

Parks and Green Spaces – future funding model

Background

1. Overall, the cost of the council providing essential services and changes in our income will leave us with a gap in our finances of £108m over the next five years. This is because prices keep going up, as does the demand for services such as social care and education, because we have a growing population. The council has to make savings across many of its services.
2. We believe Bristol's parks and green spaces are a vital part of the city's facilities. Parks are good for the physical and emotional wellbeing of citizens, as well as helping to make Bristol an attractive tourist destination.
3. Providing and maintaining parks and green spaces is not a statutory function of the council (i.e. the council does not have to do it). Most councils choose to spend money on public open green space because of its importance to citizens. Maintaining and investing in parks and green spaces is getting more and more difficult as council budgets become smaller. However, there is a real opportunity for a thriving city such as Bristol to come up with innovative approaches to sustain city green space for the future.
4. By April 1st 2019 the parks and green spaces revenue budget will be reduced to £1.6m, a £2.868m reduction since April 2017 and a £4.35m reduction since April 2014. In order to continue to provide and maintain the current estate of green spaces in Bristol and many of their facilities including play and sports, an innovative solution is needed to this budget reduction.
5. This means services will need to be run in a very different way; we will need to work more with communities, make more money, create more partnerships, make services as efficient as possible and reduce some of the things we do now. As we move forward we want to be positive and ambitious for our parks whilst being clear that we have to work differently to maintain a much valued level of service citywide.
6. In order to make the savings, we have taken the approach of trying to earn as much money as possible so we can keep service reductions to a minimum.
7. **Our vision for parks and green spaces is:** Working together for a Bristol with good quality, attractive and enjoyable parks and green spaces in every part of the city / neighbourhood.
8. **We will do this by:**
 - Keeping free access for all to the city's parks.
 - Making money from our parks that we will use directly to support their maintenance and improvement [and seeking to make them more financially secure for future generations].
 - Welcoming community management of local spaces, supporting volunteering and neighbourhood decision-making.

- Recognising that our parks are vital for our health and wellbeing and ensuring they are attractive and accessible for all our citizens.
- Being clear about our strategy for parks, our minimum standards, our investment plans and how we intend to deliver them.
- Being clear that having good, safe, clean and well-maintained parks is a collective responsibility.
- Ensuring that the planning process protects green space from development where green space is needed and where it helps protect the city from high temperatures and local flooding during heavy rainfall .

Developing the future funding model

9. During 2017 a plan was developed to maximise income from parks, green spaces and related services such as cemeteries and crematoria, in order to minimise the need for service reductions. In 2017/18, the £963k saving was delivered through a combination of increasing the income from existing businesses within parks and green spaces, and reducing the repairs and investment revenue budget. The budget reduction plan for 2018 – 2020 includes a further £1.415m in income proposals and £490k service reduction proposals.

10. The original proposals are detailed in table 1 below:

Proposal	Estimated income / saving	Additional detail
Continue to improve and increase income from existing businesses in parks and green spaces portfolio	£375k	Examples include cemeteries and crematoria, horticultural nursery, woodfuel.
Increase income from cafes and concessions (e.g ice cream vans) and provide more of these in our parks.	£120k + per year income	Our aim is not to simply 'charge more', but to provide attractive and competitive food outlets that provide a profit we can use to support free-to-use parks services.
Introduce appropriate advertising in parks and green spaces.	£50k + per year income	Advertising content would not include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tobacco, alcohol or e-cigarette advertising • Religious advertising • Pay-day loan advertising • Any content that can be deemed to offer escort or sexual services • Party political content • Content that contravenes the Council's equalities policies.
Introduce new, competitive fees and	£55k + per year income	Types of business included <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional dog walkers;

