

Minutes of Bristol Parks Forum Meeting

18th April 2026

Redcatch Community Centre

Attended.

Committee:

Sarah West (Chair for this Meeting)
Frances Robertson (Treasurer)
Kate Spreadbury (Minutes)

Parks Groups represented:

Badock's Wood
Canford Park
Castle Park
Cumberland Basin including Sylvia Crowe Park
Eastville Park
Manor Woods Valley
Northern Slopes Initiative
Oldbury Court Estate
Owen Square
Redland Green Community Gardens.
St Andrews Park
Snuff Mills
Victoria Park

Bristol City Council:

Alex Minshull, Sustainable City and Climate Change Manager
Becky Belfin – Nature Conservation Officer
Kit Beaumont - Nature Together Project Manager
Naomi Chatfield- Smith -Ecological Emergency Coordinator
Caroline Ennion – Estates Manager.
Natalie Watson - Nature Together Coordinator

Councillors:

Councillor Lisa Durston

Other organisations

Apologies:

Charlee Bennett – Your Park.
Nic Ferris – Volunteer Coordinator, Bristol City Council
Richard Fletcher – Bristol City Council.

1. Welcome and Introductions by Frances Robertson, BPF Committee & Friends of Badock's Wood.

Frances reminded all about the importance of completing the BPF survey, do tell us – what do you value? What will work for you?

2. Approval of the minutes of the October 2025 meeting.

The minutes were approved as an accurate record although it was noted that Victoria Park Action Group's attendance at the meeting had been omitted.

3. Matters arising not on the Meeting agenda.

Stephen Wickham apologised for not completing his action with regard to the Princess Street Planning Application. He is currently writing the Planning objection. Matters are proceeding well. No other matters arising.

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

Frances encouraged new attendees to sign up for the Parks Forum Update as needed.

4.1 Local Green Space (LGS) designation.

Frances reminded members that LGS is the 'top dollar' protection for a green space. Bristol City Council (BCC) originally designated 174 green spaces in its Local Plan, but the Inspectors did not accept that the designation was being used appropriately. Frances did write to the Planning Inspectorate asking for an explanation of why the spaces were not considered to be LGS but she was referred to the Inspector's responses from the Examination in Public and advised that they do not enter into correspondence.

BPF wrote to council Leader Cllr Tony Dyer, the Chair of the Public Health and Communities Committee, Cllr Stephen Williams and Chair, Economy and Skills Committee (responsible for Planning matters) Cllr Andrew Brown ("to request that Bristol City Council formally protects Bristol's Parks and Green Spaces, and in particular that the Council will not dispose of those sites that were identified as Local Green Space during the Local Plan consultation process"

Full letter from the Forum is on our website -

Cllrs Dyer, Brown and Williams replied and the full reply is on the BPF website and" We confirm that we have no plans to dispose of any of our own council sites. However, some green spaces we had proposed as LGS are privately owned. It is possible these

landowners could at some point make the case to allow development their land. We are committed to working with other landowners to protect green spaces in the city. “and also says “we are clear in our commitment to protecting council-owned parks and green spaces, and to ensure there is no net loss of green space.” See

<http://www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/LGSresponse.pdf>

BPF members are encouraged to contribute to the Local Plan consultation by Friday 12th June. Find the consultation here: <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/ask/find-consultation-engagement/280>

The meeting discussed LGS, those who attended the examination observed that the focus appeared to be on developers. We understand that once this version of the Local Plan is adopted, the Local Plan will be reviewed particularly regarding the number of houses planned. Members also regretted that BCC put the big ‘signature’ parks in which do not meet the criteria for LGS.

Available designations on the Bristol Local Plan are now only Reserved Open Green Spaces, and Incidental Open Spaces.

