

Decision Pathway – Report



PURPOSE: Key decision

MEETING: Cabinet

DATE: 05 March 2024

TITLE	Parks and Green Spaces Strategy and Food Growing and Allotments Strategy	
Ward(s)	Citywide	
Author: Jonathan James	Job title: Head of Service, Natural and Marine Environment	
Cabinet lead: Cllr King, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Public Health and Communities	Executive Director lead: John Smith, Interim Executive Director Growth and Regeneration	
Proposal origin: BCC Staff		
Decision maker: Cabinet Member Decision forum: Cabinet		
Purpose of Report:		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> To approve a new Parks and Green Spaces and Food Growing and Allotments Strategy that set out ambitions for Bristol’s parks, green spaces and food growing land over the next 15 years up to 2039. To seek approval to proceed with a full bid to the WECA Green Recovery Fund to enable the delivery of a £1M investment in accelerating our ambitions to manage 30% of green space for nature by 2030. 		
Evidence Base:		
Parks and Green Spaces and Food Growing and Allotments Strategy – 2024-2039		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Bristol’s parks and green spaces are a significant part of the city’s landscape, with the city covered by over 400 parks and green spaces of varying sizes and functions. Our parks and green spaces play a key role in the city’s overarching vision of becoming a ‘fair, healthy and sustainable city.’ Parks and green spaces offer a wide variety of benefits ranging from recreation and culture, to supporting sustainable food growing and renewing wildlife habitats. They are the city’s most popular leisure resource, with over half of residents enjoying a visit to a park every week. A new strategy has been developed in recognition of new challenges the council faces in managing our parks and green spaces, and the need to adapt them to local and national priorities which have emerged since the last strategy was adopted in 2008. Key challenges are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial pressure: It is estimated that, nationally, parks budgets have fallen in real terms by £350m since 2011. Thirteen years of government austerity means that budgets for parks have reduced by around two-thirds since 2010. Climate and ecological crises: The latest State of Nature report shows that over half of all UK wild species are in decline and there is an urgent need to restore habitats and create new spaces for nature. Global Warming is creating more extreme weather events, particularly of heat and high precipitation – leading to risk of heat stress and increased flood risks. Inequity: Satisfaction with the quality of local parks is lower among people from the most deprived wards of Bristol, as well as disabled people, and single parents. Establishing a more 		

equitable spread of quality parks and green spaces in the city is a major priority.

- **Inclusion and safety:** There is local and national evidence demonstrating that people's experience of safety and belonging within parks is not equal. Certain features of our parks and green spaces make them less inclusive and safe for certain users, particularly women and girls who are disproportionately impacted by the threat of harassment and violence.
- **Engagement:** Despite an increased demand from residents to have a say in how their parks are enhanced and developed, we know there are barriers to some communities being more involved in decision making around local parks and green spaces.
- **Population growth:** The population of the city is growing with much of that growth focussed on the central area of the city. Informed and realistic standards can help guide provision of good quality green spaces in these areas.
- **Health and wellbeing:** The physical and mental health benefits from parks are not shared equally across the city. Each year around 17 million visits are made to Bristol parks, but nearly half the population (44%) don't visit parks, or do so rarely, rising to 70% not using parks in the most disadvantaged areas of the city (Quality of Life Survey).
- **Food growing:** Since the adoption of our last Allotments Strategy in 2009, interest in food growing – both nationally and locally – has surged; a trend which accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic. This rise in interest has seen allotment waiting lists grow; our waiting list is currently at 8000 (there are 6,500 people on the list, with some people putting their name down for more than one site). This increase requires a shift from predominantly focussing on the improvement of allotments sites, to considering how we can increase access to food growing opportunities.

4. Our Parks and Green Spaces Strategy 2024 addresses these key challenges, establishing a vision that 'by 2039, all our communities feel that parks are accessible, inclusive, safe, fun and rich in nature and wildlife. We want more people than ever before to visit our parks and stay for longer, and to take part in activities which make them healthier and happier.'

