

Communities Scrutiny Commission

8 February 2021



Report of: Growth and Regeneration – Parks Service

Title: Bristol Future Parks

Ward: City-wide

Officers Presenting Report: Hayley Ash

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Recommendation:

For Scrutiny to comment on the Bristol Future Parks Accelerator Fund project.

The significant issues in the report are:

In June 2019 Bristol City Council Parks and Green Spaces Service was granted £900,000 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to run a 2-year innovation project aimed at:

Finding the right model that delivers high quality and sustainable parks and green space for Bristol; Contributing to the One City Plan: ‘everyone has access to an excellent quality green space within 10 minutes’ walk from home’ by 2036; And informing the emerging Parks and Green Space Strategy

This report will update on the progress of the project and discuss the next steps



1. Summary

1. In 2008 when the Parks and Green Space Strategy was adopted it identified that circa £80 million of investment was required to enable the city's parks and green spaces to reach an excellent standard. Since 2008 the service has secured circa £13 million to invest in parks and green spaces.
2. Following the period of austerity in 2010 this saw Local Government budgets being significantly reduced. The budget allocated to the parks and green spaces service saw the budget reduced from £5.96 million to £4 Million; approximately a 33% reduction.
3. Through the Quality of Life survey we have seen the satisfaction in the quality of Bristol's Parks decline over this period, from 83% in 2013 to 72% in 2019, with satisfaction only 53% in our 10% most deprived neighbourhoods (data captured from the Quality of Life report 2019/2020).
4. A project team led by Bristol City Council secured funding in 2019 from the Future Parks Accelerator Fund (National Trust, Heritage Lottery and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government) to pilot new approaches to sustaining the City's Parks and transform the way we manage parks and green spaces.
5. The project delivery (which has been affected by Covid 19 pandemic) is currently embarking on a change programme after which it will go into the Mid-point review. If successful and the project aims are still relevant to the Council, the project will receive further funding and 12 Months additional delivery time. The project has not been without its challenges as it's a new venture for the National Trust and they find the business model which local authorities operate under difficult to understand.

2. Purpose

6. The projects original aims were to transform the way we manage and use our parks. Key work packages include
 - a. Health: how do we make our parks and green spaces part of the solution to our city's health inequalities?
 - b. Community Development: working with local anchor organisations to encourage community action and volunteering within in our parks
 - c. Assets: a full asset review of the portfolio
 - d. Business opportunities: looking at both our current enterprises and how we can add value to our parks offer by including exciting new activities, whilst at the same time generating income to reinvest into the service
 - e. Expressions of Interest: inviting all sectors (business big and small, voluntary, health, investment and community sectors as well as individual citizens) to express an interest in what they would like to do in our parks, what they can bring to the table and how they would like to work with the Council
 - f. Nature
 - g. Communications and Marketing
 - h. Evaluation
 - i. Learning then informs the emerging Parks and Green Space Strategy
7. The Covid 19 pandemic has impacted upon the project significantly and has caused time delays with the delivery of programme, our ability to engage with businesses and the voluntary and health sectors, and through the soft market testing exercise (Expression of Interest) which was planned for last summer.

8. The Future Parks Governance Board agreed on May the 13th 2020 to put the planned Expressions of Interest (EOI) phase back from August 2020 to February 2021. It is likely to be delayed further in order to give the market an opportunity to recover from the second and third waves. We are currently proposing to invite EOI in mid May 2021.
9. The project team has also agreed with the funder to phase the EOI approach to ensure that interest from both the community and business sectors can be actioned effectively within the shorter timescale and to test the processes and systems we have developed. We will ask communities, voluntary sector organisations and the business sector what they would like to do in our parks, what they can contribute, what they need from us, and what partnerships they might want to explore. It is envisaged that over the next 5 years there will be a number of other phases. Please see appendix 5 for the criteria used to agree which sites are to be in scope for the first EOI phase.
10. From the EOI we expect to receive interest from a variety of stake holders interested in working with us across a range of different opportunities, such as
 - a. Communities working with the Council to fundraise for a specific activity within a local park, such as procuring new play equipment, improving access or adding to the nature value of the green space
 - b. Communities wanting to take on a more active role within their local green space (or part of it) to add value to what it is already there for, eg. to set up a food growing project, take responsibility for planting and managing a small flower bed within the park, arranging regular litter picks or organising a community event, etc.
 - c. Communities wanting to take on a building or part of the space within a green space via community asset transfer to enable them to offer additional benefits to their community
 - d. Smaller Businesses, wanting to explore ideas to deliver their services within parks.
 - e. Larger businesses may wish to explore opportunities working with the Council to deliver enterprising leisure based activities.
11. This Expression of Interest process aims to gather ideas, some of which will be easy to progress and others that will need to go through transparency processes including consultation and procurement.
12. The approach we take has to be transformational and we will need to demonstrate how we can sustain this. This will be demonstrated by embedding the outcomes into the Parks and Green Spaces Strategy.
13. **Mid-point review –**
 - a. The project is currently at the mid-point review stage. This is where the funder will decide if they think that we have demonstrated sufficient evidence that we have progressed enough to make the transformational changes that they expect to see in order to drive and secure a sustainable future for the City's Parks. The funder has advised us that they want us to change elements of the project and we are currently exploring how we can do this whilst retaining the essence of the original project and ensuring that the solution is right for the city and its parks. This process should be complete by April. Current thinking (this is work in progress) is that we reduce the work streams to three.
 - b. Health: we are looking at building a case for changing funding models, working with Social Prescribing to increase activities in parks, and developing partnerships with funders and businesses that deliver services in parks to deliver more health related

services.