4.2 BPF ‘Big Park’ campaign.

The St Phillips supplementary planning document (SPD) shows an area described as ‘large park’, but this is only as big as Spark Evans Park and unfit for the needs of the large population who will live there. The tallest buildings in the St Phillips development are near the river, blocking the blue/green space for the rest of the development. 1800 dwellings are planned with a population of around 3,600 so putting pressure on existing parks. The Forum considers that the Bristol Parks and Green Spaces Strategy is not being given any weight in the planning process nor in the development of this SPD

Members discussed their concerns, the shadow from big buildings, car parking. On Feeder Rd a 30-40 story building due South of the river will break Spatial Design Principles, as has happened at Princess St. There is no sense of the ‘mix’ needed to make a good park, park design needs to articulate community needs. BPF needs to articulate what a ‘good park’ looks like.

Agreed: BPF to write to the council to raise concerns that the Park and Green Spaces strategy is not being taken into account in planning decisions. Action: Frances Robertson.

Action: Kate Spreadbury to share the Bristol 24/7 article on the Feeder Rd development onto the BPF Facebook Group.

4.3 Commercialisation in parks – the Bristol Parks license scheme.

The Parks License scheme began on the 1st April. Kate Spreadbury described the impact on one not-for-profit community benefit organisation, Let’s Walk, which provided low

cost (£3-£4 per session) Nordic Walking to older and marginalised groups across Bristol.

Let's Walk have announced their withdrawal from all parks in Bristol. Let's Walk provides training and on-going support to a group of self-employed instructors who also have 'day jobs' as community workers, nurses and (retired) social workers. Let's Walk regularly ran classes in three Bristol parks (Eastville, Oldbury Court Estate and Blaise). Two instructors ran the Oldbury Court Estate group because of the needs of the older group there, one instructor spoke Cantonese which meant that 40% of the group was attended by older Bristol residents from the Hong Kong community. The diversity of Let's Walk instructors mean that people whose first language is not English, or who feel intimidated in parks, attend the lessons. Let's Walk and other organisations like them are not 'commercial', they are not there to 'make money' – the meaning of the word commercial. Forum members were asked to let Kate know through the Forum email address – info@bristolparksforum.org.uk of other examples of other community benefit groups impacted by the introduction of Park License are appreciated.

Agreed: BPF should write to the Public Health and Communities Committee to express concern about the impact of the Parks Business Licensing policy on activities which benefit communities in Bristol. Action: Kate Spreadbury.

4.4 Castle Park workshops.

Frances Robertson advertised these workshops on 29th and 30th April to members, one on Heritage (Ted Fowler attending) and another on Safety and Biodiversity (Frances Robertson attending.) Lighting may well be thought to be a solution regarding safety in Castle Park, but Park groups may be concerned about a reliance on lighting in all parks to provide safety. The workshops are for Castle Park stakeholders so some BPF members may be attending, if you are not attending and have thoughts do send them in via the BPF email.

5. Reports from Bristol City Council.

5a) Ecological Emergency and Climate Emergency (EEC) Plans 2026 – see at <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/files/documents/5241-climate-emergency-action-plan/file>

Alex Minshull, Sustainable City and Climate Change Manager.

Alex told the meeting that the EEC plans were adopted as part of the council's contribution to the One City over-arching strategy. The Plans were reviewed at the March Committee.

The Climate Plan includes actions taken by the council regarding their own buildings and fleet plus including Bristol City Leap which is a partnership between Bristol City Council and Ameresco UK which will accelerate green energy investment in Bristol and help towards decarbonising the whole city, providing up to £500 million over the next five years to help to decarbonize Bristol. It also includes action by the council on

transport, housing etc which help to reduce the city's emissions and improve its resilience to the impacts of climate change.

The ecological action plan contains a wide range of actions planned by the council both on its own land, highways and the harbour but also action to improve biodiversity citywide.

See Alex Minshull's slides.

Questions from BPF members:

Question: How many of the 30,000 trees planted are still alive?

