

Bristol Parks Forum meeting 14th October – Eastville Park

Notes from Bristol City Council Parks Department

Dear Parks Forum members

I asked colleagues for any news they wanted to share with you and I have set out below what I was sent back. There is so much going on and on and much of it with our incredible volunteers in our incredible city, and I'm sure this is just a fraction of what is actually happening. So much to be proud of.

Brief news from Richard Fletcher:

We have taken a **draft Tree Strategy** to the One City Environment Board. Some further consultation is taking place with stakeholders about the content including with the Tree Forum. Amendments will be made and a final draft taken back to the Board to be adopted and then published.

The **Parks Strategy** content is being finalised. The Food Growing and Allotments Strategy will be embedded within it. **We are planning the start of the consultation for 20th November** currently and we will do a Forum specific consultation event as planned previously. When consultation starts, please encourage people to review and respond.

Ash Dieback was mentioned at the last Forum meeting. It might be useful to make this an agenda item at the next meeting.

This year has been a difficult one for **grounds maintenance** as it has been a perfect growing year –warm and wet through the whole summer. Each year we struggle a little more to attract seasonal workers and increasingly they leave us after a short time to take up other opportunities. Together with long-term sickness absences, this year we have had c25 staff less than we need to deliver the specification. This winter we will of course review what we might do differently and feedback.

Have a good meeting.

Regards

Richard Fletcher, Park Services Manager

- **Managing for Nature report and opportunities**

Following the One City Ecological Emergency Strategy target of at least 30% of land in Bristol being managed for the benefit of wildlife, the Council set a corporate target of managing at least 30% of its own land for nature. A project was undertaken to establish the baseline for how much Council land was currently being managed for nature, and to identify opportunities for: better management of existing habitats; the creation of new areas of habitat; and changes to the current grass maintenance regimes which would be beneficial for wildlife. The project concluded that currently 15% of Council land is being managed for nature. Within land covered by the Parks and Green Space Strategy, opportunities have been identified to improve

management of 423.6 hectares of existing habitats and create 119 hectares of new habitats. Together, this would be a significant contribution to the Bristol Ecological Network. This will form part of the Parks and Green Space Strategy consultation.

Pesticide Reduction

The Council's Ecological Emergency Action Plan includes an action to review council use of pesticides and progress the search for alternatives, identifying the benefits and costs of each. The pesticide reduction project identified that herbicides are the biggest group of pesticides used by the council. Changes to the Council's weed management programme will need to comply with several different pieces of existing legislation relating to both the use of these chemicals and maintenance of our highways.

Research carried out by other Local Authorities have shown that whilst there are safe alternatives, they are significantly more expensive. Therefore the changes needed to meet the target of 50% reduction in pesticide use by 2030, would be likely to need more resources and investment. In addition, many of the alternatives have other environmental impacts and health and safety issues which all need to be taken into consideration. The findings of this work have led to recommendations for key actions which would contribute to further reductions in herbicide use and will enable the Council to comply with legislation and government guidance through the development of an integrated approach to weed management.

The Service has not yet sought any decisions on a way forward through the Council's pathway processes. The recommendations will have budget implications and it may be prudent to trial alternative approaches by different service areas to produce a more accurate view of costs. This is not a Parks-owned piece of work.

- **Biodiversity Net Gain – direction of travel.**
Biodiversity net gain (BNG) is an approach to development, and/or land management, that aims to leave the natural environment in a measurably better state than it was beforehand. This approach to development will become a mandatory component of the planning process early next year, and is seeking to deliver measurable improvements for biodiversity by creating or enhancing habitats in association with development, either on-site or off-site. This requirement could generate funding that would enable the delivery of habitat creation or enhancement within Parks and green spaces. We are undertaking work to identify sites with the potential for habitat creation which could be funded through this opportunity and we hope to consult on these proposals early next year.
- At **Ashton Court**, volunteering sessions with the Rangers and Gardeners have been ongoing and very successful with lots of rhododendron removal in the winter and himalayan balsam pulling over the summer, with the regulars plus occasional corporate groups. Ride Bristol have secured £5,000 of sponsorship for revamping of

the bike trails, and will be putting a further £5,000 from the money they have raised along with free stone secured from ETM to restore sections of the trails.