5. The realisation of this vision is underpinned by five key principles:

- **Collaboration:** We will seek to engage a more diverse range of stakeholders and commit to co-designing change in partnership with communities. By delivering with – rather than to – communities, we can achieve more, deliver greater benefits, and accomplish our shared objectives.
- **Creativity:** We will find innovative and creative ways of addressing the biggest challenges outlined in this strategy, and – using an open dialogue with stakeholders and communities – will seek to adapt to new ideas and new ways of thinking.
- **Equitable and Inclusive:** Using Bristol City Council's Equity and Inclusion Policy and Strategic Framework as a guide, we will seek opportunities to collaborate with a more diverse group of stakeholders to achieve our goal of making parks and green spaces more accessible and inclusive for people of all backgrounds. We will be mindful of the impact on equalities groups in all our service delivery.
- **Financially sustainable:** We will be driven by an ambition to create a sustainable and long-term future for parks, focussing on how we can make the most of our assets – both the parks estate and the communities who use them – to drive investment and generate income for future use. We'll be open to new partnerships and opportunities to secure more income for the parks service.
- **Informed:** Our creative approach to developing new and existing spaces will be informed by a growing evidence base which includes local data, learning from the successes of other places and from proactively forming relationships with stakeholders and communities across the city.

6. These principles will enable us to deliver improved outcomes, particularly against the six key priority themes we have identified within the strategy. These are:

- **Nature and Climate:** We will restore habitats and create new spaces for nature, implementing

our plan to manage 30% of council land for nature by 2030 – an additional 830 hectares of land.

- **Children and Young People:** We will deliver quality play opportunities and seek to design future developments around the needs and ideas of children and young people. Children and young people will feel a greater sense of belonging, inclusion and safety within their local parks and green spaces.
- **Community Participation:** We will establish more effective working relationships with organisations and communities that share an interest in improving parks and green spaces. In this way we will develop stronger links, change will better respond to local needs, be better designed, and be delivered at a faster pace.
- **Health and Wellbeing:** Our 'Wild and Well' approach will support a more equitable share of the health benefits which come with visiting parks and green spaces regularly.
- **Culture:** We will build on our piloted 'Our Spirit of Place' approach to ensure our decision-making around cultural offerings in parks is aligned to the needs and aspirations of our communities.
- **Employment and Skills:** – We will address the employment barriers for under-represented groups through the delivery of our Health and Wellbeing Transformation Programme. We will provide more work and training opportunities through an expanded apprenticeship programme and Parks Volunteer Programme.

7. The Strategy also adopts a revised approach to minimum standards for publicly accessible open spaces for in Bristol, an important function in support of the Local Plan. These standards help to ensure that there is sufficient, good quality open space to meet the needs of Bristol's population and maintain ambitious targets for open spaces while being grounded in realistic delivery. More information on this approach is provided in Appendix A2.

8. Our Food Growing and Allotments Strategy has been embedded in the Parks and Green Spaces Strategy in recognition of the role our green space land plays in realising our vision for providing a thriving network of accessible spaces for local people, communities and social enterprises to grow healthy and sustainable food. This network will tackle food inequity, strengthen food resilience and support community cohesion and wellbeing.

9. Off the back of being awarded Gold Sustainable Food City status, we have developed a strategic approach to achieving equitable and sustainable food growing across Bristol. The development of our Food Growing and Allotments Strategy is primarily driven by two documents and their aims – Bristol Good Food 2030 and Bristol Food Equality Strategy 2022 - 2032. Delivery of the Strategy is driven by three key commitments:

- Reducing the number of people who are waiting to access Bristol City Council owned food growing spaces.
- Delivering new spaces for food growing.
- Working to ensure people and communities from every area of the city can access suitable food growing opportunities.

10. We will deliver on these commitments by focussing on four key priorities:

- **Effective Use of Existing Space** – By establishing a stronger tenancy agreement, engaging with our Allotment Associations, and improving information to tenants, we will support a greater number of plots to be used for their full benefit and adapt sites so they make the most of the space available.
- **Collective Food Growing** – Established to satisfy a particular community need and interest in food growing, collective growing is a great opportunity for providing social interaction and community cohesion, and encouraging the participation of under-represented groups.
- **Repurposing Land** – We will review our current landholding agreements so that we can start to explore opportunities to repurpose land to diversify our food growing spaces and ensure land is being used effectively to meet Bristol's food growing aspirations.