Answer; Kit Beaumont - The One Tree per Child report will tell us how many trees have been replaced. One Tree per child plants at double density. The important aspect is the canopy cover, not the number of trees. Action: Kit Beaumont to share link to the One Tree Per Child Report. <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/residents/museums-parks-sports-and-culture/parks-and-open-spaces/trees-and-meadows/one-tree-per-child>

5b) Blue Green Infrastructure Strategy

– see slides at [Appendix A1- Presentation.pdf](#)

Naomi Chatfield-Smith, Ecological Emergency Coordinator.

Naomi is now the Ecological Emergency Coordinator, taking over from Kit Beaumont who is working on Nature Together for the next two years. Naomi was leading on Blue/Green Infrastructure. If any park group is concerned about ponds or rivers, you can email Naomi on Naomi.Chatfield-Smith@bristol.gov.uk

Naomi described the network of landscapes in the city, and how the blue/green infrastructure connects us all. The slide presentation documented the strategies involved, the four pillars supporting the blue/green infrastructure, BCC targets and drivers for change.

Comments and questions:

The importance of bat friendly lighting and concerns about microplastics in the watercourse were discussed.

Generally, the strategy was praised, it interfaces with a huge number of strategies and frameworks but contains everything you need to know about the Blue/Green infrastructure.

Question: The Welsh Government consider the next generation impact in all policies and strategies; there are so many council strategies – where are the priorities?

Answer; Alex Minshull - There are no simple answers, but we are knitting the strategies together.

The NPPF appears to be driving areas to certain outcomes. Planning inspectors have struck out the council's proposed policies on climate resilience for example, and we will often find that the council will have to make decisions that are incompatible with strategy because of other duties or priorities, it all depends on the context.

5c [Nature Together Programme](#) [Nature Together: involving communities in caring for local green spaces - Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership](#) – blog.

Kit Beaumont, Nature Together Project Manager.

See Kit Beaumont's slides

Bristol was successful in its bid for Nature Towns and Cities funding against 280 other applications. The resultant Bristol 'Nature Together' has three 'project sites' which will focus on how the council can work with communities and the third sector. The three community partners are Lockleaze Neighbourhood Trust, Eastside Community Trust and Bristol Older People's Forum. They will create neighbourhood plans for nature over two years. The projects will also trial easier communication with the council through a 'one front door'.

Nature Together Team - Kit is the project manager, Natalie Watson the coordinator,. Avon Wildlife Trust are acting as the community ecologist, with Joy from Your Park acting as the community park lead.

There is a recognition of the conflict between commercialisation and enabling people to use parks freely.

Questions:

Q: As an allotment site rep, I am keen to understand more about all of the strategies we have heard about this morning. We want to be part of all this but have not heard anything directly, we only need a little information.

Answer: Kit said that the allotments team is a small team, but Caroline Ennion said she will be attending the allotment forum to share more information.

The BBC 'My garden of a thousand bees' was recommended. **Action: Kate Spreadbury**

to share a link via the BPF Facebook page.

Q: How are we doing on 100% of watercourses in Bristol being good for wildlife?

A: The target must be broken down, BCC are using River Hub on the River Trust website to understand the different sources of river pollution. It is hard as our rivers are so far down the catchment area and so the solution is not often in the gift of BCC.

5d Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) –Becky Belfin, Nature Conservation Officer.

No slides.

Becky told the meeting about her work to determine the potential for BCC to enhance Parks and Green Spaces through Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG).

What is BNG?

By law developers must deliver a BNG of 10%. This means a development will result in more or better quality natural habitat than there was before development. If developers cannot achieve 100% of the requirement onsite they can deliver off-site by buying units at another location. Any areas which are enhanced to generate BNG units have to be maintained for 30 years, and this is secured through a legal agreement. BCC is looking for parks and green spaces where habitats can be created or enhanced to generate BNG units that can be sold. This will generate income that can be used to fund this enhancement and 30 years of maintenance. This will contribute to the target of managing 30% of BCC land for nature.

