



Bristol Parks Forum

Notes of the Meeting of the
Bristol Parks Forum
held on Saturday 14th October 2023 at
the Greenway Centre, Southmead

A list of attendees was taken and is held by the Forum Committee.

1 Welcomes and Introductions:

Len welcomed everyone.

Len introduced:

- Parks Forum Committee members present – Frances, Sarah and Derek; apologies had been received from Rob Acton-Campbell and Ted Fowler.

- Cllrs Lorraine Francis was present.
 - Bristol City Council Officers
 - Nic Ferris/Steff Probert covering for Ella Hogg.

Joining later would be

- Colin Chapman from Council's Local Plan team;
- Sara Laking from Your Park

Apologies had been received from the following BCC officers: Jon James, Head of Service for the Natural and Marine Environment; and Richard Fletcher and Richard Ennion from the Parks Department. Also from Charlee Bennett, CEO, Your Park Bristol and Bath.

Apologies had also been received from several Parks Group representatives.

Len reminded the meeting that the Forum is dependent upon donations to support these meetings, for example to pay for room hire and refreshments. A suggested annual donation per group of £10 would be welcomed if your group could spare it. This can be paid to the Forum in cash at these meetings or by bank transfer / standing order etc. Contact the Forum for bank details if needed.

Len also thanked the Friends of Eastville Park for hosting this meeting at this venue and supporting the meeting, as well as providing refreshments (donations welcomed for teas and coffees).

Sarah from Eastville Park gave a 5-minute talk about Eastville Park explaining that it is one of Bristol's biggest parks which is not a "destination park". It covers a large area and a wide demographic. The Park extends all the way to Snuff Mills. Eastville Park includes a playing area, meadows, sports area, lake and more. She briefly explained that they had applied for funding and worked with the Parks Department and received a grant. Key importance to gaining the grant was the link between the community and the park. Members were invited to join Sarah for a walk in Eastville Park after the meeting.

2 Minutes of the Last Meeting

Approved.

Matters arising from March and October Meetings:

BCC and Eastside – no news – carry forward. **Action: Bristol City Council** Parkhive. Frances had spoken with Sam who has advised contacting David Smith (VPAG and UWE) who was the lead on the project. Frances is to contact him via UWE as he is not currently active in VPAG. Frances is to find out whether the database and the photos that were used for ParkHive are available to download anywhere. **Action: Frances**

3 From the Committee

Len reported that the Committee had met once since the last full Forum meeting in July – mainly to organise this meeting.

Questions on these topics could be put the Committee members during the break.

Chair attended Communities Scrutiny Committee on future funding, draft Parks Strategy and Tree Strategy – five points raised:

- Clarity needed on what words and phrases mean
- Clarity on how the funding review is being carried out
- Welcomed statements about working with parks groups and local communities
- Asked for joined up consideration of changes to individual sites
- Asked for practical consideration of a new large green park in Central Bristol.

Reply sent in on City Centre (Broadmead/Castle Park) Development Delivery Plan.

Asking for better coverage of issues at the start of the document such as the role of play, the approach of the design for women and girls, the need to support individual or groups of wildlife species. – to crease green, green spaces and wildlife corridors.

We welcomed a tree lined avenue along Merchant Street to St James Barton; asked for more green, green space around Almshouses.

We didn't comment on Castle Park on behalf of the Forum as there is a Friends of Castle Park who made their own comments.

We ask for all parties to work together to ensure sufficient funding for the maintenance of features, so that health and well-being benefits remain in place for people and wildlife.

Rob attended a meeting discussing the provision of toilets in Bristol.

Bristol Parks Forum AGM

Len outlined the process for the AGM using a series of slides which are on the <http://www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/meetings/> webpage.

Accounts for 2022/23 for approval

The accounts were presented and a copy of these are available on request.

It was noted that Petty Cash had not previously been shown on accounts (this is primarily the cash collected at meetings to pay for room hire, refreshments, etc)

It was noted that funds are held for ParkWork and suggested that ParkWork should claim these funds from the Forum.