- Investment and Sustainable Funding – It is essential that our allotments service can run sustainably. Using allotment plots more efficiently and repurposing land will support this, but to reach the levels of funding required, we will also implement a fairer and more realistic approach to tenancy fees and work with communities to identify strategic funding opportunities.

11. The ambitions and actions which underpin this strategy have been established in conversation with communities and stakeholders, and developed in response to relevant national, regional, and local strategies. The Strategy sets out how we aim to work collaboratively to reach our shared goals.
12. A draft of the Strategy was subject to public consultation between 11 December 2023 and 22 January 2024 with over 700 individuals and relevant organisations responding. Organisations included Bristol Parks Forum, Bristol Walking Alliance, Natural England, Bristol Civic Society and the British Mountaineering Council.
13. The key themes arising from the consultation are set out in a summary of the consultation in Appendix B, a summary of which is provided below:
 - The consultation demonstrated widespread and clear support for the proposals and actions the draft Strategy has set out, giving a clear mandate to proceed.
 - The actions with the highest percentage of people in agreement was ‘to identify sites for tree planting or natural regeneration’ and ‘identify priority sites for Keeping Bristol Cool framework’ (both at 93%)
 - The action with the highest percentage of people disagreeing was ‘to explore commercial activities that improve the recreational offer and income’ (23%).
 - Our Health and Wellbeing theme drew the widest range of comments with subject areas such as safety, accessibility, park design, regulation, volunteering, community engagement, park infrastructure and decision-making all surfacing.
14. Taking into account the consultation responses, the proposed final Strategy document is set out at Appendix A1. Amendments have been made to the draft Strategy including strengthening the relationship between allotments and parks and green spaces in supporting community food growing opportunities, more clearly defined actions and outcomes by 2039 and a commitment to review actions over time. The additional comments made by citizens and local, citywide and national bodies through the consultation will help inform how we approach the delivery of actions and policies going forward and help us identify who to engage with further when we do so.

Green Recovery Fund bid

15. To help us accelerate our ambitions for nature, we will submit a bid to the Green Recovery Fund, administered by the Combined Authority. The deadline for full applications is 15 March 2024. Our ‘Managing More Green Space for Nature’ project proposal will make a significant contribution to urban nature recovery by implementing a first phase pilot towards achieving 30% of council land managed for nature by 2030. This work involved an analysis of Bristol’s ecological network and identified opportunities for habitat improvements to deliver greater connectivity, functionality and resilience for nature. The expected project outcomes are:
 - Increased area of species-rich grassland and wetland habitat within the Bristol Ecological Network.
 - Generate Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) units facilitating future investment.
 - Improved condition and resilience of habitats within Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCIs).
 - Residents more engaged and contributing to nature recovery in local green spaces.
 - Habitat management plans that direct action and facilitate investment.
 - An understanding of priorities, options and costs for improving fish passage in Bristol’s rivers.

- Learning to enact a full implementation plan to achieve 30% of council land managed for nature by 2030.

Table 1: Activity programme and costs – Green Recovery Fund project:

Activity	Output	Programme	Total Capital £	Total Revenue £	Total Capital & Revenue £
Habitat creation					
Habitat creation/enhancement	65 hectares species-rich grassland created	2024 to 2025	£35,000	£172,894	£333,894
	Ponds x 5 @ £5k/pond	2024 to 2025	£25,000		
	River restoration in South Bristol	TBC	£101,000		
Changes to grass cutting maintenance regimes	Pilot managing for nature grass cutting regimes 1/3 city (BCC land)	2024 to 2026	£195,000	£140,966	£335,966
City-wide conservation vol programme for SNCIs	Management of habitats across 15 SNCIs	2024 to 2026	£24,000	£95,284	£119,284
Engagement					
Communication and engagement	Implementation of Communication Plan	2024 to 2026		£101,882	£101,882
	Engagement for river restoration work	TBC	£0	£1,600	£1,600
	R&D new techniques to engage under-represented groups	TBC	£0	£15,000	£15,000
	Engaging BAME community in conservation volunteering	2024 to 2026	£0	£9,333	£9,333
Development					
Management Plans (Prepare and adopt)	24 new/updated Management Plans for SNCIs	2024 to 2026		£101,882	£101,882
Work to enable sustainable grazing of grassland SNCIs	Grazing Feasibility Study	2024	£0	£7,000	£7,000
Assessing barriers to fish passage within Bristol's river corridors.	SNIFFER Assessment fish barriers & eDNA testing Trym & Frome	2024	£0	£40,000	£40,000
			£380,000	£685,841	£1,065,841