To determine loss or gain a biodiversity matrix is used, this calculates loss or gain on the basis of distinctiveness of the habitat, the condition of the habitat, and its strategic importance – the latter will relate to the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Temporal risk identifies the impact of development (i.e. before and after), the difficulty and length of time needed to recreate the habitat is also part of the calculation. Finally, spatial risk, or how far away from the development the off-site BNG units are, is also included.

The final spreadsheet shows the unit value of habitats retained and lost to development and habitats that are enhanced or created, which collectively demonstrate whether or not the 10% net gain has been achieved. Developers have to submit this as part of their planning application.

BCC's initial focus is on the spaces that are designated Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCIs). The majority have now been surveyed to identify areas of low distinctiveness or poor condition that can be improved to generate BNG units and thereby maintained for 30 years. The 30 years maintenance clause means checking the council's rights or permissions regarding the site and checking that BCC have the ability to maintain these over 30 years. The cost of enhancement and 30 years of management

will be factored into the unit rates that BCC will charge developers for different habitat types.

A range of habitat units can be sold, as well as looking at the SNCIs there are also possibilities being explored for Individual Tree biodiversity units and grassland units in parks outside of SNCIs. BCC could take forward around 95 BNG units in the first phase.

Selling BNG units is a national market, and developers can go to whoever they wish, BCC has no control over this. However, the matrix does increase the number of units needed if the off-site BNG is outside of the same Local Planning Authority area and the National Character Area as the development. BCC could sell to developers outside of Bristol too. In either case the price of the Unit is important as it will need to be competitive in the market.

BCC needs to understand the demand for off-site BNG, as once sites are registered to sell units there is a time period in which the management plans must be implemented. BCC is looking at what other councils are doing to learn from their example.

The proposed sites for these habitat units, as well as a process for agreeing the use of other green spaces in the future will need to go before a Policy committee. It is not clear yet whether this will be the Public Health and Communities Committee or the Environment and Sustainability Policy Committee.

Members questions and comments:

Question: Brownfield sites may still be interesting, even though there is no existing value there will still need to be a 10% improvement.

Answer: Becky – BNG trading rules form part of the Statutory Biodiversity Metric and determine how habitat losses are compensated. These rules ensure that biodiversity loss is replaced with habitats of equal or greater ecological value, i.e. like for like, or like for better. So, for example we cannot replace a high distinctiveness woodland with a high distinctiveness grassland. Brownfield sites can have areas of habitat, and even if it's low value developers would still need to achieve the gain of 10%. Pre the mandatory requirement Becky is aware of a few BCC developments that used off-site BNG units.

Other local authorities are also looking at becoming part of the BNG market. In order to register BNG unit sellers need a legal agreement with a third party, either a S106 agreement or a Conservation Covenant. A council cannot have a S106 agreement with itself, and for a Conservation Covenant the third party is an organisation that has been formally designated by DEFRA. There are not many designated 'responsible bodies' yet set up, and the costs associated with conservation covenants appear to be higher than S106. So, currently we are looking at enter into a S106 agreement with another local authority.

Question: This sounds like it could be useful in managing sites to deliver equity and access to nature.

Answer: Becky – To some extent, we are for example focusing on trees where canopy cover is needed, often in the most deprived parts of Bristol. But there are a lot of constraints around BNG, once we understand the demand and opportunities we can factor other dimensions in.

Question: Are Friends groups in the SNCI parks/green spaces going to be involved in the process?

Answer: Becky - In terms of the SNCIs there must be a habitat management and monitoring plan, and this will be fed into by the local Friends group.

Question: Regarding the St Phillips development, will BNG apply to the area as a whole?

Answer: BNG has to be covered in all planning applications and is built into discussions about the management plan for St Phillips. Remember BNG is separate from having an amenity park or sports area.

Question: How is the assessment of loss and gain quality assured?

