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**A Summary of Greater Bedminster's Progress on the  
Bristol Area Green Space Strategy**

**This document offers information to aid discussion on GBCP's strategic approach to the development of Parks and Green Spaces.**

**The GBCP Board is requested to**

- **Note the report;**
- **Invite park groups and others to prepare proposals for park improvement in line with the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy by April 30 2013;**
- **Consider the 3 key issues set out below.**

**1. around £100,000 of 106 money for green spaces has been identified for allocation in 2013, where should we spend it?**

**2. should our emphasis be on promoting wildlife; securing improved children's play; enhancing the infrastructure and design of formal parks or something else? Can some of these be combined?**

**3. can we use the 106 money to leaver in other resources from, say, the lottery or land fill tax?**

**The Green Spaces:** Work on the Bristol Strategy started in 2005 and it was adopted in 2008. It's a 'spatial and investment plan for the next 20 years', ie 2006-2026. The Bedminster and Southville section, adopted after consultations in 2010, identified 14 sites that are the responsibility of BCC Parks, although there may be others, eg Windmill Hill City Farm, Hebron Burial Ground, Marksbury Community Garden, Ashton Vale Town Green, not 'owned' by Parks. The BCC sites and BCC names are

Greville Smyth Park  
South Street Park  
Land at Dalby Ave  
Land at Francis Road  
New Cut Open Space

Gores Marsh Park  
St Johns Churchyard  
North Street Green  
St Pauls Ch'yard  
Ashton Court

Dame Emily Park  
Ashton Vale Playing Fld  
'Sturdon Road'  
'Cumberland Road'

Additionally, important spaces easily accessed from Greater Bedminster, but in Windmill Hill ward include

Victoria Park

Malago Vale OS

‘Cotswold Road’

Funding and development of these spaces is the responsibility of Knowle, Filwood and Windmill Hill Neighbourhood Partnership.

Some of our local sites are quite small and will not be dealt with here, although their importance should not be underestimated as they are part of the walking environment and also significant as part of wildlife corridors. We’ll also not be commenting much on Ashton Court Estate, except as a wildlife reservoir.

The unimaginative naming of some sites by BCC perhaps indicates a lack of official engagement by the department who sometimes seem to see green space as a maintenance burden rather than as assets capable of meeting health and enjoyment goals for local people. Discuss!!

This is not true of front-line BCC staff who have always engaged well with local groups.

**The Criteria:** BCC introduced quality, quantity and distance criteria relating to different types of green space. The types are play opportunities for children and young people; formal green space; informal green space, natural green space and active sports space. Of course, these are not always easy to distinguish from each other. The aim of the strategy is that by 2026 all Bristol residents will be within various set distances of each type of green space and that this provision will be of an acceptable quantity and quality. Full details of the original Strategy can be seen on the BCC website: <http://www.bristol.gov.uk/page/bristol-parks-and-green-space-strategy>

**What’s the purpose of this summary?** The GBCP Board has asked for an assessment of progress over the last few years towards the goals set out in the original Strategy. We know that some spaces have moved forward considerably, whilst others remain ‘unimproved’. Of course, in some cases, ‘improvement’ might be a bad thing. The data will help GBCP to decide where further investment should be encouraged. This investment might come from BCC or externally. In both cases, a more convincing case can be made to the funder if applications are shown to be in line with a longer-term plan.

## **1. Formal Parks**

The BCC Strategy identified four ‘formal parks’ in or near GBCP. These are defined as ‘sites with a consciously organized layout whose aim is aesthetic enjoyment’. They are **Greville Smyth Park; Dame Emily Park, St John’s Churchyard and Victoria Park**. The aspiration is that by 2026 all Bristolians will live no more than 600 metres from a good quality ‘formal park’.

- **Greville Smyth Park** (formerly Bedminster Park). (c23 acres): This is already a fairly well equipped park and in 2012 it received a Green Flag Award. It has a development plan including an aspiration to enhance its wildlife habitats. It has a semi-derelict ‘Pavilion’ which is also the base for a tennis and a bowls club. There is currently a division of opinion about the advantages of promoting this (including a café) or a new building (unknown to the park’s development plan) that would offer changing facilities for the Ashton Boys (and Girls) Football Club. The main park group is the Friends of Greville Smyth Park (FroGS) - [www.frogs.org.uk](http://www.frogs.org.uk) - although there are also well organized user groups around football, tennis and bowls.
- **Dame Emily Park** (c6 acres): This is a small park and around half of it is given over to a MUGA and skateboarding area, ie much of it is hard surface. It is also a focus for street art, although this is in decline as suitable walls disappear. A small community garden was recently installed, but the park itself has few ‘formal park’ features. A development plan was agreed in 2012. The support group, Dame Emily Park Project (DEPP), have identified as immediate priorities improvements to the infrastructure, ie entrances, boundaries and paths; better integration of the park and the swimming pool (a grade 2 listed building) with a possible shared café and toilets and a more equal distribution of planting across the park. Jointly with the swimming pool it is of considerable heritage interest as a former coal mine. As a ‘formal park’ it is of poor quality.
- **St John’s Churchyard** (c2 acres): This is a pleasant, but very small space. Its heritage interest is very great as the focus of the medieval village of Bedminster. The simple circling process of the BCC Strategy implies that its contribution is equivalent to Greville Smyth or Victoria Parks. This is an absurd suggestion, but does not mean that it should not be improved. The modest aspirations of the St John’s Churchyard Community Association include better tree management, repairs to walls and railings, a new path, more seating and the cleaning of the of the commemorative cross installed a few years ago by the Community Association.