Similarly, funds are held for Castle Park as there is no constituted Friends of Castle Park to hold these funds. Peter (Manor Woods Valley) queried whether there were any plans to set up a group and Russ (Castle Park) said there were not as it was not easy to get members to do this.

Why some numbers are shown in brackets was queried and Derek (Treasurer) explained that this is the usual way of showing expenditure in accounts.

Frances suggested this be changed to show income, expenditure, balance as three separate columns to make it easy for anyone to understand.

Len suggested that this be considered at the next Committee meeting. **Action: BPF Committee**

The accounts were formally approved.

Elections to formal posts, and agreement on Committee members and helpers.

Chair – Len Wyatt, Nominated, by Derek Hawkins, seconded by Peter Loy-Hancocks. Elected.

Vice Chair – No nominees

Treasurer – Derek Hawkins volunteered to continue as Treasurer - approved

Committee members – Sarah West, Ted Fowler, Frances Robertson volunteered to continue on the Committee and were approved.

No other volunteers for the Committee were forthcoming, but members can be nominated and join during the year.

Helpers – Kate from Oldbury Court said she would love to be a helper. She explained she was good at note taking and summarising complex documents. This was most welcome to the members.

End of AGM

From the City Council

Parks Department

None of the officers were available to attend this meeting but Richard Fletcher, Parks Services Manager, had sent the Forum a detailed document with information / news passed on from Parks officers as well as updates on what was happening regarding the Parks & Green Spaces and Tree Strategies - see http://www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/BCC_Parks141023.pdf

Len put the first page up on the screen as well as having provided some paper copies. The meeting discussed some of the matters in Richard's reports.

It was noted that the **Parks & Green Spaces Strategy** is due out for consultation on 20th November alongside the **Tree Strategy**, but the Tree Strategy is not being consulted upon.

Len explained that there would be two alternative meetings for the Forum members to attend to hear and talk about the Parks & Green Spaces Strategy (PGSS) - one face to face meeting at the Greenway Centre, Southmead and the other on Zoom. [The date of the Greenway Centre meeting is Saturday 2nd December and will run from 10.00 to 11.30 a.m.]

The PGSS had been to the Communities Scrutiny Committee – see here for the papers and minutes

<https://democracy.bristol.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=149&MId=10792&Ver=4>

The Forum noted that Richard Fletcher had suggested Ash Die Back be put on the Forum agenda for the next meeting. This was agreed.

Grounds Maintenance was mentioned in Richard's report. He wrote: "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."

Derek commented that this seems to be an ongoing saga as Parks Department having to manage the same parks with less and less funding. Len wondered if the Forum might want to write in to put a formal response. Frances queried whether this was the right time with the Parks Strategy about to be published.

Peter (Manor Woods Valley) felt that there were conversations to be had about changes because there were opportunities to reduce the management in some areas but these were being met with resistance.

Christine (VPAG) felt that it was a good idea to make a statement to get it noticed.

Frances (Badock's Wood) thought it interesting that MWVG were meeting resistance which was very different from her experience where the officers were very receptive to discussions about management, mowing regimes etc. She felt there needed to be a consistent approach.

Len's experience was that the GIS information was wrong for his area, but the Council had brought their GIS specialist out to map what was actually there, which informed more accurate management.

Kate (Oldbury Court) agreed that there was a need for a consistent approach as her experience was that there was confusion around management.

Sarah (Eastville Park) reported that they had spent time building up good relationships with the relevant Parks Officers and working with ParkWork and Ella Hogg. Their Nature Group had agreements on mowing and what happens on the ground.

Russ (Castle Park) felt that Castle Park is in a bit of a bubble. A popular destination and also a thoroughfare. He said it was problematic because their Parkee, who is a union rep was wanting to not lose staff jobs. Russ explained that when large groups of people from local businesses get involved in volunteering, they get the H&S signed off by Teija but smaller group do not.

Also, sometime corporate groups turn up unannounced to do litter picking off their own bat. He said there was a mixture of ways of doing things.

Frances queried how is it that some Parks group can work with ParkWork, Ella, One Tree Per Child etc and others cannot. She cited the example of having agreed with the Council that there would be tree planting at Badock's Wood as part of the recognition of their Queen's Green Canopy Award for the Platinum Jubilee, but it seemed it wasn't planned in so much as an afterthought. Having been told they would come back and plant more trees this season, when Frances had queried when it would be and also offered to pay for the trees, she was told the planting in Badock's Wood would be at the end of the year before it would be delivered, using whatever was left that would then be planted. So, she has no idea how some parks get all the resources and support for their Friends group / conservation work in their open space and others not. She had been waiting years for an updated quote for steps to be rebuilt from ParkWork and without that they cannot even try to get any external funding.

Russ responded by saying that the way to get help from ParkWork was just to contact Joe McKenna and that Castle Park does not have to pay for that. He said that there is a Sikh Memorial Garden there and they work with Joe on the first Tuesday of every month and the Sikh community will come on the same day.

Cllr Francis said it can be difficult to have one approach across all.

Peter (MWVG) said that he thought the Forum should send a response to the grounds maintenance issues. He did think a lot of conversations here may be solved by the Parks Strategy.

Nic Ferris explained that she and Steff, who was also present, were covering for Ella Hogg (Parks Volunteer Coordinator) which she is on maternity leave. She had found the discussion very interesting and she and Steff would look at clarifying the processes once they were both settled in to their role. She said ParkWork can offer some sessions for free because they are undertaking training as well as charging for some.

Sarah (Eastville Park) explained that ParkWork was a model that Parks would pay for their time so when Future Parks ran the EoI process, she had had to bid for Joe's yard. However, it has undergone a huge change. Having information about the connections between what Joe does, what Corporates can or want to do, what Parks Dept and Your Park can do would be helpful. So clarification would be good.

Action: Nic and Steff to look at clarifying for groups the process which they need to go through to access the support from the various sources.

Managing for Nature

Frances explained that Badock's Wood situation where they had been selected for a Management Plan to be developed, despite there being an existing one – albeit in need of a slight update. The only part of the site that has changed is a recreational field that was taken out of playing pitch use at the same time as it was added to the Playing Pitch Strategy so despite not being used nor managed for pitch use, it could not be incorporated into the Local Nature Reserve because Richard Ennion insisted it had to stay available for pitches. At the same time, it has been earmarked for new management regime for nature by the Council / WECA and is currently being managed for nature to a regime agreed with the Friends group and the maintenance officer, but different from all the hay meadows.

Len commented that conflicts are going to need to be managed and Parks Groups will need make the links between the various initiatives and seek clarifications when necessary.

Pesticide Reduction

Peter (MWVG) was concerned that there should not be a total glyphosate ban in Bristol as it was needed to tackle Japanese knotweed. Knotweed was a problem in Manor Woods Valley and this had to be used. He commented that pesticides like glyphosate have been through safety processes whereas alternatives that are being suggested such as vinegar and salt haven't in particular in relation to their impact on habitats, ground water, water courses etc

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

It was noted that the majority of developments to which this will be relevant will kick in January 2024.

Peter (MWVG) stated that Biodiversity Net Gain is fundamentally flawed. If a development affects biodiversity, a developer can identify another site (which may be distant from the site where the development is) where biodiversity can be enhanced. Developer is required to put money in to make it happen.

Len noted that some Wildlife Trusts are setting up companies to gather in money from Biodiversity Net Gain to help with creating larger scale habitat enhancements. Environmental Banks are being created where land is bought then sold to developers to achieve biodiversity net gain requirements for their development. He cited an example on the Western Slopes where the developer was proposing to improve what remained of the existing site, improve a nearby site; and provide money for a site in Nailsea.

Bristol Local Plan

Colin Chapman, Local Plan Team Manager, Bristol City Council.

See presentation http://www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/BCC_Local_Plan141023.pdf

Also subsequent to the Forum meeting Local Plan papers to Full Council on 31st October 2023

<https://democracy.bristol.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=142&MId=10819&Ver=4>

Colin explained that the Local Plan was now at the formal Publication Stage.

He said that the One City Plan was not statutory and covers a whole range of partner and Council activities. The Local Plan covers planning land use and is a statutory document.

