

# Public Forum - Public Rights of Way and Greens Committee - 11<sup>th</sup> July 2024



**Members of the Public Rights of Way and Greens Committee**



<b>Questions</b>	Shirley Brown	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. PROW work backlog</li> <li>2. Stoke Lodge Village Green/Playing Fields</li> </ol>
<b>Statement 1</b>	Helen Powell	Stoke Lodge Village Green/Playing Fields
<b>Statement 2</b>	Susan Mayer	Stoke Lodge Village Green/Playing Fields

### Question 1

Having learned, at the last meeting of the PROWG Committee, that the huge backlog and long delays in making and implementing decisions about public rights of way in Bristol are partly due to the fact that there are only two council officers supporting that aspect of this Committee's work, and that some of their time had been seconded to working on unrelated projects, has any specific action since been taken to ensure that sufficient staffing and time will now be allocated ?

### Answer 1

Whilst thirteen outstanding DMMOs may seem a huge number this is very small amount compared to other Authorities. Of the thirteen DMMOs awaiting investigation one is nearing completion and will be brought to committee in October and another is currently being investigated with the expectation it will also be brought to committee in October. A third path is on Council owned land and a Dead of Dedication is being sought to make the route a right of way – a short report will then be brought to Committee. Of the remaining ten, seven are unobstructed so currently available for use.

In order to address the backlog and limited Officer resource a consultant has been employed to work on DMMOs over the next two years. The consultant will work on the most complicated and time-consuming applications to allow Officers to focus on more straight forward applications alongside other rights of way work.

No Officers have been seconded to unrelated projects. Both Officers work solely on rights of way with some of that work being DMMOs. Officers are also required to work on planning applications that may affect rights of way, Public Path Orders (PPOS), Legal Event Modification Orders (LEMOs), enforcement works, maintenance and improvement projects and follow up public enquires.

### Question 2

In view of the ongoing legal action by Cotham School to try and reverse the PROWG Committee's decisive vote in June 2023 to register Stoke Lodge as a Town or Village Green, are you aware of the arguments and evidence put forward by the local community's campaigners, as detailed on the website "We need to talk about Stoke Lodge"? ( <https://welovestokelodge.blog> )

### Answer 2

Yes, absolutely. The CRA as first defendant fully appreciates the input of Ms Welham and her counsel as second defendant.



## Statement 1

### **From Susan J Mayer - Stoke Lodge Village Green**

We have a new Committee and so a hearty welcome to all here today. In the first few weeks and months there will be so much for you to learn about ongoing issues but firstly, I would like to express my sincere thanks to the previous Committee for their endeavors to protect the autonomy of the PRoW & GC. The people of Bristol will be forever proud that they stood their ground and were not intimidated by unwarranted interference from faceless unelected individuals, who may still be seeking to undermine our democracy, so watch out!

You may be forgiven for assuming Stoke Lodge TVG is a straightforward issue, and that all relevant information has always been entirely factual. Sadly, that is not the case because from the earliest conciliatory meetings, Cotham School Management has taken a belligerent stance to ongoing shared use of the Parkland; despite willingly accepting an additional clause to do just that and with no mention of statutory incompatibility, in their Lease signed in 2011.

Since that time, there has been a concerted effort to discredit local individuals and to exaggerate pupil safety issues to justify public exclusion from the land; doggedly claiming a fence is necessary due to "hostile locals" menacing students during games lessons. Nonetheless, this neighbourhood has a very low crime rate and still has the cleanest football pitches in Bristol (confirmed by local teams) and tellingly, no official complaints of this nature recorded before (TVG1) 2011.

The School has called for the Parkland to be downgraded from Open Green Space, also considered a green stepping stone between the Dingle/Gorge and The Downs and despite conservation evidence proving Badgers and Deer were foraging within this Parkland before the fence excluded them in 2019.

However, some wildlife appear to be returning to the reopened field; amazingly, there are three young Badgers now living close to an old Sett that was abandoned during groundworks to erect fencing in 2019. Also, several sightings of Deer in recent days - this was a regular occurrence in the past so a welcome return. Sadly, a long-established roosting area for Pipistrelle Bats, removed during refurbishment of the now abandoned School Pavilion, has not revived - yet!

This vital Open Green Space has been a peaceful sanctuary for more than seventy years and despite repeated attempts to eradicate evidence of any 'Public Rights of Way', locals continue to visit daily, for recreation as well as using various traditional paths to cross the field.

Please help us to preserve this historic Parkland and its trees for future generations to enjoy, by vigorously defending our TVG on this last Open Green Space in Stoke Bishop.

## Statement 2

### **From Helen Powell - Stoke Lodge Playing Fields Village Green**

Dear Committee members You have as part of your meeting papers an update on the ongoing legal proceedings in relation to Stoke Lodge Village Green. New members of this Committee may be less familiar with this long-running saga (although one or two of you will remember it from previous stages in its lifecycle). Whatever your level of familiarity with the situation, you may be puzzled by the absence from the latest update of any mention of the community playing a part in this litigation. I appreciate that not everything can be covered in a short update, and I'd like to reassure you that the Commons Registration Authority is not alone in defending this claim against Cotham School. There are



in fact two defendants to the ongoing litigation: the Council and Katharine Welham (the community member who made the successful application for village green registration) are co-defendants. Kathy Welham is fully supported by the local community. Members of our community have fought long and hard for more than a decade to protect Stoke Lodge Playing Field for the benefit of all users (meaning Cotham School, local clubs and informal use - formal and informal recreation has co-existed on the playing fields for decades). This is something about which the community cares deeply, and to which we have dedicated the significant time and resources needed to prove our case. All the evidence that supports registration has been submitted by the community, in the form of five witness statements totalling around 90 pages, and over 2,800 pages of evidence. After the Committee's decision last summer we called on Cotham School to move forward together - our 2.5 minute video can be watched using the QR code below:



Unfortunately, the school decided instead to challenge the decision of this Committee - but the Stoke Lodge community is standing absolutely firm and will continue to do so, whatever it takes. We welcome the Commons Registration Authority's robust defence of this Committee's decision to register the land and will continue to do everything necessary to support Kathy Welham as the second defendant and to ensure a successful outcome to protect this historic parkland.