16. BCC's Environmental Impact Assessment has determined significant beneficial impacts from the proposal: The Parks and Green Space strategy sets out much of the framework required for realisation of our corporate environmental objectives relating to nature (ENV2) and climate resilience (ENV4). A successful funding bid will make a significant contribution to the timely achievement of parts of those objectives.

Cabinet Member Recommendations:

That Cabinet:

1. Approves the Parks and Green Space Strategy and Food Growing and Allotments Strategy as set out in Appendix A1 and Appendix A2.
2. Approves the submission of a grant application of £625,841 to the Green Recovery Fund administered by the Combined Authority to deliver a Managing for Nature project at a cost of £1,065,841.
3. Authorise the Executive Director for Growth and Regeneration in consultation with the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Public Health and Communities, to take all steps required to implement the

Strategies and, if successful, to accept and spend the funding, including to procure and enter into contracts (including any over the key decision threshold), to deliver the Managing for Nature Project as outlined in this report.

4. Note the outcome of the consultation as set out in this report and Appendix B.

Corporate Strategy alignment:

1. Theme: Development and Delivery – The Strategy will provide opportunities for communities, park users, local stakeholders and volunteers to engage in managing and developing the city’s parks and green spaces. By working with and empowering others, improvements and change will respond better to local needs, be better designed, raise quality and be delivered faster. Developing opportunities for a more diverse range of decision-makers will be key to our service delivery.
2. Theme: Environmental Sustainability – The Strategy commits to a Managing for Nature Plan that will largely deliver our ambition for at least 30% of the Council’s land to be managed for nature. We will establish 50 hectares of new trees and woodland within 10 years and the Strategy will ensure that change is delivered in the right space and protects important existing recreational functions.
3. Theme: Equality and Inclusion – The Strategy adopts equality and inclusion as a strategic principle. We will seek opportunities to collaborate with a more diverse group of stakeholders to achieve our goal of making parks and green spaces more accessible and inclusive for people of all backgrounds.
4. Theme: World Class Employment – we will develop a workforce that is more representative of the communities we serve through our succession planning and invest in volunteering opportunities throughout the city and across our work areas.

City Benefits:

1. Bristol’s One City Plan – In 2050, Bristol is a fair, healthy and sustainable city. A city of hope and aspiration, where everyone can share in its success.
2. One City Climate Strategy – In 2030, Bristol carbon neutral and climate resilient. We have collectively achieved a fair and inclusive transition; capturing the opportunities of new jobs, investment, improved health, wellbeing and education, and a better environment for local people. We have helped lead the way to a safer global climate.
3. One City Ecological Emergency Strategy – We will work together to ensure that 30% of Bristol’s land is managed for nature. We will create space for nature and find new, fair and inclusive ways to reduce and eliminate the threats to habitats and wildlife. Together we will take action for nature so that both people and wildlife can benefit.
4. Bristol Health and Wellbeing Strategy - Citizens to thrive in a city that supports their mental health and wellbeing, with children growing up free of ‘Adverse Childcare Experiences’ and the gaps in health outcomes between the most economically-deprived areas and the most affluent areas of Bristol significantly reduced.
5. One City, Food Equality Strategy – Food equality exists when all people have. At all times, have access to nutritious, affordable and appropriate food according to their social, cultural and dietary needs. They are equipped with the resources, skills and knowledge to use and benefit from, which is sourced from a resilient, fair and environmentally sustainable food system.
6. Bristol Good Food 2030 – As well as being tasty, healthy affordable and accessible, the food we eat should be good for workers, good for local communities, good for local businesses and good for animal welfare.