He explained that there were opportunities for communities to be involved in planning the development of the city. Decisions have to be in accordance with the Local Plan. The Government expects that if a development proposal is in accordance with the Local Plan, then it should be approved by the Council.

The Local Plan had been in preparation for a long time (see timetable on slides). In 2019 a consultation was held on new protections and designations for Parks and Green Spaces.

He explained that the Local Plan papers would be published on 20th October for consideration and approval at Full Council on 31st October. Following that they will be published for representations in mid/ end November.

He stated that now would be the opportunity to say what people are not happy about and make representations and also to support those areas that people support.

Following the consultation, the plan goes to the Planning inspector for examination and that process takes about a year so it is expected to be adopted in Spring 2025.

In the presentation there is a slide showing the chapter headings of the local plan.

On the map the orange circles are regeneration areas.

There are going to be some green belt changes in Brislington, Ashton Vale and Bishopsworth.

The requirement for Biodiversity Net Gain includes that new development should incorporate green space and biodiversity.

Biodiversity and green infrastructure.

Policy G1 - Local Green Space (LGS) is a national designation intended for the most special open space protection.

Policy G2 – Reserved Open Green Space (ROGS) designation means that it could be reviewed in the future.

Policy G4 - Stapleton is proposed as LGS because of the quality of soil for good growing.

The Local Plan does not override neighbourhood development plans's green space policies.

Changes

Colin explained that following feedback from 2019 consultation a number of ROGS had their designation changed to LGS. There were no designated Green Spaces within the Green Belt in 2019 so for example part of Ashton Court which is green space will also be LGS. Western Slopes will now be a LGS designation not development allocation.

The public consultation will run for a minimum of 6 weeks.

Both the Inspector and the City Council will look at comments received from the consultation. The Inspector will ask the Council if there are any changes the Council wishes to make as a result of the feedback from the consultation.

Len reported that the Forum has responded previously and had also met with Cllr Beech (Cabinet member responsible for the Local Plan)

Lois (Redland Green) asked whether once adopted it would have a 20-year life. Colin said it will go to 2040 but should be reviewed after 5 years.

Cllr Francis asked Colin to explain the difference between “social housing” and “affordable housing”.

Colin explained that affordable, in policy terms, is housing that is available to those who could otherwise not afford from the open market eg: share ownership. The Policy focus is on social housing, including homes for social rent – e.g. Council and housing association housing. Proximately 75% of affordable housing provided should be social housing. Affordable housing from development would normally require a registered provider (eg: housing association) being involved.

Len noted that relevance to Parks Forum of discussion on housing was the interrelationship between housing policies and parks and open spaces.

Stephen (Dame Emily Parks, Western Harbourside) unable to be present but sent in this question:

“I would have asked if not previously told, what if anything has changed of the evident knobbling of "New Protection for Open Space" (March 2019) in the wards of Southville, Hotwells and Bedminster map pages and charts where all the open space inside the Western Harbour Redline of that date was simply erased from consideration in that consultation document.?”

Land which includes the Sylvia Crowe Designed "Cumberland Basin South" or Ashton Meadows.

This remains in my view an open wound in the Local Plan proposals. Has anything changed, and if so what? “

Colin explained that in the Western Harbour area none of the parks are designated in the same way. It was felt that it was not appropriate because of proposed road changes. The Policy does expect open space provision in the Western Harbour. The Master planning for Western Harbour is separate from the Local Plan, but the Plan says development must accord with the Master Plan. He said that people could comment on the Western Harbour areas as part of the Local Plan consultation – e.g. on the green spaces.

Nic Ferris asked about loss and retention of open spaces.

Colin said that the focus is on retention and protection. Most LGS come from the previous open space designations which are no longer used. LGS protection is still the highest category of open green space protection.

Guglielowe, CircularArtsSpace/Eastville Park asked how green spaces are protected and asked more about social housing.

Colin explained that the Local Plan is helping to increase the proportion of social housing. There is a significant increase to enable affordable housing. The expectation is protection of open space when development is proposed but CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) is a way of getting finance from developers to improve existing open space.

Asked about areas with asbestos contamination, Colin explained there is a policy in the Local Plan that deals with existing contaminated land.

