

Minutes of Bristol Parks Forum Meeting

31st January 2026

The Greenway Centre.

Attended:

Committee

Sarah West (Chair for this Meeting)

Frances Robertson (Treasurer)

Kate Spreadbury (Minutes)

Parks Groups represented:

Badock's Wood

Eastville Park

Northern Slopes Initiative

Oldbury Court Estate

Old Sneed Park Nature Reserve

Redland Green Community Gardens.

Troopers Hill

Horfield Common

Cumberland Basin including Sylvia Crowe Park

Bristol City Council

Richard Fletcher – Head of Parks Service

Caroline Ennion – Parks Estates Manager

Other organisations

Bristol Tree Forum - Chris Wallace

Bristol Civic Society – Stephen Wickham

Your Park – Rob Acton-Campbell

Apologies:

Charlee Bennett – Your Park.

Nic Ferris – Volunteer Coordinator, BCC

St Andrews Park

Castle Park

1. Welcome and Introductions by Frances Robertson, BPF Committee & Friends of Badocks Wood.

2. Matters arising not on the Meeting agenda.

It was noted that after our previous Chair, Len's, departure, the absence of a new Chair has led to a restructuring of the BPF committee. Frances is the only role – holder as Treasurer. Frances, Sarah and Kate are working cooperatively to manage BPF business and meetings. Other BPF members are very welcome to join the committee to help out with the various tasks and roles including minuting meetings and leading work streams.

Members are encouraged to complete and submit the Survey previously circulated which will inform discussions about the future direction of the Forum once adequate responses have been received.

A new round of CIL funding has begun with a slightly different process. Do talk with your local councillors, expressions of interest will need to be submitted to the Area Committees covering wards during February and March. Remember to include inflation factors! **Action: Frances to include details in the next BPF Update.**

BPF Committee to discuss a proposal to convene a meeting on encampments.' Action Completed. The emphasis was changed to enable a consistency of approach on issues like this across Bristol.

BPF Park representatives are invited to join the BPF Facebook page to network and discuss/share information etc between meetings. Look for 'Bristol Parks Forum' on Facebook. **Action: Bristol Forum Parks Group members**

3. Report from the Parks Forum Committee (Frances Robertson)

Big Park in St Phillips. Frances attended the Supplementary Planning Document consultation session. . There is a lot of interest in a Big Park. We need to aim for the biggest park possible. Sparke Evans already serves the existing community and cannot cope with the increased use by the emerging community. In addition, Sparke Evans is not in the right place to serve the fast-growing community. The blue/green infrastructure must be carefully thought through. A link to the consultation/further information will be in the next BPF Update.

The meeting noted that the area plans include buildings of 10-16 stories with a population of 7000 exclusive of the student population. There are around 1,000 students living there at present with 3,000 more being accommodated next year. The high-rise buildings appear to be next to the riverside linear green space.

There are in-person and online opportunities to participate in the consultation.

Action: Susan Acton- Campbell will contact Bristol University students union to invite representatives onto the consultation.

Local Green Space (LGS) designation. 174 Parks and Green Spaces in Bristol were given the robust designation of 'Local Green Space' in the Local Plan. The Planning Inspector subsequently asked BCC to remove this designation as being an

inappropriate use of the 'Local Green Space' designation. Spaces are now protected by the National Planning Policy Framework designation of 'Open Green Space' – in Bristol titled 'Reserved Open Space,' a less robust designation. BPF is considering formally writing to the Council to ask what protections are now offered, whether there are any other options for protection and whether the council will make commitments to protect the parks and green spaces, a cross-Party political commitment rather than a planning commitment. Action: BPF Committee

In terms of **commercialisation**, BPF committee members meet regularly with Richard Fletcher and can raise these, and any other issues you are concerned about, as needed.

The Ecological Emergency Action Plan has not yet been agreed as the previous Environment and Sustainability Committee had an item which overran. It will now go to the February Policy committee meeting. The Nature Towns and Cities (Nature Together) project which started in January 2026 will also report to a subsequent meeting, likely in June.