Consultation Details:

1. A draft Parks and Green Spaces and Food Growing and Allotments Strategy was subject to consultation between 11 December 2023 and 22 January 2024.
2. The draft Strategy was informed by engagement with a number of stakeholders during 2022. These are listed in the Strategy on page 59.

3. A briefing on the Strategy took place at Communities Scrutiny on 14 September 2023. Early work on the Managing for Nature elements of the Strategy took place on 17 November 2022.
4. A number of Cabinet Member briefings too place in 2022, 2023 and 2024 on elements of the Strategy content.

Background Documents:

[Parks and Green Space Strategy 2008](#)

[Consultation 2024-2039 Parks and Green Spaces and Food Growing and Allotment Strategy](#)

[Bristol Good Food 2030 One City Framework for Action and the Bristol Good Food 2030 Summary](#)

[One City Food Equality Strategy \(2022-32\)](#)

[One City Food Equality Action Plan \(2023-26\)](#)

Revenue Cost	£685,841	Source of Revenue Funding	£625,841 – Combined Authority Green Recovery Fund £60,000 - Natural Flood Management grant
Capital Cost	£380,000	Source of Capital Funding	£291,000 - Management of council land for nature initiative £89,000 - Natural Flood Management grant
One off cost <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ongoing cost <input type="checkbox"/>		Saving Proposal <input type="checkbox"/> Income generation proposal <input type="checkbox"/>	

Required information to be completed by Financial/Legal/ICT/ HR partners:

1. Finance Advice: This report requests approval for the Parks and Green Spaces and Food Growing and Allotments Strategy 2024-2039 and the submission of a grant application for £626k to the Green Recovery Fund.

The Green Recovery Fund is required to fund a pilot to establish how Bristol will achieve the commitment to deliver 30% of council land managed for nature by 2030. As match funding, the Council is contributing £291k of the £450k fund to manage council land for nature that is included in the 2024-25 Budget now awaiting Council approval. This may need to be increased by £89k should the bid for Natural Flood Management funding not be successful.

Finance Business Partner: Ben Hegarty, Finance Business Partner Growth and Regeneration, 26 February 2024.

2. Legal Advice:

The submission of a bid for grant funding does not raise any specific legal implications. The procurement process must be conducted in line with the 2015 Procurement Regulations and the Councils own procurement rules. Legal services will advise and assist officers with regard to the grant agreement and the conduct of the procurement process and the resulting contractual arrangements.

The consultation responses must be conscientiously taken into account in finalising the decision. The leading cases on consultation provide that consultation should occur when proposals are at a formative stage, should give sufficient reasons for any proposal to permit intelligent consideration and should allow adequate time for consideration and response. There must be clear evidence that the decision maker has considered the consultation responses, or a summary of them, before taking its decision.

Legal Team Leader: Husinara Jones, Team Manager/Solicitor 12 February 2024

3. Implications on IT: I can see no implications on IT in regard to this activity.

IT Team Leader: Alex Simpson – Lead Enterprise Architect 13 February 2024

4. HR Advice: There are no HR implications evident

HR Partner: Celia Williams, HR Business Partner 13 February 2024

EDM Sign-off	John Smith, Interim Executive Director Growth and Regeneration	25 January 2024
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Cabinet Member sign-off	Councillor Ellie King, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Public Health and Communities	26 February 2024
For Key Decisions - Mayor's Office sign-off	Mayor's Office	26 February 2024

Appendix A – Further essential background / detail on the proposal A1 - Parks and Green Spaces and Food Growing and Allotments Strategy A2 - Minimum standards for publicly accessible open spaces for recreation in Bristol	YES
Appendix B – Details of consultation carried out - internal and external	YES
Appendix C – Summary of any engagement with scrutiny	NO
Appendix D – Risk assessment	YES
Appendix E – Equalities screening / impact assessment of proposal	YES
Appendix F – Eco-impact screening/ impact assessment of proposal	YES
Appendix G – Financial Advice	NO
Appendix H – Legal Advice	NO
Appendix I – Exempt Information	NO
Appendix J – HR advice	NO
Appendix K – ICT	NO
Appendix L – Procurement	NO