

18 August 2008

We have been sent an interesting report on the economic value of parks. The report is American, based on research carried out in Philadelphia but the principles apply just as well in the UK. The report was sent by Alan Barber, who was head of Bristol Parks for many years (there is an article about Alan here: <http://tinyurl.com/6bwayq>) - this is what he had to say:

"Subject: THE HOLY GRAIL AT LAST!

Dear All

If you haven't seen the attached report before, I hope you will be as thrilled as I am with its contents. I am grateful to Professor John Crompton for drawing my attention to the valuable work the Trust for Public Land has been doing on valuing the benefits of city park systems in the USA.

This report appears to be the first published product of their work in estimating the per annum value of green infrastructure to a city. Philadelphia makes a good subject as their parklands have suffered from maintenance budget reductions in past years, as is still the case with many UK cities.

This work in no way eclipses the parallel work being done by CABE on Asset Management of park systems in England, but it does propose a real advance in the evidence base needed to help persuade Government and local government to reverse the continuing revenue budget decline in the UK and invest more in green infrastructure.

The report shows that the annual value of parks to Philadelphia is around 100 times greater than the annual amount being invested in their maintenance. The methodology can be refined and the benefits expanded beyond those in the report. I suggest this should be a matter for international cooperation, keeping in mind that the Australian authorities are also keen on this approach. One improvement should be to recognise that whilst most benefits rise in value with the quality of the parkland, justifying greater investment, not all do; there are some valuable benefits such as slowing storm water run-off which are not so affected.

In the USA, increases in the value of property can quickly produce commensurate gains in city revenues. Alas, our dysfunctional local taxation system allows no such gain. Notwithstanding the vacuous rhetoric about 'change' from both Brown and Cameron, neither party is grasping this nettle; even the timid Lyons Inquiry Report on the financing of local government appears to have been binned. The UK has the worst system I have ever come across, especially when it comes to being able to capture value and support local democracy.

Please note the important role of the Philadelphia Park Alliance. <http://www.philaparks.org> Similar cross-authority forums are being formed in the UK and should be encouraged in their advocacy by this report. The proof will be if they succeed in Philadelphia in increasing the maintenance budget to achieve a greater return, now that the case has been so well made.

Best wishes,

Alan"

The report can be downloaded from <http://www.tpl.org/philaparkvalue>

The last paragraph of Alan's message seems to lay down a challenge to the BPF and despite the

promises in the P&GSS we obviously have some work to do. BCC's recently published Medium Term Financial Plan (see <http://www.bristol.gov.uk/redirect?oid=PressRelease-id-27377005>) includes an increase in the Parks maintenance budget for 2009/10 to cover the retender of the South contract but doesn't seem to include any further increase for 2010/11.

Rob
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28 August 2008

As discussed at the last Forum meeting the structure of Bristol Parks is currently being reviewed. This has come about because of the changes in grounds maintenance which means that some work will be taken in-house and also because of the restructuring of Bristol City Council - details on the BCC website. The plan which has been approved by the cabinet moves Bristol Parks from Culture & Leisure Services to Neighbourhoods.

Bristol Parks wish to consult the BPF about the proposed changes and there will therefore be an special meeting of the BPF at the Southville Centre on Saturday 13th September, 10-00 a.m until 12-00 midday. Please can you contact helen.rossington@bristol.gov.uk or ring 0117 922 3719 if you wish to attend this session.. Bristol Parks will also be inviting all park groups to comment via a Parks Review webpage which will contain the Service Review Plan and invite comment. The consultation period is from 8 September to the first week of October.

The next regular BPF meeting will be Sat 11th October - the minutes of the last meeting in July are now available on our website at www.bristolparksforum.org.uk They have also been sent to everyone on Bristol Parks' email list.

You will also be interested to know that Richard Fletcher has been successful in getting the Area Green Space Plan Project Manager post which means that he is no longer the Community Development Officer. As you will see from the minutes Catherine Newman is the contact at Bristol Parks for items for the Agenda for the next meeting, or you can send them to info@bristolparksforum.org.uk

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