4. Reports from Richard Fletcher, Head of Parks followed by Q&A.

Richard shared the Bristol Parks structure via PowerPoint. There are 230 people in the Parks Service. The structure document is not yet shareable as the service is in a state of flux, there are changes, new posts and vacancies to be filled. Once the changes are complete the document will be available to BPF. It has been hard to replace Laurie and Keith (Asset Team) whose expertise far exceeded their pay grade, their loss has left a gap in the service.

Notable changes;

Sharon Radnedge will focus on Parks Commercial Management, Caroline Ennion has been appointed as Parks Estates manager.

There are new project managers for South Bristol and Canford Crematoriums, Learning and Development and commercialisation of the Downs. New roles include project manager for Park Assets, there is a small amount of Capital Budget now available. Amy, Steve and Teija are in post as Parks Operations Managers and grounds delivery. The Allotment Service is expanding. As demand is growing, an additional arboreal officer is being recruited to the current team of six. Paula Spiers is focused on Partnerships across Avon and Frome Rivers. More staff are needed in the Allotment Service.

More Community engagement is coming in as part of Nature, Towns and Cities. Ella Hogg returns from maternity leave this month and will job share with Nic Ferris as Parks Volunteer Coordinators.

Question; How does the gap in expertise in the Parks Service affect CIL costings?

Answer: Richard Fletcher – Susie Feltham is attending to landscape and play management for costings at the moment, there is also a template for pricings, contingencies, inflation rate and risk. Once posts are filled this will be refreshed.

Question: How is the new allotment computer system going?

Answer: Caroline Ennion - the old system goes off line at the end of the week, all staff training is complete and feedback from analysts and allotment officers is that all is going well. A similar system is in use for Pinpoint which enables identification of the species and diameter of every tree in Bristol Parks.

Looking ahead.

Nature Together is just getting going.

Grounds maintenance for council owned property residents- there is now a package of information available.

The Blaise Nursery retail offer is still expanding. See <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/blaise-plant-nursery>.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). New developers are obliged to deliver 10% BNG on or offsite. Offsite BNG must be managed for 30 years. Bristol City Council wants to be in the BNG market, pricing, delivery, location etc is complex work. Becky Belfin is currently working hard on this piece of work which will be supported by a committee. We need to establish via ecological assessment how much each area can be improved, and how much improvement could be achieved through BNG. Bristol City Council has done the basic BNG survey and overlaid this with nature recovery and mapped areas. This will need to be double checked with other council departments who also have eyes on the relevant areas. Funding is expected to be through the market rate of an off-site solution. Low rates are of course attractive to buyers, but the rate must include legal costs, resource and on costs.

Whilst BNG will not protect land, there is an enforcement mechanism and significant penalties for failing to meet the 30-year requirement, BNG standards etc.

Richard referred to the Wiltshire County Council case study - See <http://bit.ly/4bFZ52V> - assessment of BNG site allocations in Wiltshire.

The Parks Service, along with other council services, have been asked to respond to the Golden Motion on Children's Right to Play passed at Full Council in September 2025. <https://democracy.bristol.gov.uk/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=115011&ISATT=1>

The Parks Service completely supports the principles and aspiration, but the resources required are not currently available.

An application has been made for funds to restore the Stoke Park gun emplacement. Sports Asset Transfers are progressing. A cemeteries and crematorium task and finish group is planned to look at future services. Both of the Ashton Court deer management managers are now semi-retired. The Parks Service now has a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Housing and is pursuing SLAs with other departments.

In the next few years there will be an expansion to Bristol South Cemetery.

Commercialisation. The Report is now published, pages 368 - 383 at <https://bit.ly/4dIARw3>. The cross-party task and finish group met on six occasions, including a meeting with Bristol Parks Forum Representatives, and reported in November 2025. Opportunities identified included enhanced services in cemeteries and crematoriums to add value, licenses for commercial services- although this will

not generate income. Councillors are currently enthusiastic about the findings, but this may change. Invest to save approaches will be needed. More data is needed on public habits, wants and needs.

Events organisation. Richard will talk to the Events team to ensure that the need to contact Friends groups is built into the events process. **Action: Richard Fletcher.** The site permissions team and Parks Service meet regularly which means that the Parks Service can also pass on information about a planned event to Friends groups.

Question: In the case of the Krazy Karts event at Victoria Park there was no consultation with the Friends group – or local community. If the event company does not bother, what happens?

Answer: Third Party Event organisers are told who the stakeholders are, but the Parks Service agrees that Friends groups need an early warning.

Negotiating for a proportion of any new income to go to the Parks Service. BPF needs to play a role in defending a budget for Parks. Funding for allotments and other Parks service is likely to be confirmed in the next few days.

Comment: Spirit of Place (see Blaise, Eastville Park/Oldbury Court websites for examples) are important in thinking through commercialisation, income generation and the future of Parks – the concept of Place is important.

Contacting the Parks Service.

It is council policy not to offer officer contacts. The communications system is set up as a funnel, on-line forms with customer service behind that. Online enquiries are triaged and sent to the right officer for the right area with the right reason. Bristol will also soon use a chat Bot 'Ask Briz' to direct enquiries.

This is an effective system but relies on people knowing the difference between a complaint, enquiry or reporting a problem. One of the links – 'suggest an improvement' is broken but currently being mended. People tend to click on 'General Enquiries' but need to be more specific.

Action All: Email BPF the kind of enquiries or issues that are difficult to identify the right approach for.

Issues people have encountered:

How to report a dead animal, there is no option to do this.

The communication issues between the Parks Service and Bristol Waste – Parks groups can create a case on Fix My Street if they put in the Park details, however the dilemma is whether the case goes to Waste or Parks- Waste will often automatically redirect when it is their case.

Fix My Street reports that the case has been closed – but nothing has happened! It may be that the case has been redirected, but this should be stated by Fix My Street with a follow up to the reporter to ask whether the issues has been fixed.

Question: Is there a way to Report an issue with the webpage/forms?

Answer: there is a link at the bottom of the web page to report.

Pesticide use by the council. **Action: Caroline Ennion to follow up. Action complete** – see response below:

'In 2020 as part of the Ecological Emergency Action plan, the Council committed to reducing its pesticide use by 50% by 2030. Halfway through this 10-year period, on 6th November 2025 an update report was submitted to the Environment & Sustainability Committee. It reported that in 2024/25 the Council has already reduced pesticide use by 42% from 2020. The breakdown of usage across the Council is:

46% Highways

30% Housing

16% Cemeteries and Crematoria

8% Parks

1% Public Rights of Way

In parks we will continue to need to use pesticides on hard surfaces to reduce trip and slip hazards and prevent damage from vegetation; for a high-quality public realm; to control pests in our plant Nursery; and to manage invasive species.

Our approach to reducing use is to:

- use controlled droplet spot treatment of weeds
- only using pesticides when the weather conditions make them most effective
- using mechanical weed control e.g. mulching, weeding and sweeping where possible
- designing out problems, for example ensuring paved surfaces do not have lots of gaps that weeds could proliferate in

In addition, our thorough ongoing treatment of invasive species means that we are treating less and less every year - on starting our treatment programme with over 700 patches of Japanese knotweed, we treated only 87 sites in 2024/25. And finally, we continue to investigate alternative treatments, particularly at Blaise Nursery and benchmark against other local authorities for best practise solutions'.

Questions for Richard Flether on broader Park topics.

Horfield Common: No answer from the council had been received since November 2025 when a mapped proposal for tree planting and environment areas was submitted. This has had a negative impact on the Friends group as they could not progress tree planting without permissions. In addition, the proposal was for 900 trees which would have been funded by the Forest of Avon. The council instead planted 100 trees at a cost, it is understood, of £30,000. Trees died, were the wrong species for the area and were not planted correctly. Why did BCC not accept Friends of Horfield Common's proposal?

Answer: Friends of Horfield Common should have had a response, **Action: Caroline Ennion and Richard Fletcher will follow up.** It is important to think about the cycle of tree planting when applying. The tree team tend to plan their work in the summer and are out autumn/winter planting trees. The design of the planting scheme may be an issue, the Council has a custodian role regarding the integrity of the landscape.

5. No Report from Cllr Stephen Williams Chair, Public Health and Communities Policy Committee

6. Update from Your Park Bristol and Bath – Rob Acton- Campbell.

Rob reminded the meeting that Your Park started eight years ago with two employees. Fourteen people are now employed, in 8.3 full time equivalent posts. Rob has been the Chair of Trustees for the last seven years. Charlee Bennett has been the CEO for the last seven years. What is Your Park doing?