Answer; In terms of quality assurance the planning department will use a new piece of software to validate information, the planning department is responsible for checking the validity of the data.

Comment: BNG has been around for a while and there has already been a huge amount of work by the public and private sector to get all this in place. Private companies are now very mature, and it will be challenging for a council to enter the market.

Answer: Things are still evolving, WECA could be a responsible body, lots of legal input to this, we could also go with BANES.

Question: The planned Lawrence Weston Cycling Centre will lead to a massive loss of green space for concrete and a car park. How can this be replaced in the city?

Answer: Our space is limited in the city, so we have to enhance habitats we have. There is also a mitigation hierarchy, the first step is always to try to achieve a 10% net gain onsite.

5c Update from Bristol City Council – Caroline Ennion, Parks Estates Manager.

Vehicle Dwellers on park land – The council has an injunction against van dwellers on the Downs and will not need to go back to Court every time enforcement is needed. The council have also employed a larger enforcement team.

Grounds Maintenance – each team now has a tablet with jobs mapped, this should help avoid prevent another incident like the St Georges park bulb destruction. The council

has been inundated with friends groups experiences of having precious planted areas mowed, hopefully the new system will stop this happening. An update on the investigation into the St George's Park bulb incident will be shared in the next newsletter that goes out to Lead Volunteers.

Nature Together – as above the project is looking at the feasibility and creation of a 'one front door' for all parks related issues.

Restructuring of the Asset team is on-going and new capital works are planned throughout the city.

Allotments – there will be a city-wide consultation in the autumn. In the meantime, there is an engagement process underway to look at the issues across allotments, this can include a discussion about BNG if wished.

Engaging younger people - Duke of Edinburgh Award participants are doing an hour a week volunteer work in Stoke Park and Badock's Wood. Offers are also being made to local schools.

Commercialisation of parks:

- Licensing in Parks. There have been 77 applications, mostly (70-75%) dogwalkers and also fitness instructors. This is not about making money for the council but understanding what activities are going on in our parks and ensuring organisers have the correct insurance etc to safeguard participants, knowing what people are doing.

- Enterprises – the council is looking at bringing under used or vacant assets back into use and has identified various opportunities to do that.

- Blaise Plant nursery – a dedicated retail manager has now been employed.

The Commercialisation Action Plan is taking account of increasing wellbeing in parks, reviewing the licensing scheme and ensuring the most effective use of land.

Question: Regarding the 420 event in Castle Park, why allow this? Because there is no organiser there are no toilets, there is illegal drug use including dealing and injecting and the noise is incredible and well over the legal limit of 90 decibels.

Answer: Caroline - The council has not 'allowed' the event but struggled to prevent it. Police and council have worked together to stop vehicle access and protect the vaults. As many mitigations as possible will be deployed.

Question: Who do I talk to on the Estates teams?

Answer: Caroline - Your main point of contact is the Parks Operational Coordinator – Steve Clampin (South), Mary O'Connell East & Central and Aimee Bowden-Poole (North) - manager.

6. Park Forum Survey.

Kate Spreadbury told the meeting that 10 groups had responded so far, all agreed with the purpose of the Forum. There were suggestions about different ways of meeting and recognition of the range of ways that park groups are configured. Do fill in a survey and tell us what you want from the Forum!

7. Any other business.

We are considering what sort of meeting to have in July – face to face or Zoom? Should we have a social? Visit other parks? Go down to Beese's tearooms? We will consult members. Do note that there are only three committee members at the moment and it is hard with so few people. Do help out – taking minutes, meeting and greeting at meetings etc will also be very gratefully accepted.

Do also ask other people from your group to attend BPF meetings – new faces and ideas are always welcome.

8. Anna George – remembrance – Frances Robertson.

Frances led the Forum in remembering Anna who was a member of BPF, a lovely woman and a 'mover and shaker' in the Horfield area. Anna managed to get a community centre established in Horfield. She is much missed.