

01 February 2010 – No 6

Membership Records

The list of groups that have returned their forms so far can be seen here:

www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/directory.htm

We would like all groups who are members of the BPF to return a form so that we can hold an up to date list. Once we have the list in place then any new groups will also be asked to complete a form to join the BPF.

The terms of reference of the BPF set out which groups are entitled to join (they can be seen here www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/ToROct08.pdf). Membership is open to 'groups with an interest in protecting/improving parks or green spaces (including natural spaces and outdoor playgrounds)'. As well as park groups 'city wide' groups can also join.

If you are a member of a group or organisation which you think meets the criteria then please encourage them to return a form. The form is available on the website at

www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/#membership

Forms need to be returned by 15 February for any groups that wish to be included in the Parks Forum Directory.

Head of Parks

Following the departure of Peter last week there is now a new structure in place with two third tier managers reporting directly to Tracey Morgan rather than four. This confirms what Tracey Morgan suggested would be happening when she spoke at our meeting and spoke about the need to reduce the number of managers.

In the structure that was put in place in April there were five people reporting directly to Peter - Rob Thurston (Parks Operations), Richard Ennion (Natural Environment), Jen Mackley (Strategy Team), Sue Lutkenhouse (Parks Projects) & Helen Rossington (Parks Business). Each of these now report to one of the two third tier managers, but not all to the same one. For the time being the structure of the teams below this level remains unchanged.

This means that there is no longer a 'Head of Parks' and in fact no 'Parks Department' as a separate entity in the way that we have known it.

Tree Clearance on the Cyclepath

There has recently been some tree felling and tree planting on the cyclepath. There are some photos and comments on the Green Bristol Blog including a reply from Jon Rogers which explains why the trees were felled - see <http://greenbristolblog.blogspot.com/2010/01/railway-path-before-and-after.html>

Some of the trees are being felled to allow the installation of lighting but others are 'to promote

biodiversity within the corridor'. This is the most recent example of something we have also experienced on Troopers Hill where it is sometimes necessary to cut down trees to improve the habitat for other flora and fauna but it is difficult to get this message across. Some of the comments on the Green Bristol Blog are very similar to comments we received on the Friends of Troopers Hill Forum.

One of the main problems seems to be that Bristol City Council are not very good at publicising these works in advance or at explaining why they are being done; Jon Rogers admits this in his reply. Of course part of the reason for this might be that there is no longer a marketing or publicity officer for Bristol's parks and Council Officers are very restricted in what they can say to the media. Perhaps this will change with the new structure.

Zoo Car Parking on the Downs

This is a subject that has received a lot of coverage in the Evening Post recently such as this story: <http://tinyurl.com/y9penav>

The planning application is 09/05111/T and is for the use of part of the Downs as an overflow car park for the next five years. The Zoo has apparently looked at various alternatives but still thinks it needs the car park.

Grove Woods

On our walk in Snuff Mills after the last meeting we saw the container that Bristol City Council are trying to get removed from Grove Woods. There was a story in the Evening Post about it that can be seen here: <http://tinyurl.com/yhkfkm>

Next BPF Meeting

The next BPF meeting on Saturday 10th April will be at Netham Pavilion, Netham Park. As far as I know this will be the first BPF meeting that will actually be held in a park.

While you are in the area there is also the chance to visit Troopers Hill, we have a Dawn Chorus Walk with Ed Drewitt on the same day starting at 6.30am that will finish in time for you to get to the meeting! Details of how to book for the Dawn Chorus and of other events planned for Troopers Hill are on our website at <http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/events.htm>

The minutes of the last BPF meeting will be out soon.

Rob Acton-Campbell

BPF

www.bristolparksforum.org.uk

BPF Meetings: Saturday 10th April at Netham Pavilion

Saturday 17 July; Saturday 9 October - venues to be confirmed

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Minutes of BPF Meeting 16 January 2010

These are now on the website at <http://www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/#meetings>

Membership Records and Directory

The list of groups that have returned their forms is growing fast, see www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/directory.htm

However, there are still several groups that we expected to hear from who haven't yet returned forms. The form is available on the website at www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/#membership

Forms need to be returned by 15 February for any groups that wish to be included in the Parks Forum Directory. We are considering having a stall again at the Festival of Nature over the weekend of 12th/13th June, if we do it would be good to have copies of the Directory available and to have lots of park groups listed.