- Working with a lived experience group to develop the Your Park strategy for 2026 – 2030.
- Published the research undertaken with Bath University on why minority groups do not use Parks. See the research paper here:
<https://www.nature.com/articles/s42949-025-00293-x.epdf>
- If people do not use Parks they will not get access to health and nature. Barriers identified include safety and perception of safety, people may travel to other parks which are seen as safer. Dogs off the lead coupled with the attitude of dog walkers concern both disabled people and people from minority groups. People are also influenced by the availability and cleanliness of toilets, shade and places to gather as a bigger family groups, availability of tables.
- How can we address these issues?
Access for Disabled People:
Your Park can run an activity programme with disabled people to audit Parks. Work is on-going at Hartcliffe Millenium Green, in Withywood, Redcatch park and Redcatch Community Gardens. Your Park is also running a Sensory walk programme with disabled people in Parks, they are looking for walk leaders and advisors with sensory impairments. Your Park's 'Parks4 All'
<https://yourpark.org.uk/parks-4-all> meets regularly to ensure that work is not duplicated.

Your Park is A Key Partner in Bristol 'Nature Together' (Nature, Towns and Cities funded.) <https://bristolclimatenature.org/projects/nature-together/>

Roots to Wellbeing – self referred or GP referrals, has been successful in a National Lottery Bid of £353,000 to run more Roots to Wellbeing Sessions. The Charity has really started to build up, get things happening and achieve national recognition.

Discussion: How much capacity does Your Park have to take on work in other Parks? Victoria Park has thirteen entrances, all are photographed and on their website. But there are so many aspects to think about, parking, distance between entrance and seats. Disabled people need to be able to plan a visit, the Your Park template can be used to audit accessibility, ideally with disabled park users, so that accurate information can be published on websites. Find the template here: <https://yourpark.org.uk/news/opening-access-with-information>

Recording problems is a start and remember CIL money can be used to make improvements. Dropped kerbs are a matter for Highways. Your Park is aiming ultimately for a list of accessible parks.

Safety in the Park. Women and girls often do not use parks because they do not feel safe. Richard Fletcher told us that the Parks Service is keen to begin to address these issues, but a strong direction is needed. It would be really powerful if Your Park, BPF and the council worked together on improving safety for women and girls in parks. The council needs design guide to use when planning trees, play areas etc. Strategic CIL money could be used to create exemplar Parks.

7. Bristol Parks Forum Future Working.

Frances asked members to:

Fill out the survey to share your ideas on the future of BPF.

Volunteer to be the BPF representative to the National Association of Parks Forum.

Help us work on new Terms of Reference in a Task and Finish Group.

Action: All Parks Groups

8. Welcome to the new Chair of Bristol Tree Forum, Chris Wallace.

Chris is also the coordinator of 40 or so tree champions in Bristol. He explained that the intention is to cover all wooded areas in the City. The Tree Forum and BPF have common interests in LGS, restoring Park protections, as well as Park trees. The Tree Forum also focuses on street trees.

Chris hopes to explore more ways of connecting with tree people in Parks. The Tree Forum can offer expertise to Tree Champions and affiliate status for a Tree Champion in each Park.

BNG is also a mutual interest. The Tree Forum Vice Chair, Mark Ashdown, has put energy into working with government and council with planning applications etc to prevent loss of trees.

The meeting thought it would be useful to talk about BNG at the next meeting.

Action: Chris to write something for the next BPF Update on becoming a Park Tree Champion.

Chris also told us about the Trees of Bristol website. It was currently down following damage by a WebCrawler but does map 1000 'open spaces' in Bristol plus tree walks that can be downloaded onto a phone.

9. AOB

Stephen Wickham noted that the planning application for the area adjacent to Victoria Park is imminent, A BPF statement will be welcome. **Action: Stephen to draft.**

Next Meeting: The next meeting of the Bristol Parks Forum will be on Saturday 18th April 2026 at at the Redcatch Community Centre, Redcatch Road, Knowle, Bristol BS4 2EP

Refreshments and sign in from 9.30am for a 10.00 prompt start