further cut being made; we hope that this is a true indication of the administration's intentions.

We call on Cllr Craig to make a clear statement that she accepts that cost neutral parks are not feasible - and - that this administration will ensure that our parks have adequate ongoing funding so that they are properly maintained.

Councillors we ask you to support our petition; and our parks and green spaces. Work with us to ensure that the city builds on its reputation as city with good quality green spaces that enhance its residents' quality of life."