Len clarified that there are site allocation maps for all the areas that describe potential development sites and there will be a policy statement for larger areas marked for development e.g. for Central Fishponds.

Peter (MWVG) noted that when people look at the plan their eye is immediately attracted to your own area. He reiterated the point made that it is important that if you support a policy; or designation that you think is good then people should say so because a developer or someone else could suggest a site for development. He cited Crox Bottom as a successful example of where this support had worked changing the designation from ROS to LGS.

Colin agreed that it is very helpful to know what people do support.

Frances asked about the 3rd open space category that she recalled from the previous open spaces consultation. Colin explained that this is called Incidental Green Space and these are areas of green spaces that are too small to be identified, but there is a policy which covers them.

Lois (Redland Green) asked whether allotment sites are LGS or ROGS – and thought some may fall within an area for LGS. Is agricultural land different quality? Should we make representations and will there be general allotment policy in the Local Plan?

Colin replied that there will be a policy for allotments. Allotment sites have generally been identified as ROGS. Stapleton Allotments and Holdings is a LGS reflecting their unique food growing role and soil quality.

Len said that there would be a separate meeting of Parks Groups organised by the Forum to talk about the Local Plan (separate from the Parks Strategy meetings). To be arranged.

Your Park – update on activities Sara Laking

Sarah outlined and updated progress on Your Park's projects.

Health related projects:

Roots to Well Being – social prescribing is running at two locations.

- Eastville Park; and
- Hartcliffe Millenium Green

2 new sites will be added at:

- Stockwood Open Space; and
- Withywood Park

The focus is for people who have mental health problems.

South Bristol

Wild & Well Project run by Judy.

Different levels of activities including nature, sports day, community gardening. Locations include Withywood Park, Eastville Park, Stockwood Open Space and Hartcliffe Millenium Green.

The project has attracted new funding in Withywood Park for raised planters. There will be a 5th location added to the list, as there is funding for Judy to develop this project.

Access to Parks – Madie

Includes Parks volunteering – helping support access, sensory walks etc.

Accessibility

Hartcliffe Millennium Green – funding to talk to local disabled people about what could be done to make it more accessible. Starting forums at the end of November and the contact for that is colin@yourpark.org.uk

Your Park is recruiting for a new paid position to help the project. Hoping to get Heritage Lottery Fund funding to extend the project.

Nature & Biodiversity

Rachel Ellis is the Your Park nature lead.

She is working in South Bristol supporting Parks Groups to support them in improving their nature areas.

Volunteer Awards

These celebrate Parks volunteers. Sara explained that if you have volunteering groups and individuals you would like to nominate there will be information coming soon about categories.

The Award Ceremony date is 3rd February 2024 – venue to be confirmed.

Corporate Team Days – Saskia

If there are things in your park you need doing Your Park can help to get corporates out to do it.

Len commented that he was confused about who is doing what with whom; and it would be good to be clearer so that groups can better understand the opportunities. See discussion above with Nic and Steff.

Any other business

Introduction to Nic and Steff – joint volunteer coordinators covering for Ella Hogg

Bristol City Council Parks Department

Nic and Steff explained that Steff is covering South and North parks groups and Nic is covering Centre and East.

Nic is working on Parks Volunteer support on Monday p.m. to Wednesday and is the contact for Central and East volunteers.

They support the liaison between Parks Groups and Operational Officers and work with Your Park e.g. on Corporate volunteering and events and celebrations. Supporting staff led groups are about 5. Steff's role will include managing Joe McKenna.

They will be making a clarification document as mentioned above and sending it out with a volunteer newsletter.

Len – “micro group” – Northern Slopes –

Len shared the experience from Northern Slopes where they are trying to set up a micro group of volunteers just looking after one path on the Bommie on a as needed basis, rather than the whole site. It is called W2BFPG – Wingfield to Beckington Foot Path Group. He wanted to share this idea and will report back on how it is going.

Next Meeting

Saturday 9th March 2024 in Headley Park Church Hall, St Peter's Rise, Bristol BS13 7LZ, hosted by Manor Woods Valley Group.