



## **Response to Bristol City Council Parks and Green Spaces Consultation**

Date: 25/1/2018

From: Friends of Horfield Common

Friends of Horfield Common is a volunteer-led park-group affiliated with Bristol Parks Forum and representing 959 members.

**We are concerned at the proposals for further cuts to the budgets available to deliver parks maintenance across the city as we do not believe that the current resources are adequate to enable the parks service to operate effectively.**

Whilst there is an aspiration for volunteers to do more to support the parks service to be able to provide good quality parks across Bristol, it is not possible for volunteer-led groups like ours to work effectively without dedicated parks officers with the appropriate skills, knowledge and experience – and time available to work effectively with us. We have raised more than £100,000.00 of external funding over the last 5 years to support enhancements and improvements to Horfield Common, in support of BCC's strategic aims and for the benefit of all residents. However, delivery time for projects has slowed down significantly & at the most recent Bishopston, Cotham and Redland Community Partnership meeting representatives from each park in the area reported that they had secured external funding for projects and improvements to their local parks but that this funding was at that time sitting in the group's bank accounts because BCC parks does not have the staff capacity available to enable projects to be delivered. In view of this, and the considerable cuts that the BCC parks service has already been subjected to over the last 10 years (as a non-statutory service it has been an obvious target for cost savings as budgets have been reduced) we do not believe that further cuts to parks service budgets will enable BCC to achieve minimum standards for quality parks and green spaces citywide nor to meaningfully recognise the vital role that *Bristol's parks play in the health and wellbeing for all our citizens.*

**WE OBJECT TO THE FURTHER CUTS CURRENTLY BEING PROPOSED TO BRISTOL'S PARKS BUDGET AND BELIEVE THAT THESE COST SAVINGS AND SOME OF THE PROPOSALS FOR INCOME GENERATION INCLUDED IN THIS CONSULTATION HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO FUNDAMENTALLY AND NEGATIVELY CHANGE THE NATURE OF PUBLIC PARKS IN THE CITY.**

However, we submit our considered response to the consultation in recognition that the local authority states that 'Because of the Council's overall requirement to make savings, we have ruled out keeping the parks service as it is and not making changes. Therefore, we are consulting now on a number of proposals for 2018-19 and 2019-20 that would help move us closer to our savings target.' which suggests that our preferred outcome - no further cuts to Bristol's parks budget is not a potential outcome from this consultation.

Bristol Parks Forum's statement in response to the consultation identifies that many of the proposed changes to the service currently lack detail which makes it difficult to respond in relation to any specific site in the city. We echo this and urge BCC to ensure that consultation on specific proposals does (rather than may) follow once BCC has responded to the outcome of this citywide consultation to ensure that individual sites are not negatively impacted on by a centralised and/or 'one size fits all' approach (which historically, has repeatedly demonstrated that one size really does not fit all when it comes to Bristol's Parks).

Specific issues of concern to Friends of Horfield Common members:

**1. Our members object to any suggestion that BCC will take over established café facilities in Bristol's Parks where these are being run effectively and providing improved outcomes for the local communities they serve.**

The Café on the Common was set up by FoHC volunteers in 2015 in response to demand from the local community for a facility on Horfield Common and as part of a long-term community-led project to revitalise the Ardagh site and bring it back into full use for the benefit of all members of the local community. The café is now established as a successful community business which forms a central part of Ardagh Community Trust's plans for a sustainable community facility at the Ardagh. Any suggestion that this should be taken over and run by BCC does not seem fair & we object to this strongly. This is the same for St. Andrews Park and Victoria Park where independent traders working closely with parks group volunteers have established well-supported facilities which enhance the area and improve outcomes for local communities.

**If BCC wants to establish more café concessions in the city's parks, it should be looking to do this in addition to – not by taking the – trade of independent and community-led facilities, or giving franchises to the highest bidder. This will inevitably mean that small, local, independent and/or community-led businesses – which arguably provide the most benefit to local communities and the local economy - would not be able to compete for them.**

**2. Our members strongly disagree with the proposal to remove children's play equipment from sites where it is currently located once it reaches the end of it's life without further and specific consultation with local communities and park-users.**

One of our members was advised at one of the consultation 'drop-in' events that the play area near to the Ardagh (which was finally refurbished by BCC in 2010 following more than 8 years campaigning by local parents and grandparents) would be one of the play areas considered to be over the level required for the city.

We don't believe that the data used to construct plans as part of the AGSP published in 2010 is accurate nor that it reflects demographic changes in the local area since that time. This play area is very well used and needed. The map we have been provided with showing the space standards for the city's play areas does not make clear why this play area would be considered to be surplus to requirements and we do not agree that it is.

We do not believe that residents citywide are aware of this space standard measurement for children's play areas, nor that the space standards reflect community use in practice. We think that enacting this on the basis of the space standards mapping without further & specific consultation with local communities would lead to areas in the city where children do not have access to suitable free outdoor play equipment and do not believe that this is acceptable.

**3. Our members strongly disagree with BCC funding the provision of formal sports activities in Bristol's parks (e.g goalposts on the Downs etc, which benefit only a few) when there is not funding to pay for maintenance and care of Bristol's parks for use by all. In an ideal world, local authorities would be able to support both, but we do not believe that it is justifiable for BCC Parks to pay for/subsidise individuals' leisure pursuits in a financial climate where there is not enough funding to pay for core maintenance and/or to replace children's play equipment in parks, for example. BCC Sports budgets should be funding these activities if the local authority considers that they should be subsidised.**

**4. Our members are concerned at the proposals to reduce the opening hours of toilets in parks.** Experience demonstrates that this leads to unpleasant and offensive behaviour. If toilet facilities are not available people use parks as public conveniences which is disgusting. Without significant resources to monitor & respond to any issues arising we do not believe that this will enable the council to provide good quality parks. It may be possible to work with BPF members and other community groups to maintain longer opening hours if BCC is doing the core work of cleaning & servicing public toilets - parks groups may be able to organise a key-holder rota by volunteers to enable parks toilets to be open for longer hours, particularly during the summer months when it is light much later.

**5. We do not support the proposed reduction of any core maintenance of Bristol's parks and believe that the parks service cannot continue to enable BCC to deliver good quality parks and green spaces for all if further cuts to it's core service - maintenance of Bristol's Public Parks - go ahead.** Retaining a viable and effective core parks maintenance service which delivers the basics & ensures that our parks and green spaces are safe & which can work with volunteers & other groups to enable residents to contribute & maximise the opportunities for all in the city to contribute to ensure continued availability of all of the city's parks is - for us - a priority.

Friends of Horfield Common, January 2018