- **Friends Groups South Bristol** have been very busy, with regular sessions in Manor Woods Valley, Withywood Park, Friends of Avon New Cut and Redcatch Park carrying out litter picking and planting or maintenance, and one-offs in St Annes Park planting wildflowers, and lots of bulbs just arrived from Blaise Nursery for groups to plant at Withywood Park, Redcatch Park, Dame Emily Park, Valley Walk, Willmott Park and Cottle Road. Primary schoolchildren have planted herbs in the circular bed in Spacemakers (Willmott Park).
- **Rachel Ellis** will be starting next week, to support specific sites and Friends groups in South Bristol including Stockwood Open Space, Withywood Park, Hartcliffe Millennium Green, Dundry Slopes.
- We have two new apprentices **Ethan and Dylan who have started with the Ashton Court Gardens Team** and are settling in well. They will also be working with the Fix It Teams and Blaise Nursery in conjunction with their college syllabus.
- Some of our friends groups eg **Manor Woods Valley, Northern Slopes Initiative, Friends of Avon New Cut** continue to be very active and organising regular activities and fundraising for improvements, whilst some are finding it more difficult, and others are just one or 2 interested individuals who litter pick and keep an eye on their local space. We have a potential new group starting up in **Gores Marsh Park**. We try to help groups where we can with supplying tools, training and bulbs, and the occasional one off supervised sessions for some planting bulbs or wildflowers.
- The **Sport Asset transfer project** is currently working with sport clubs and interested parties that jointly submitted expressions of Interest in 2018 to take over their respective existing sport assets located across nine parks. The project is progressing forward with good club/BCC engagement. Community engagement officers from the project Hayley and Steff are working with the sports club committees to support them in their bids to take over these assets through providing guidance on business cases and providing information packs on existing park costs. **The first Community Asset transfer panel** is being held on 8th Nov where the project aims to gain approval for at least half of the sites to progress to the next stage where lease arrangements of those assets will be reviewed for transfer to the clubs in 2024.
- We expect to plant c.8,500 **trees this winter**, including 8 woodlands + c. 700 individual (specimen trees) – mix of green space and streets {some grants /other funding yet to be agreed}.
- Our **tree maintenance and tree planting programme is published on the One Tree per Child website**. Currently we are giving dates for October – December. The first volunteer tree planting event is on the 6th December at Ashton Court. The January to March sessions will be released in due course.

- We will be planting our 100,000th tree this winter (since we started **One Tree Per Child in 2015**) so look out for an announcement of where and when.
- **Wild and Well - Judy at Your Park** continues to connect communities and organisations to deliver health and wellbeing benefits around greenspaces in South Bristol in Hartcliffe and Withywood and now expanded into east Bristol at Stockwood Open Space. The Wild and Well approach has now recruited 15 Park Champions – a cohort of people who can speak up on behalf of their community, supporting the principle of Wild and Well, which at its heart is making connections and seeing good things happen in and around their parks or greenspaces as a result. Judy's regular padlet news (click here), is a great way to find out what is happening with lots of information about activities taking place in parks and greenspaces in the area, plus health news, information about jobs and funding. Judy was pleased to announce that Routes to Wellbeing has now started in Withywood Park offering a weekly 'health and wellbeing support group in parks for those struggling with low mood and/or loneliness' – see Hartcliffe and Withywood Wild and Well (padlet.com).
- We are pleased to confirm that our '**Volunteer Parks' partnership project with Your Park Bristol and Bath** has started in South and East Bristol in partnership with Your Park. This is funded under the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (administered by WECA). The project will be supporting communities around 10 green spaces including: Withywood Park, Hartcliffe Millennium Green, Willmott Park, Manor Woods Valley, Northern Slopes, Dundry Slopes, Hengrove Mounds, Hawkfield Meadow, Stockwood Open Space, and Cottle Road Open Space. This is a 3 year programme supporting existing and formative friends of groups with a focus on volunteering and site planning /action leading to more people using and getting the benefit from these amazing places. Watch these spaces!
- Volunteers at **Stoke Park Estate** have worked with our Ranger Ash Kent to dig out and repair the two dew ponds on the Estate and also to do hedgelaying, clearing laurel, building steps and pulling ragwort. Despite the less than ideal weather conditions this season, they have now completed works to the dew pond in Pale Plantation and it looks fantastic. Ash has also taken the knowledge from the Stoke Park dew pond to support the Blaise Rangers who have now started restoring the dew pond in The Royals at Blaise.
- **Blaise and Stoke Park have also hosted several corporate volunteering events** to remove invasive species from the historic landscape, cut back scrub encroaching on meadow areas and continue the local groups work on the dew ponds. All working to the appropriate management plans for these sites. More of this partnership working with Your Park is planned on both sites in future.
- Caroline Ennion was pleased to attend the unveiling of the warhorse statue at the Daisy Field on the 16th September which was a lovely event organised by the Friends of **Lamplighters Marsh** to commemorate the history of the site as a receiving station

for over 250,000 horses shipped over from the Americas to take part in the first World War.