charges for any business operating from a park or green space.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hot Air Balloon operators; • Fitness trainers. <p>NOT included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Park run
Introduce new fee-paying activities into parks and allow private businesses to operate pay-to-use facilities from parks	£315k + per year income	<p>We will seek to introduce activities such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inflatables such as bouncy castles • Adventure golf • Aerial adventure trails • Car boot sales • Camping and caravanning. • Zorbing • Commercial Climbing • Commercial Ballooning • Allotments
Increase money from events in the parks of the city.	£300k + per year income	<p>We would look to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • host more, larger fee-paying events that raise significant income • host a greater variety and number of events overall; • host events on more sites.
The operation of chargeable sports facilities and other facilities in public parks only when they generate no cost to the Council.	£50k per year saving	<p>. We would do this by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing fees and charges so that they are more in line with the type and quality of facilities being requested and the cost of provision; • Working closely with sports clubs and leagues so they can use facilities and make pitches ready without Council help; • Review and reduce the number of changing rooms and pavilions in the city to lower maintenance costs; • Pursue longer-term 'self-management' arrangements where facilities are run or maintained by a club or other organisation.
Reduce the number of days Hengrove Play Park is open to five days a week – Wednesday to Sunday	£15k saving	Currently, over the summer months, the play area is open six days a week.

– all year round.		
Reduce the level of grounds maintenance on parks or parts of parks across the city where it is appropriate to do so.	£300k saving	Proposals considered are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing grass cutting and strimming on some sites: • Reducing leaf collection except on sites where they are likely to blow on to roads and footpaths and cause a hazard. • Change sites or parts of sites to a different function or management regime that lowers costs e.g. grassed area to woodland. • Remove shrubs and reduce our maintenance of them where this will not cause a nuisance • Consider reducing the number of sites that we cut for hay and introduce a different management regime
To no longer provide hanging baskets in some parks and in parts of the city centre and Clifton and to replace formal bedding displays with more floral meadow displays across the city.	£20k saving	
Flexible opening times for parks facilities (e.g. toilets) in order to reduce out-of-hours staffing costs	£15k saving	Out of hours” would be any time before 7.30am and any time after 3.00pm, seven days a week. Facilities affected would include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toilet facilities in Victoria Park, Canford Park, Blaise Estate, Oldbury Court Estate and Snuff Mills, St Andrews Park, Brandon Hill Park, Redcatch Park. • Cabot Tower in Brandon Hill Park, • St Andrews Park paddling pool.
Remove play areas and play equipment when they are no longer safely usable and do not replace if the Council’s minimum	£40k saving	

provision standards demonstrate that there is suitable provision nearby.		
Look for opportunities for community groups and organisations and businesses to manage, maintain or enhance local green spaces	£50k saving	We may not accept management by other organisations if a park or green space is able to generate income that could be used to support the parks service as a whole.
Increase the number of pay and display parking spaces in parks, and increase the parking charges on sites that already have pay and display parking	£200k	The purpose of the pay and display parking is to help to manage city traffic and is not an income generation proposal for parks – however the increase in parking spaces may result in money being available to invest in parks and green spaces.

11. Between 6th November 2017 and 29th January 2018 a citywide engagement and consultation exercise took place on the proposals in Table 1 above. The consultation asked citizens whether they supported a variety of income generation and service reduction options for parks. There were opportunities for detailed feedback about the proposals throughout the consultation document. Drop in sessions took place in neighbourhoods and the survey was actively promoted by the parks forum and via social media and other media channels.

12. 2659 people responded to the consultation. Detailed responses were also received from partner organisations and community groups, including the Bristol Parks Forum and Avon Wildlife Trust. One petition of 3307 signatures was received which opposed the proposal to introduce advertising into parks.

