

Establishing a new Parks Forum for Bristol

Terms of Reference

1. Introduction:

These proposals have been developed following three consultation workshops involving twenty-two park groups and city wide organisations with an interest in parks and green space.

They were agreed as the basis to take the new Forum forward at a workshop on 19th March, leading on to planning for the Inaugural Meeting of the Bristol Parks Forum later in the spring.

The primary aims of the Bristol Parks Forum are:

- ❑ **To influence decision making, including resources allocation, on a local and national level, affecting parks and green spaces in the city.**
- ❑ **To act as a key consultation body on parks and green spaces in the city.**
- ❑ **To offer an opportunity to share ideas and experience.**

At the end of this proposal, the other objectives prioritised at the consultation workshops to date are also set out. These will also help the Forum in future discussions over how to agree its priorities and forward agenda for action (also see 5 below).

2. Membership and Representation:

- 2.1 **Members:** Membership of the Forum will be for resident lead Park Groups or other groups with an interest in protecting/improving parks or green spaces (including natural spaces and outdoor playgrounds).
- 2.2 **Groups:** A 'group' in this context would not need a constitution or any other formal organisation, only to be able to show it is committed to being open to all and able to sign a membership form that states this.
- 2.3 **Access:** Groups will need to demonstrate that they advertise their meetings locally (e.g. posters in park, corner shop) beyond the existing membership.
- 2.4 **Representatives:** Groups will nominate two named people who will act as the lead representatives of the group on the Forum and tend to be those who usually attend the meetings.
- 2.5 **Becoming a member:** The Forum will welcome new members who meet the terms 2.1 to 2.3 above. They will cease to be members if they no longer meet these terms.

- 2.6 **Voting:** Each group will carry a single vote. In the eventuality of the Forum needing to vote, one of the two representatives will vote on behalf of the group.
- 2.7 **City councillors:** Groups should not nominate City councillors as spokespeople for the group. Councillors will be welcome to attend the Forum and will often be invited by the Forum to attend for specific purposes in relation to the agenda. Councillors will be non voting.
- 2.8 **Council officers:** Officers will act as advisors to the Forum when invited to attend, but will be non voting.
- 2.9 **City wide organisations:** City wide organisations (such as the Civic Society, Wildlife Trust and VOSCUR) which also meet the other criteria 2.1 to 2.3 above, should be members with one vote per organisation.

3. Leadership:

- 3.1 **Chair:** The Forum will elect a Chair by vote at each Annual Meeting. The Chair will act as the first point of contact between the Forum and the Parks Service, individually represent the Forum membership in a formal capacity when appropriate, and ensure the Forum meets the other terms set out in this proposal (in particular, relating to equal opportunities and accessibility).
- 3.2 **Vice Chair:** The Forum will elect a Vice Chair who will act in the absence of the Chair.
- 3.3 **Rotation:** Neither Chair or Vice Chair should hold this position for more than two years.
- 3.4 **Eligibility:** Chair and Vice Chair should be members (as defined in 2.1 and 2.9). At no time will both positions be held by members from the same group.

4. Organisation and style:

- 4.1 **Frequency:** The Forum will meet at least four times per year, including an Annual Meeting in April. Additional meetings, perhaps covering a specialist subject, can be added to the programme as necessary.

- 4.2 **Style of meetings:** Apart from the Annual Meeting (which might be more like a conference) and additional meetings set up to cover one special subject, the Forum agendas as a general rule will include an 'Open Access' item and a 'Learning' item.
- 4.3 **Access agenda:** This item will allow time for groups to bring to the Forum each time, a particular issue which they would like to see tackled which is outside the agreed forward agenda/programme.
- 4.4 **Learning agenda:** This item will cover a particular theme where members have agreed they would like to know more. It will most likely be delivered by a council officer and/or guest speaker.
- 4.5 **Notice:** Forum members will be made well aware of the forward meeting agendas and what to expect, to enable them to attend those that are of particular interest.
- 4.6 **Working Groups:** The main Forum meeting can opt to set up Working Groups - which will not have any decision making status but will report back to the main group - comprising (say) 3 or 4 members to look at a particular subject in more detail on behalf of the wider group. This might be, for example, a group looking at the overall organisation of the Forum which would meet throughout the year, or a group which meets twice to research a particular subject (such as 'How the contract works' or 'playground development') before reporting back to the Forum at a special meeting.
- 4.7 **Equal Opportunities:** The Forum is committed to being accessible and inclusive and to ensuring that its meetings are run in an inclusive, friendly and accessible way. The Forum recognises that the council has a responsibility to ensure the Forum maintains equality of access if it is to continue recognising and supporting it as a key consultative body.
- 4.8 **Evaluation and review:** The Forum will undertake regular review and evaluation of the way that it operates. This will include an annual review in line with the annual cycle of meetings, possibly undertaken by an independent body outside the membership and the city council.
- 4.9 **Accessibility of meetings and equal opportunities:** The Community Development Officer (Parks) will act as an observer in these two areas (4.7 and 4.8), at Forum meetings and feed his/her findings back to the Forum.
- 4.10 **Promotion:** There is a need to publicise the Forum, so that anyone interested in joining would have the option to do so.