- An ecologist working with the **Friends of Horfield Common** identified a rare catmint that hadn't been recorded in Bristol for over 100 years growing in a patch of The Common that had recently been dug up for road works. The North Parks Team have put signs up to advise residents what is going on and will be leaving the area uncut for two seasons so that the plants can set seed.
- **Sustainable Westbury on Trym (SusWOT)** continue to work weekly clearing litter across the North area waterways supported on a weekly basis by the Parks team collecting waste.
- Wessex Water have completed their long standing project to upgrade the main water supply at **Crow Lane Open Space** and have completed the remedial works. A new tarmac path which Wessex funded is now being programmed which will link Vimpany and Pevell Close.
- We have received funding from the **WECA Bee Bold Pollinator Fund** for two projects:
 - £3000 has been granted for creation of a pollinator-friendly and drought-resistant garden at the **Stapleton Allotments** site. The garden will be created by volunteers with Park Work throughout October 2023 and will include a wildflower meadow, herb planters, and a bee bank. Information about the garden and how other allotments users can create wildlife spaces will be provided on the allotments webpage.
 - Nearly £10,000 has been granted for **creation and enhancement of pollinator habitats across 28 parks sites**, including orchards, hedgerows, wildflower meadows, floral lawns and spring bulb planting. Planting sessions will commence in October 2023 and be delivered in partnership with Friends groups, or through volunteer sessions with One Tree Per Child, Your Park and Park Work.
- **Hallen Marsh** is a wetland site, comprising approximately 97 hectares of wetland, grassland and woodland. The site has been created as part of the Avonmouth and Severnside Enterprise Area (ASEA) Ecology Mitigation and Flood Defence Project. The primary aim has been to create habitat that can support the migratory bird species associated with the Severn Estuary Special Protection Area (SPA), to mitigate potential habitat loss associated with the recent and future development of the Avonmouth and Severnside Enterprise Area. Now the habitat creation work has been completed, Hallen Marsh will soon be handed back to Bristol City Council for ongoing habitat management which will include grazing. The site isn't a public greenspace, but parts of it are accessible via public rights of way. We are also engaging with local volunteers to undertake monitoring of over-wintering birds using

the site to help us determine how successful the habitat creation has been and to inform future management.

- The introduction of goats by Streetgoat to **Hengrove Mounds** has been a real success in spite of some ASB issues (including 2 goats being stolen which were later found wandering around in Willmott Park!).
- **The Area Committees (AC) have received 27 applications at Stage 1 related to parks** (not including those for tree planting), which is around the norm. We have provided costs and feedback to Cllrs who are considering the applications which will go forward at their Stage 1 AC meetings within the next few weeks. The Stage 2 decisions to fund projects will be taken by Cllrs in February 2024. Whilst the Parks Service is supportive of the majority of applications, the financial value of all the applications exceeds the AC money available, with some ACs currently in deficit, therefore it is likely that only some of the proposals will proceed.
- Update from **Judy Gowenlock from YourPark:**
 - Tuesdays- Roots to Wellbeing, has started at Witherwood Park-,1 -4pm. We are open to referrals! Friendly and relaxed group offering gardening, crafts and mindfulness. Free lunch and transport provided. Contact roots@yourpark.org for more info. (Roots to Wellbeing is already running at Hartcliffe Millenium Green on Thursday mornings).
 - Community Nature walk- Saturday 14th October meet at 2pm outside Morrisons- join Bristol Avon River Trust for a walk along Pigeonhouse Stream.
 - Wild and Well network meeting- Tuesday 17th October 10-12 at Hartcliffe Club for Young People- everyone welcome. Book your place here. Please contact me if you want to know more! Would love to see you there. There will be homemade cake!
 - Drop in advice session for community groups- Thursday 19th October @Symes 12.30-2.30pm
 - Knowle West nature walks- Saturday 14th October and Tuesday 24th October- see post for details.
 - Free Guided Sound walks in Witherwood - Saturday 18th and Wednesday 29th November- see the post for meeting details. This walk starts at Campus Skate Park and ends in Witherwood Park and is led by Brave Bold Drama.
 - Wellbeing Wednesdays and Thursdays at Hartcliffe City Farm- see the posts for more details.
 - 14 young people completed the makeover of the shelter/lozenge at the Spacemakers site in Hartcliffe. It is looking fabulous! If you want to find out more about Spacemakers, follow the Spacemakers Facebook page.

Grounds Maintenance – Part 2

This year we have been struggling to recruit a full team of litter operatives and have had a lack of Seasonal staff across all areas, this has impacted service delivery as relies on support of the wider team to support litter as well as grounds maintenance but the teams have and continue to work tirelessly to deliver services. With warm, wet weather the mowing season is prolonged and still continues as grass has not slowed in growth. Winter works are now taking place with hedge cutting, flailing and shrub works underway. Football season is well underway also with frequent pitch cutting and marking required due to the continued grass growth.