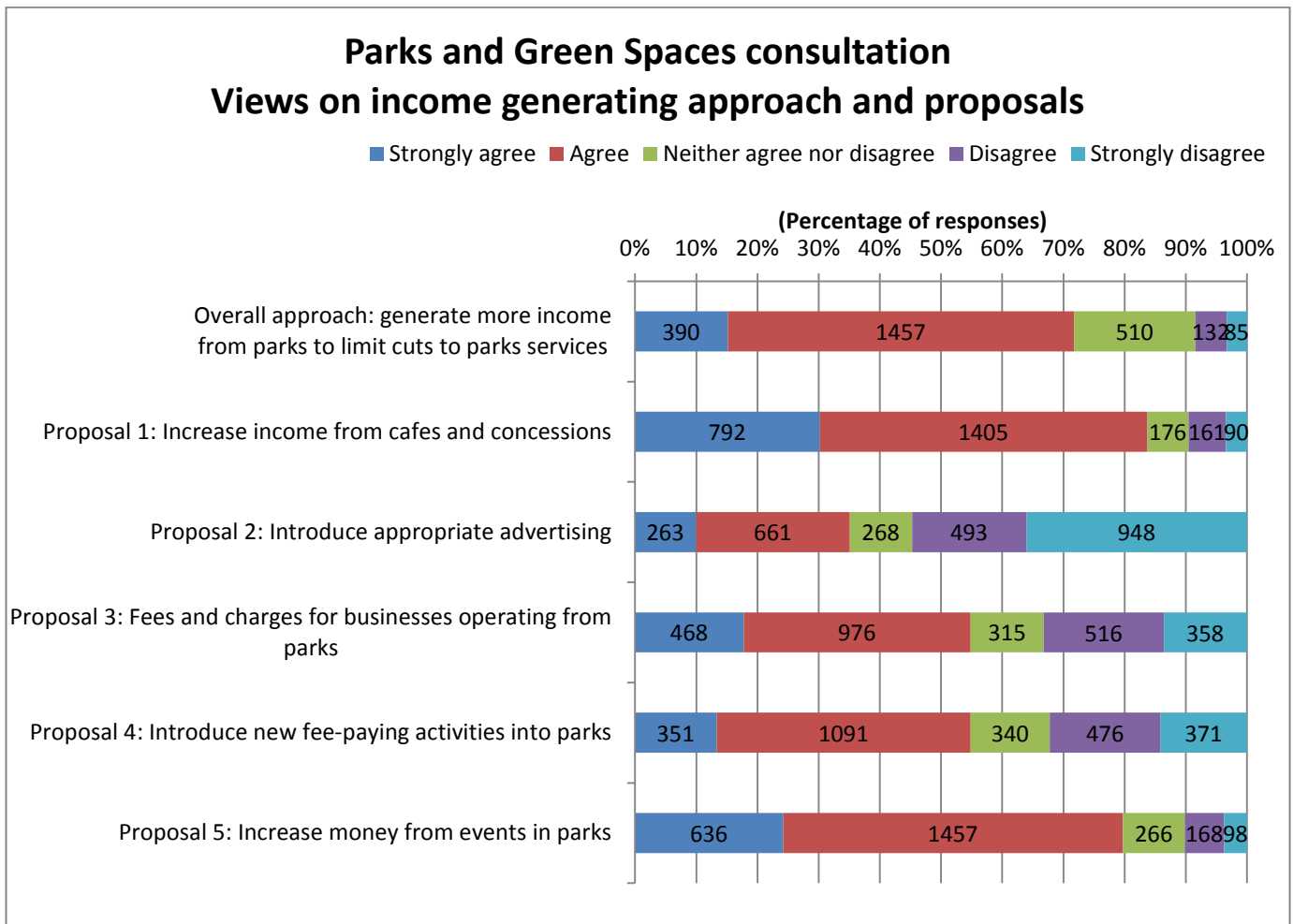
Consultation overview (see full consultation report for full detail in appendix 2)

13. The consultation broadly supported the income generation plan put forward by the council. Over 70% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the approach to generate income to limit cuts to the service. Over 80% of people agreed with increasing income from cafes and concessions, just under 80% of people agreed with expanding the events programme, and around 55% of people agreed with the proposals to charge business for operating in parks and to introduce new fee paying activities into parks. Free text responses provided more detail about the things that caused concern about these proposals, which included some general concerns about the effect of income generation on parks, and concerns about some of the fees and charges, the effect on small local businesses such as dog walkers, fitness instructors and concessions. The general tone of the free text responses was supportive of income generation to support parks as long as it didn't have a detrimental impact on the enjoyment of the parks or on small, local businesses. Avon Wildlife Trust voiced concerns about the impact on wildlife and biodiversity if

commercial activities were increased.