Events

The deadline for applying for funds from the Community Festival and Event Fund is 26th February 2010. There is £40k available and we would like as much as possible to go to parks groups for community events. As part of these changes Bristol City Council will not be running 'Music in the Park' events this year. If you would like a music concert in your park this is one of the events that the fund will be able to support. We have contact details for the Bath Spa Band. Details and forms for the Event Fund are at www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/#events

You might also be able to get funding for events from your Neighbourhood Partnership. There is £10k per ward for 2010/11 to deliver projects and events. These are intended to be projects 'delivered by local voluntary or community groups to improve the neighbourhood/quality of life of residents'.

Jenny Crook has now returned from holiday and has clarified the criteria for the insurance cover that is available to park groups for small community events:

The limit on attendance for the first year's trial is under 200 people at any one time.

The policy is only intended for:

- * Recognised parks/arts groups delivering events and activities that support the Parks/Arts Strategy
- * Small, low risk community events for under 200 people, such as picnics and fun days

Any applications for events with over 200 people, commercial applications, sporting events or those with high risk activity, would be expected to apply for their own insurance cover as per usual.

There is no finite limit on the insurance policy itself, but we need to provide a limit as this insurance policy is only intended to support small scale events and community groups. Any abuse of the policy will obviously result in its loss for everyone. We've got further than any other authorities with this so need to ensure that the years trial is a successful one. Assuming it is, we can perhaps look to expand in future if a need is established.

Relationship between Bristol Parks and Park Groups

I have received the email blow from Marie Jo of the Manor Woods Valley group and she has agreed that I can share it with you.

Hello Rob,

You will remember that at the end of the Parks Forum meeting on 31st October 2009, André and I both explained the fact that we found our work as a Park Group more and more difficult.

The last Parks Forum meeting was most useful as it put us "in the picture" as far as the new reorganisation is concerned. Unfortunately, there was no time to mention the problems we have on the ground and we wondered if other groups felt the same frustration. Thank you for all your personal efforts to help people organise events in their parks but in our case we do not have enough volunteers and too many concerns to deal with.

Our Manor Woods Valley Working Group meets regularly. We have been around for a number of years and have always worked in partnership with Sally Oldfield until September 2008 and Julian Cox our Community Park Manager at the time. In the past 18 months we have carried out a variety of projects on the ground and are still doing so, all this without the Parks Department support and money.

When we spot a problem or have a question to ask I e-mail our Community Park Officer, always with short and to the point e-mails as we are very aware that since the post of CPM disappeared, the CPO's work has increased. The answers are always prompt but what we would like to happen on the ground does not always happen for various reasons.

Let us make it clear that this is not a criticism of individuals but of the system or rather the absence of it. To us it appears that there is no official mechanism to meet, discuss problems, make suggestions, assess progress etc. with the Park authorities on a local level. The collaboration between Park Groups and these authorities appears to us more and more tenuous and confused. When we raised the problems we have at the Parks Forum in October, it was obvious that the groups and individuals from south Bristol agreed with us.

Isn't the main aim of our Park Groups to improve our green spaces through collaboration with the authorities concerned? If this collaboration is hardly existent our groups are becoming redundant. We feel that the Parks Forum needs to address this situation and discuss it in meetings and through

correspondence. Otherwise, some groups will soon drop out due to lack of direction and support and we think it would be difficult for new groups to appear and be effective in the present climate, at least as we perceive it in south Bristol. Other areas of Bristol may have a different experience.

The only positive news we have to report is that Justin Smith, our new Woodland and Wildlife Officer has contacted and consulted with Malago Valley Conservation Group and some coppicing work is starting in Manor Woods Valley. Also our group is working well on the third interpretation board about the flower meadow after we were given a grant by Yansec. You will have to come and see it in the summer.

Best wishes
Marie Jo Coutanche
For Manor Woods Valley Group
(Part of Malago Valley Conservation Group)

I have to say that this seems to be in complete contrast to our experience at Troopers Hill, which is of course in the East area with an 'in house' team.

We have met Jamie our Area Park Manager & Gary our Community Park Manager on many occasions and walked the site with them. We have also walked round with Keith who is acting as Community Park Keeper while Julian recovers and spoken and exchanged emails with Dave our Head Gardener. Things that we have suggested should be done have been discussed and actions agreed and acted on. Urgent matters have been dealt with promptly and we often receive replies to emails in the evenings. Both our APM and CPO were new to the area following the reorganisation but were keen to get to know the site (we had 5 CPMs from 2003 to 2009 so we are used to introducing the site to new faces!). We have also walked the site with Jan Walters from the Natural Environment team. Some good news this week was that we got our YANSEC funded project signed off - details at www.troopers-hill.org.uk/yansec08.htm.

One of the things that Tracey Morgan has said is that she is keen to build on what works in Bristol Parks and to change what doesn't. We would be keen to hear from other groups on how they think things are working (or not) and will raise any issues with Tracey when the committee meet her at the beginning of next month.

Incidentally Tracey is keen to stress that whilst there is no one in the role of head of Parks, there is still a parks department.

Rob Acton-Campbell
BPF
www.bristolparksforum.org.uk
BPF Meetings: Saturday 10th April at Netham Pavilion
Saturday 17 July; Saturday 9 October - venues to be confirmed

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Deadlines

BPF Membership Forms need to be returned in the next couple of days for any groups that wish to be included in the Parks Forum Directory. Catherine and Raquib will start putting it together this week, it needs to be printed by the end of March.

Groups that have returned our membership forms can be seen at www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/directory.htm

The Membership Form is available on the website at www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/#membership

The deadline for applying for funds from the Community Festival and Event Fund is 26th February 2010. Details and forms are at www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/#events

Relationship between Bristol Parks and Park Groups

Further to the email from Marie Jo and my comments about Troopers Hill in my last update, I received emails from two groups in the North area reporting their problems; the first is from Eileen at Old Sneed Park Nature Reserve:

"It appears that the quality of support varies across the city. I note that Area East has APM, CPO, a park keeper and a head gardener.

In Bristol North we have an acting APM. only. I asked about support from gardeners, which Peter envisaged would be available for winter work, but was told they would be too busy on other sites. All practical work at Old Sneed Park is done by volunteers apart from work covered by external grants which we have obtained and the occasional emergency such as the branch of a tree falling in the lake.

We did not get any support from Sally Oldfield as we are not deemed suitable to be an LNR (not based on the merits of the site,) but because we are not in or near a "socially disadvantaged area". Our management plan needs updating and we need one for the Lake. We have been told there is no money or staff time for that, we would have to pay for it. I suppose the alternative is to do what we think best.

So compared to us Malago are very lucky to have the support which they do.

After our CPM left last April we found the new APM very helpful indeed, but no sooner was an CPO appointed the APM disappeared. We have found the acting APM (the officer), very helpful. He has come to the site several times and always replies to e-mails. He had the difficult task of taking over the HLF funded work with no information passed on within the Parks Dept.

Referring to the Malago's comments, I do think the Parks Department should look at its role vis a vis the Park's Groups with regard to management. When we had a CPM he knew the site intimately, but it is difficult to see how one person can get to know all the Parks and Open Spaces in an area in detail, though I must add in fairness our APM (acting) has done well in getting to know on our site and our group.

If there is to be effective improvement to Parks and Open Spaces effective management plans are essential and an opportunity to discuss progress with someone from Parks and to plan work. I am hoping our APM will be able to do this with us. The problem is the Management Plan requires updating.

All good wishes, from Eileen"

and this from Alan at Friends of Badock's Wood:

"My experience of FOBW's interface with Parks is far more inclined to Marie Jo's view than yours.

I'm not sure how we are going to improve matters. On the face of it, our CPO is grossly over-worked to the point where support for us appears to be severely limited.

A couple of years ago, Richard Fletcher indicated that he would like FOBW to be second to FoTH in the production of a Parks Group Agreement before rolling out the idea to all Parks Groups. In the event this failed because it was devolved to our CPM to progress and, unfortunately, this just did not happen. This was probably due to lack of commitment by our CPM whilst his time was taken up by more important day-to-day problems.

So, the net result was that we (FOBW) didn't get a Parks Group Agreement and the idea just withered on the vine as regards to it being rolled out to other Groups.

Any Agreement would have been a great corner stone to a new Management Plan. At least it would have indicated where support from Parks would have been forthcoming. It would have defined the boundaries between our long term aspirations and Parks' desire/ability to deliver. As it stands, we don't even have a schedule of routine work that we can refer to. We (FOBW) are often asked why (or why not) certain activities are or are not undertaken and we haven't got a clue!

I'm not sure of the best way forward. FOBW would like to engage with Parks to progress our aspirations. As Parks is in the process of yet another reorganisation - before the previous reorganisation has had a chance to establish itself - just where do we start? Do Parks (as an entity) want to engage with Parks Groups, or are we just to be tolerated in the process of devolution to the Neighbourhood Partnership process?

I would like a share of the Community Festival Fund but FOBW do not have the resources to progress an application, let alone organise an event without Parks support - bring back Sally! Unlike FoTH, I don't really think Badock's Wood is the venue for a Music in the Park performance by a live band. I could be wrong...

If we are able to organise anything ourselves, it is most likely to be a very low key affair in the shape of a Bat Walk or some other guided walk with 10 to 20 odd attendees. In the event, would we still need to apply for

insurance cover through the "new" system? In the past Sally would have taken care of things like that!

Regards

Alan"

The Parks Group Agreement that Alan mentions dates from 2007 and can be seen at www.troopers-hill.org.uk/Agreement.pdf The process of producing this agreement was a useful exercise but it was not renewed.

Eileen, Alan and Marie Jo all wanted me to stress that they are not criticising individuals. Everyone seems to agree that individual Parks officers work very hard and do what they can to help given the time they have available.

On the specific point of guided walks, these can be covered by BCC's insurance if you have undergone Bristol Parks' Health & Safety training for practical activities. At Eileen's suggestion I have asked Raquib if a shorter training session could be arranged for people who would like to lead walks but not work days.

Other emails I received included one from Denis at Callington Rd confirming that they are also happy with the support they are receiving from the East team.

Wilmot Park Group are particularly unhappy about the way the consultation over their Pathfinder Play Area was run last year.

Friends of Hartcliff Millennium Green have written directly to Tracey Morgan expressing their disappointment that their site is not now going to be put forward for a Green Flag. You can see a copy of the letter here www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/StandardsHMG.pdf

The BPF committee are meeting Tracey Morgan on 8th March. Tracey sees these emails and in response to the email from Marie Jo she has said that she 'will be looking at what we need to do to address this'.

Tracey adds 'At the moment I am having a number of meetings with groups of staff, meetings with the Trade Unions and the discussion set with you for the 8th March, from this we will then have a plan of changes that can take place where staff are in agreement.'

I will report the outcome of our 8th March meeting in a future update.

Rob Acton-Campbell

BPF

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Visit us at the Bristol Festival of Nature 12th and 13th June 2010 www.festivalofnature.org

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Hi,

Next BPF Meeting 10th April, Netham Park

If there are any issues that you would like covered at our next meeting please let us know. We are aiming to finalise the Agenda by the end of March.

Community Festival and Event Fund

A reminder that the deadline for applying for funds from the Community Festival and Event Fund is this Friday (26th February 2010). Details and forms are at www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/#events

We are hoping to hold another meeting of the working group looking at licensing issues around events in March so that we can report back to the April meeting.

Friends of Troopers Hill have been approached by Gynormus Rawkus <http://rawkus.org.uk/index.htm> who tell us they have experience working at Blaise Castle with Ranger Nicola Brownlie with children's workshops, puppetry and storytelling.

They would be very happy to work with any park group and would help them put the application for funding together and would do such things as the publicity of the event and well as putting the event on. Obviously the park group would be expected to help with the event but a lot of the hard graft would be taken away.

Stoke Park

You may remember that Bristol City Council Cabinet decided in principle to take Stoke Park into Council ownership at the Cabinet meeting on 2 April last year. The BPF wrote in support of this action.

Since then things appear to have gone quiet but negotiations have been going on behind the scenes. Following a request to Tracey, we have received the following update from Cellan Michael.

"Just to briefly introduce myself, I've been with Bristol Parks for just over ten years now, nine and a half of those as Ashton Court Estate Manager. I am currently Parks Estates Manager (which came from our last re-structuring) and manage the teams who look after Ashton Court, Blaise Castle, The Downs, Oldbury Court, Hengrove Play Park and am the main point of contact between the current owners of Stoke Park and the council now that Pete has left.

Our last meeting with the developers was in mid January where we agreed on a number of issues and if the due diligence process our property team are undertaking doesn't throw up any surprises (which we don't expect it to) then we hope to be concluding the deal to take ownership of the site in June/July of this year."

BPF Membership

Groups that have returned our membership forms and are therefore official members of the BPF can now be seen via the link from the website at www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/#membership

There are still some groups who we expected to receive forms from but haven't. If your group isn't listed or if you know of people in other groups who aren't on the list, we would still like to receive a form. Replies we receive now might still get in the printed 2010 directory and will certainly be added to the website.

Rob Acton-Campbell

BPF

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