5. Forum Agenda:

- 5.1 **Agenda setting:** The forward agenda for the 12 months ahead will be agreed by members at each Annual Meeting.
- 5.2 **Consultation:** Prior to the Annual Meeting, the Forum will consult the Parks Service on the emerging priorities for members and the views of the service will be fed back to members when the forward programme is being discussed.
- 5.3 **Prioritisation:** Members will use the agreed objectives of the Forum to help prioritise their forward programme.
- 5.4 **Access agenda:** Members wishing to raise an item under this agenda item should ideally give the Chair 48 hours notice, to enable the Chair to communicate this to the Parks Service. This will allow officers to do some research and respond more knowledgeably at the meeting.

6. Support from Bristol Parks Service:

- 6.1 **Service Manager:** The Parks Service Manager (PSM) will provide active support for the Forum and endeavour to attend every meeting if invited. If unable to attend, the Service Manager will ensure a member of the Parks Management Team is in attendance to formally represent the service.
- 6.2 **Community Development Worker:** The Parks Service will employ a Community Development Worker (CDO) who will have explicit responsibility for supporting the Forum in their job description. The Forum will advise the CDO on the type and level of support that is required. If the CDO is unable to provide as much support as the Forum requires, the PSM will need to explain why this is the case.
- 6.3 **Financial support:** The Parks Service will provide financial support to meet the essential needs of the Forum, including room hire, refreshments, postage, publicity and training/learning activities, based on a budget agreed at each Annual Meeting. Financial support will also be provided to individuals to enable participation eg: those with young children or a disability.
- 6.4 **Minutes and general administration:** The Parks Service will also support the taking and distribution of agenda papers and minutes, either through the appointment of a Secretary to the Forum or through providing ongoing administrative support from the team in Colston House.

7. Status

- 7.1 **Support from the Executive:** The Executive Member for Environment, Transport and Leisure supports the Forum and will attend at least one meeting of the Forum each year, as requested. The Executive may provide practical support for members in other ways as appropriate.
- 7.2 **Consultation:** The Forum is formally recognised by the City Council as a key consultation body for the Parks Service. It expects to be consulted on all major changes and developments in the division.
- 7.3 **Responding to consultations:** The Forum might not wish to respond to issues presented to members by the Parks Service or other council services; but the importance of offering the Forum the option whether to respond needs to be recognised.
- 7.4 **Decision making powers:** The Forum and the City Council both recognise that the Forum has no decision making powers. Its powers lie in the ability to influence the development of the Parks Service, to make recommendations from members based on an open, inclusive and democratic process and to push for change.
- 7.5 **Accountability:** The recommendations of the Forum will be implemented, unless a good reason is given otherwise by the Parks Service Manager, or in certain circumstances the Executive Member.
- 7.6 **Context:** The Forum acknowledges that it can only ever be one way for the Parks Service to consult its users and customers. Just as a park group only represents some users, so the Forum can only represent some park users. Members recognise that the Forum exists within a wider democratic process already in place.

Appendix: Secondary Aims

The following objectives have been agreed by park groups as relevant to the work of the Forum. In addition to the primary objectives outlined above, they can help inform discussions about the work of the Forum and its priorities for action.

- To tackle common issues affecting green spaces
- To act as a 'watch dog' over the Bristol Parks Service
- To promote and be a voice for green spaces in the city
- To encourage and support new groups which represent Bristol's diverse communities

- To support communication between Forum members and City Councillors
- To support open dialogue and honest information exchange between Forum members and Bristol City Council officers
- To respond to and support local park groups on local issues
- To raise the profile in the city and nationally, of parks and green space issues.

**Amended and agreed by Parks Forum workshop
19th March 2003
Southville Centre.**