14. The only income generation proposal that people were not in majority agreement about was the proposal about advertising, which had 35% agreement. A 3307 signature petition was also submitted to object to the advertising proposals.

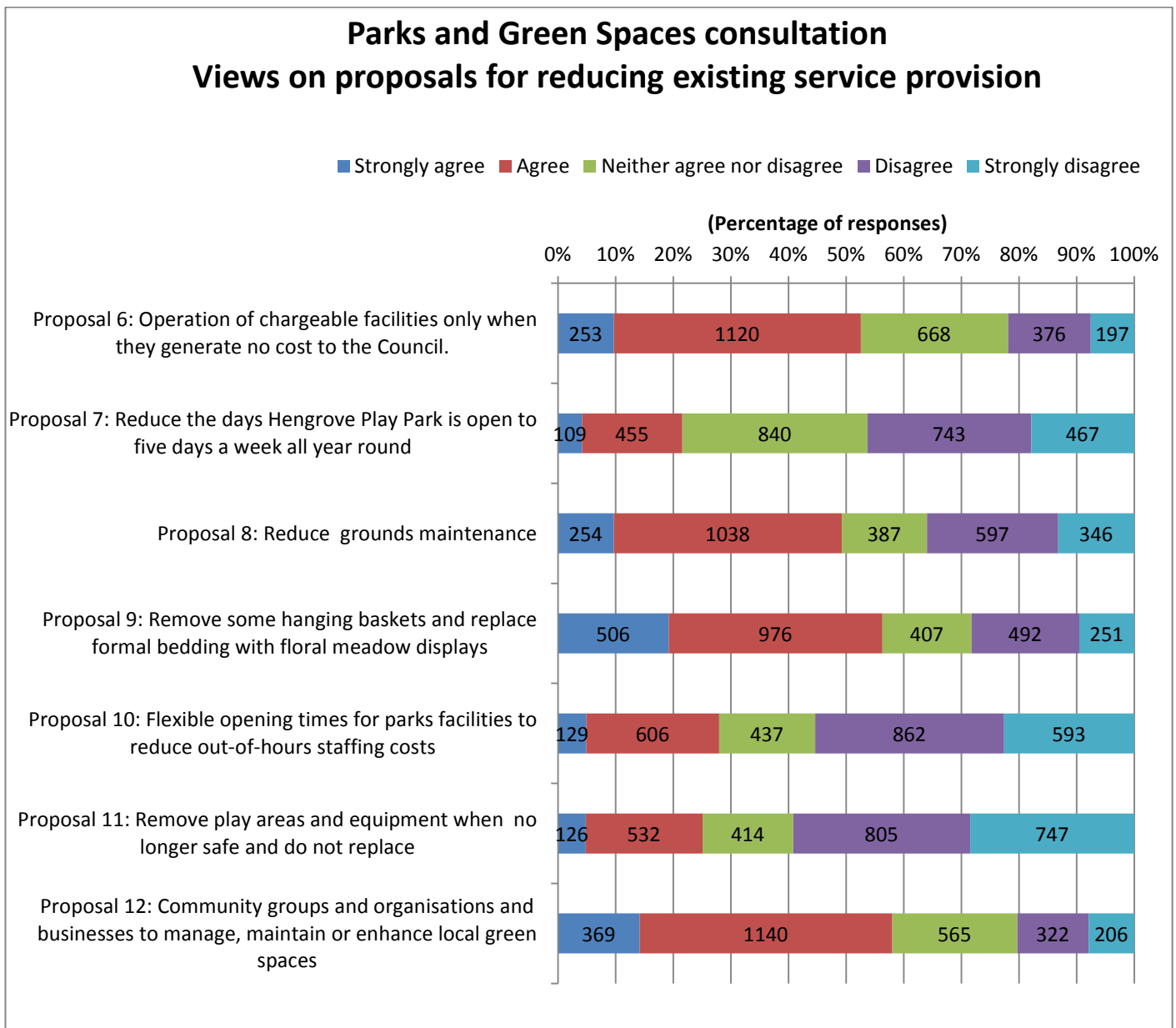
15. Graph 1 below shows the consultation responses to income generation.