- c. **Community Engagement and Development:** working with local anchor organisations and the Bristol and Bath Parks Foundation (this is a charity which aims to support parks and green spaces, raise the profile of the City's parks and secure funding which can be reinvested into specific projects. The Bristol and Bath Parks Foundation is different to the Parks Forum which has brought together a number of Friends Of groups and organisations who have an interest in parks and green spaces) to encourage community action and volunteering within our parks as well as improving the journey that citizens have when they deliver activities with the Services. This work stream will also develop and deliver a strong engagement strategy which; conducts consultations, increases interest in our parks, attracts citizens, groups and businesses that want to do things in our parks, and then works with citizens to help us measure the quality of our parks in the future (through both spirit of place type activities and the introduction of Green Flag Assessments).
- d. **Business opportunities:** looking at both our current enterprises and how we can add value to our parks offer by including exciting new activities, whilst at the same time generating income to reinvest. This work stream will also look at and challenge current funding flows to ensure that we can see income from commercial endeavours invested back into parks and be able to tell our citizens how and where it is being invested.
- e. **Cross cutting themes;** themes which cut across the three work streams include Partnerships, Communications and Marketing, Expressions of Interest, evaluation and the emerging Parks and Green Spaces Strategy, which the Bristol Future Parks Project will feed into.
- f. If the funder agrees to this new approach, and we pass the mid-point review, this will release a further £238,000 of grant funding and extend the project by 12 months.

14. **Achievements to date:** a full list of work to date can be found in appendix 4

15. A new vision for the parks services

- a. **Our Vision:** By 2050 Bristol's Parks & Green Spaces will be a first class award winning destination that welcomes and captivates residents and visitors. Our parks will be part of daily life and shape the character of the city, connecting people to the land and each other.

Our Mission: Working together for a Bristol with excellent quality, nature-rich, attractive and enjoyable parks and green spaces in every part of the City.

Our Goals:

- Everyone has access to excellent quality park or green space within a 10-minute walk from their home [by 2035]
- 80% of Bristol's residents visit a parks or green spaces at least once a week, up from 56% in 2018 [by 2046]
- A parks service that is financially secure, sustainable, well maintained and where people feel safe to exercise and socialise.

We will do this by:

- Continuing to ensure free access to all of the city's parks, at the point of entry.
- Recognising that our parks are vital for our health and wellbeing and ensuring they are safe, clean, well-maintained and accessible for all our citizens.

- Developing parks that respond to the climate and ecological emergencies we all face.
- Working to ensure parks and green spaces receive the necessary revenue and investment resources to support their maintenance and improvement. Generating income from our parks which we will use directly to support this.
- Working in partnership and supporting volunteering
- Being clear about our strategy for parks, our minimum standards, our investment plans and how we intend to deliver them.
- Ensuring that the planning process protects green space from development where it is needed.

16. Parks and Green Space Strategy refresh

- a. The parks and green spaces strategy is currently being refreshed into a 25 year strategy for parks and the Bristol Future Parks Project will feed into this, however additional work packages for the strategy will include
 - i. Nature, Climate Change and the Ecological Emergency
 - ii. Assessment of Value and quality (Green Flag)
 - iii. Children and Young People
 - iv. Connectivity and the Green Grid
 - v. Culture and Leisure(please note that some of the elements of these additional work packages will also be fed into the Bristol Future Parks Project)

17. Volunteering

- b. The Parks Service has developed a new 5 year strategy for volunteering. This work will be included in the new Bristol Future Parks Project and the learning will be incorporated within the development of a new way of working with Citizens who want to do things in their parks

18. Policy

- a. Empowering and Caring: Work with partners to empower communities and individuals, increase independence and support those who need it. Give children the best possible start in life.
- b. Fair and Inclusive: Improve economic and social equality, pursuing economic growth which includes everyone and making sure people have the access to good quality learning, decent jobs and homes they can afford.
- c. Wellbeing: Create healthier and more resilient communities where life expectancy is not determined by wealth or background.

19. Consultation

a)Internal

- i. Councillor Asher Craig has regular briefings
- ii. Councillor briefings took place in February 2020, we are planning a second briefing as soon as the changes have been agreed by the funder

b) External

- i. The Bristol Future Parks Team have carried out 19 community events, 4 face to face (pre-Covid 19) and 15 virtual discussions. At these events we informed citizens about Bristol Future Parks, and asked people what was special about their park, what opportunities they see in their parks, what risks and challenges they saw, and started discussions as to how they might want to take up the opportunity to do more in their parks.
- ii. Working with our project partners, Natural History Consortium, we have a live survey asking people about their parks' usage, both before and during Covid 19. 1824 surveys have been returned and the analysis has just begun.

20. Public Sector Equality Duties

- 5a) Before making a decision, section 149 Equality Act 2010 requires that each decision-maker considers the need to promote equality for persons with the following "protected characteristics": age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. Each decision-maker must, therefore, have due regard to the need to:
- i) Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Equality Act 2010.
 - ii) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to --
 - remove or minimise disadvantage suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic;
 - take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of people who do not share it (in relation to disabled people, this includes, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities);
 - encourage persons who share a protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.
 - iii) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to --
 - tackle prejudice; and
 - promote understanding.
- 5b) The Expression of Interest Phase will take place across the City, we want to encourage applications for Citizens, community groups and businesses large and small to ensure a good selection of ideas. We will be working with local community anchor organisations to ensure that people from disadvantaged areas and harder to reach groups can take advantage of this

opportunity. Some of the community projects may be able to be delivered as quick wins,, whilst any commercial ideas will need to be pursued via the correct council processes to ensure transparency and community buy in. The EQIA attached to this report is for the pilot phase a new EQIA will be developed once the new scope of the project has been agreed.

Appendices:

1. Application:
2. Extension application
3. EQIA
4. List of achievements to date
5. In scope principals report

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

Background Papers: