

Bristol Parks Forum statement at the State of the City debate with full council on Tuesday 15th January 2008

Councillors,

You will by now have all been aware of the issues raised by the deferral of the Parks and Green Spaces Strategy.

These are set out in my statement and I do not propose to go through them in detail again.

But it is important in this debate on the State of the City that the implications of the funding proposals for Parks are properly considered.

The changes that were introduced, at the last minute, in the cabinet version of the strategy, amounted to not only an increase in the amount of public open space that would need to be sold for development, but an additional need for funding from sale of land for 'life cycle' costs, that is replacement of equipment and so on, which have until now been included in the annual maintenance budget.

Bristol's parks, like many other cities', have been under-funded for years. But the funding for Bristol's parks is well below the national average. For example, Liverpool, which has about the same amount of open space as Bristol, spends £12,000 / ha, where Bristol only spends £4,161 / ha

To look at another way, Bristol spends £13.58 / capita on maintenance against an average figure across the country of £21.83 / capita.

Or again another way, Bristol spends £33.37 / household where the average figure is £57 / household.

To remove these annual 'life cycle' costs from annual maintenance costs and to sell off land to fund them is irresponsible.

This is not the way to fund cyclical costs. It is not a renewable source – the pot is not bottomless.

What do you do when the available low value land is all sold? Move on to selling off our more valued and valuable parks?

In the end there will be no parks and green spaces left. This cannot really be the council's intention.

Parks and green spaces are of inestimable value to Bristol.

As the number of people living in the city rises and their homes get smaller and land more densely occupied, local parks and open spaces are often their only opportunity to get out in the fresh air without getting into a car and driving to the country.

They can meet up with the rest of their community in their park, children can run about and make friends;
for older people it may be the only place they come in social contact with other members of the community;
for many teenagers it is the only place they can go to be with their friends.
The value of green space to health and well-being, to the establishment of balanced and sustainable communities, and to a high quality environment is emphasised in the strategy. These are objectives of the corporate plan.

The improved economic value of well maintained green space to both residential and business communities is also well attested, and the increased value directly benefits local taxation income.

Parks and Green Spaces have a value to tackle the problems facing us with climate change.

With 'extreme climate incidents' like the recent heavy rain, we must preserve green space to help absorb the water. Building over our parks, playing fields and front gardens is creating a greater and greater problem for the city's already overloaded drainage system.

As part of the debate on the State of the City, the value of Bristol's Parks and Green spaces must be recognised

and the council must start to redress the poor state of many of Bristol's Parks, not by selling them off and diverting the money to other uses, but by increasing the funding to them

- to reflect their value and
- to address the problems of past underfunding
- to raise Bristol's spending on parks maintenance to come into line with the rest of the country
- and to support the new strategy as it requires

so that our now run down Parks and Green Spaces can be something that Bristol, with its aim to become a green capital of Europe, can rightly be proud of.