16. The consultation responses were less supportive of the service reduction proposals. Three of the proposals had more than 50% of people in agreement (making pay facilities cost neutral; removing hanging baskets and floral displays; explore community group management and maintenance of green spaces). The proposals for the reduction of grounds maintenance had 48% of people in agreement, with the free text comments showing more support for landscape changes than reduction of existing maintenance regimes without a change in landscape. Reduction in play facility replacements and opening times for parks and facilities in parks were not supported, with less than 30% of people agreeing with these proposals. In addition to this, nearly a quarter of free text comments related to play equipment and toilets and did not support removal and reduction in hours. Avon Wildlife Trust thought that some of the proposals could potentially have

a positive effect on wildlife, although they needed more detail to give a detailed analysis. They were opposed to a reduction in hay cuts. Bristol Parks Forum expressed that any reduction in maintenance and investment in parks was not supported by the forum.

17. Graph 2 below shows an overview of the response to the service reduction questions.



Proposals for parks and green spaces savings

18. Having considered the business cases for initiatives alongside the consultation responses from the city, work will either continue or commence on the proposals in the table below:

Proposal recommended	Latest position and further detail	Income / Saving
Continue to improve and increase income from existing businesses in parks and green spaces portfolio	This work is underway, with an increase in retail sales being realised in the nursery, an improvement in Cemetery and Crematorium income and new proposals for woodfuel being developed.	£375k + per year income
Increase income from cafes and concessions (e.g ice cream vans) and provide more of these in our parks.	This work is underway, with café opening times and produce being updated and existing concession agreements being confirmed. The next phase will look for new sites in areas <u>without</u> existing cafes or concessions. Profits from cafes are on track to increase by £120k by 2018/19. Additional income from concessions will not be known until the commissioning of new sites is complete.	£120k + per year income
Introduce new, competitive fees and charges for any business operating from a park or green space. This includes fitness instructors, dog walkers, balloon flights, and any other business using public open space.	The proposal is to charge 10% of the gross income from the activity as the site fee for using the green spaces. E.g. a once-a-week bootcamp class charging £5 for 12 attendees would have an annual fee of £288 (£2,880 income from the parks activity); a dog walker walking 30 dogs a day, £5 a dog, 5 days a week would have an annual fee of £3,600 (£36,000 income from the parks activity); [based on 48 weeks a year operation]; a balloon operator taking 12 people, £100 each would have a fee per flight of £120 (based on income of £1200 per flight). It should be noted that professional dog walk companies will be approached to secure agreements, so that domestic dog walkers will not be disturbed.	£55k + per year income
Introduce new fee-paying activities into parks and allow private businesses to operate pay-to-use facilities from parks	There will be a sensitive balance to maintain on ensuring that the activities do not have a detrimental effect on the quiet enjoyment of green spaces, biodiversity and do not disadvantage people. Activities will include improving the golf offer in Ashton Court, high wires/high ropes courses, seasonal activities such as inflatables and other opportunities as they arise. This will be incremental and local stakeholders will be engaged in discussions as new opportunities develop.	£315k + per year income
Increase money from events in the parks of the	This includes maximising the site fees and	£300k + per year

city.	income from large events	income
The operation of chargeable sports facilities and other facilities in public parks only when they generate no cost to the Council.	Facilities will include bowling greens, sports pitches, pavilions. Measures to make them cost neutral could include increasing charges, reducing council subsidised maintenance or changing the facilities to make them cheaper to operate (e.g. replacing fine turf with artificial turf for cricket wickets, requiring bowling clubs to subsidise their own green maintenance as they are not public facilities).	£50k per year saving
Reduce the level of grounds maintenance on parks or parts of parks across the city where it is appropriate to do so.	There are two elements to this; firstly to reduce grounds maintenance when it is possible to change the landscape and secondly to review costs and overheads in the operation of the grounds maintenance service. For example, the countryside stewardship investment in Stoke Park will reduce the grounds maintenance on the site in coming years as well as providing wildlife and sustainability benefits. Other examples may include expanding wildlife areas in green spaces which can sometimes reduce maintenance costs.	£300k saving
To no longer provide hanging baskets in some parks and in parts of the city centre and Clifton and to replace formal bedding displays with more floral meadow displays across the city.		£20k saving
Look for opportunities for community groups and organisations and businesses to manage, maintain or enhance local green spaces		Estimated saving of £50k is not likely in the given timescale
Increase the number of pay and display parking spaces in parks, and increase the parking charges on sites that already have pay and display parking	This is not an income generation measure, but is for the purposes of good traffic management in the city. However, the introduction of parking charges is likely to result in additional funds being available to invest in parks and green spaces.	£200k
TOTAL		£1,735k

		budget reduction
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19. The income and cost savings associated with taking these initiatives forward total £1,735,000.

Advertising and play equipment replacement

20. It is proposed that further work takes place on the advertising proposals. While 55% of people did not support this proposal, 35% of people did support it and were hopeful of bringing in additional income to their parks. It is proposed that further work takes place on low impact advertising, and that further engagement takes place at a neighbourhood level in any areas where advertising may be proposed.

21. The consultation responses were not supportive of the idea of removing play areas and play equipment when they are no longer safely usable and do not replace if there is alternative provision in the area. It is proposed that further engagement takes place on specific sites where this is relevant so that the communities directly affected are able to feedback on this. We have had occasions in the past when local communities have supported the removal of old play equipment so that new equipment can be better maintained.

Proposal requiring more work and site specific local engagement	Income / Saving
Introduce large billboard advertising in parks and green spaces.	£50k + per year income
Remove play areas and play equipment when they are no longer safely usable and do not replace if the Council's minimum provision standards demonstrate that there is suitable provision nearby.	£40k saving
TOTAL	£90k

22. There were some specific proposals about reduction in opening days and hours of facilities that were not well supported in the consultation. It is proposed that these are revisited in 2019-20 if the full budget savings are not realised, but are not taken forward in 2018-19.

Proposals to be revisited in 2019-20	Income / Saving
Reduce the number of days Hengrove Play Park is open to five days a week – Wednesday to Sunday – all year round.	£15k saving
Flexible opening times for parks facilities (e.g. toilets) in order to reduce out-of-hours staffing costs	£15k saving

TOTAL	£30k
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Other outcomes of the consultation

23. The consultation also asked questions about increasing volunteering in parks and about the idea of a trust or other alternative model of parks delivery. The responses supported additional volunteering in parks, and did not support the idea of a trust or third party taking over the operation of parks and green spaces. A proposal being taken forward by the parks forum, and supported by the council, is to explore a parks foundation model which can raise money for parks and support volunteering, but does not take on the ownership or maintenance of parks.
24. Alongside the work to balance the revenue budget, respondents highlighted that investment is required in the parks both to enable the income to be generated (e.g. for investment in access and services for events, expansion of car parks, improvement of cafes and other commercial hubs) and also to identify external funding streams which can be used to invest in parks and green spaces and ultimately reduce maintenance costs while still improving the green spaces.

Stoke Park Estate

25. Stoke Park Estate is a 108 hectares (274 acre) grade II registered historic parkland owned by Bristol City Council. The estate is clearly visible from the M32 motorway, encompassing the sweeping landscape adjacent to the distinct yellow Dower house (privately owned). The estate is in poor condition and is on Historic England's 'sites at risk' register.
26. Stoke Park Estate benefits from a £1.164 million dowry (remaining sum) which was paid to the council in 2012 when we agreed to take over ownership from a developer consortium.
27. A Conservation Management Plan (CMP) was produced in 2016. This confirms the estates considerable heritage significance, highlights the problems and sets out the restoration priorities. The CMP was consulted on in February 2017 and received broad support with over 700 responses (consultation report see <https://bristol.citizenspace.com/neighbourhoods/stoke-park-future-plans/>)
28. Our ambition is to restore Stoke Park Estate reflecting its recreational and historic significance and also its contribution to regeneration plans in the surrounding area (see Stoke Park Business Case, 6th October 2016). This will require substantial investment. Our plan has been to use the Stoke Park dowry to attract (principally) Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CS) funding.
29. The aim of the work is to:

- Help attract an estimated £3.6 million investment from HLF (net grant estimate £2.5 million);
- Substantially reduce risk associated with deteriorating assets;
- Provide a high quality recreational resource for use by local communities and a citywide audience;
- Support wider regeneration plans, particularly investment in Lockleaze;
- Provide sustainable land management through grazing by cattle;
- Empower communities and encourage potential for significant volunteer activity, and
- Provide essential first step in moving Stoke Park to a cost neutral operating budget, as Countryside Stewardship investment unlocks new source of income, including Basic Farm Payments @ £14k / year, CS revenue grant @ £18.4k per year, avoided mechanical cutting of grass as we switch to grazing @ up to £15k / year.

30. In February 2017 a development bid was submitted to the HLF (£400k value) and, at the same time, a separate bid for different elements of the restoration plan was submitted to the CS fund, as administered by Natural England. The HLF bid was not successful, although we have been encouraged to re-apply and we are working through a revised approach. The CS bid was successful.

31. Natural England made their final offer of CS grant on the 28th December 2017. The total grant offer is £337,000 capital, plus £184,000 revenue to be paid over 10-years. The total cost of capital works is £556,000 (plus £15k estimate for contract administration). £337,000 will be paid for through the grant, with the remaining sum being met by the ring fenced Stoke Park dowry.

32. The essential elements covered by the CS grant include:

- Removal of c. 8 ha of scrub, plus thinning and selective felling of young woodland;
- Stock proof fencing, plus gates and other access measures;
- Hedge laying and hedge restoration;
- Improvements to grassland to increase biodiversity restoring 20 hectares (c. 50 acres) of species rich grassland;
- Planting of 70 parkland trees;
- Planting of an orchard comprising 200 trees;
- Protective fencing around Scheduled Monument (World War II gun battery), and
- Restoration of a section of historic wall.

33. It is a requirement of the grant that we complete all works within two years (by 31 December 2019). Given this very tight timeline and the fact that certain works can only be done outside the 'bird nesting season' – which typically runs from March through to September, it has been necessary to do a limited

amount of preparatory work in order that we would be able to satisfy all conditions of the grant.

34. The CS based capital works plan has been approved by the council's corporate procurement group.
35. The proposals set out in the CS scheme are essential works and will allow us to restore the landscape and re-introduction of grazing by cattle as we seek to achieve a more sustainable and lower cost land management system. We do not see any other viable alternatives to restore the landscape other than to have accepted the grant offered by Natural England.
36. We see HLF as the only credible large grant provider able to offer the significant cash injection required to transform Stoke Park into a high quality visitor destination. As such, the CS funded works should be seen as fore-runner to achieve this ambitious plan for the estate.
37. There are some local objections to elements of the work - principally changes to some areas of woodland and loss of scrub. The objectors are vocal but relatively small in numbers. We have a proactive communication plan to outline the benefit of the works (see <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/museums-parks-sports-culture/stoke-park-improvement-work-2018-to-2020>, including putting on several walks and talks, drop in sessions and production of a video with partners: <https://youtu.be/YQI8jltFI9Q>
38. This report seeks approval for the spend of the £556k on the works via a contract funded by the Countryside Stewardship grant and the Stoke Park Dowry.

Decisions requested from cabinet

39. In order to work at the pace required to deliver the level of savings required, and to undertake seasonal landscaping work required when grants are received which contributes to the proposals, this report requests that parks procurement decisions up to the EU income procurement threshold are delegated to the Executive Director of Communities in consultation with the Cabinet Member, and decisions about capital investment and investment works up to the value of £1.3m are delegated to the Executive Director of Communities in consultation with the cabinet member. This will include decisions about grants received, capital spend on income generation initiatives and any other parks investment; for example the award of the contract to carry out works funded by a Countryside Stewardship grant and the Stoke Park Dowry in Stoke Park.