- **Victoria Park** (c49 acres): Just outside GBCP. The main support group is the Victoria Park Action Group (VPAG) – [www.vpag.org.uk](http://www.vpag.org.uk). Improvements since 2008 include tree and wildlife planting; expansion of the play area (7-11); refurbishment of the multi-games court and tennis court; new and repaired benches and an outside café. VPAG's development plan includes further developments for wildlife (a wildlife group is to be launched in 2013) and play and an improved infrastructure. A major goal is the repair of the former park-keepers' lodge as a community facility and café. VPAG intends to undertake local consultations in 2013 to refine these proposals.

A 2011 BCC assessment of site quality scored as follows: **Greville Smyth 5; Victoria 3, Dame Emily 5 and Gores Marsh 6**. This is out of 10 where 2-4 is Poor and 5 to 6 is Fair. The basis of this assessment is unclear.

Since the publication of the BCC Strategy other spaces have been (or are about to be) improved.

- **Gores Marsh Park** (c5 acres): In 2006 this was identified as an informal green space. Recent and current investment in a play area, improved paths etc means that it is, at least, a contender for the status of 'formal park'. The development plan endorsed by the support group, The Gore Marshalls, includes additional enhancement to play and infrastructure improvements such as paths, seating and bins. This work will largely be funded with BCC money agreed in 2012. Also, The Gores Marshalls are working with Bristol University on an 'urban pollinisation' project to create a wildflower meadow. Future aspirations include more of the same, ie play, planting and infrastructure. It is possible that by the summer of 2013 we will be able to consider Gores Marsh as a fair quality 'formal park', the first in Bedminster ward.
- **South Street Park** (c3.5 acres including the school playing field and acta community garden): Even combined, this is still a relatively small space. Improvements are proposed during 2013 which will include the better integration of the park and playing fields; infrastructure improvements (boundaries, signage, pathways etc) and better play opportunities. The community lead on this work has been undertaken by Way Out West – [www.way-out-west.org](http://www.way-out-west.org). WOW hopes to establish an independent park group (Friends of South Street Park' FOSSP?) in 2013. It is too early to identify this space as a small 'formal park' but it may be heading in that direction.
- **Sturdon Road/Luckwell Park** (c1.5 acres): As with St John's Churchyard, this is a useful, popular but small space not on the scale

- of Victoria and Greville Smyth Parks. However its relatively new support group –Luckwell Improvement Project or LIMP ([www.luckwell-improvement.org.uk](http://www.luckwell-improvement.org.uk)) – is ambitious. A development plan has been drawn up including aspirations for play equipment; seating and other furniture; improved boundaries and the establishment of a ‘rain garden’ to collect local flood water. LIMP intends to integrate the traditionally separate areas of the space, ie the ‘park’ the hard court area and the grass court. They are also looking at ways in which the green space and local streets can be merged.
- **Ashton Court Estate** (c850 acres). This can be considered as an informal green space and/or a very large formal park, but its distance from most inhabited areas reduces its contribution to the accessibility criteria of the Bristol Parks and Green Spaces Strategy. It’s a significant link between the wild-life of the country side and the urban world of Bristol.

### **Formal Park Summary:**

By the end of 2013 we might reasonably be able to identify the following as ‘Formal Parks’ serving the GBCP area: **Ashton Court Estate, Greville Smyth, Victoria, Gores Marsh and Dame Emily**. However, the question of quality remains.

Three other small spaces will also be making a contribution. They are **St John’s Churchyard, South Street Park and Luckwell Park**.

Setting aside quality issues, the areas of GBCP that are most distant from a formal park are Ashton Vale and parts of Bedminster ward including the Marksbury Road Area. See Map 2.

### **2.Childrens’ Play**

There is a lively debate about what this means. For some it involves structures such as swings, roundabouts and zip wires. For others it is opportunities for den building, climbing and so called imaginative, informal or ‘natural’ play. Whatever we may mean by children’s play, the BCC Strategy aims by 2026 to have a good quality centre within 450 metres of every child in the city.

There is a reasonable selection of play equipment at **Greville Smyth, Dame Emily, Gores Marsh and Victoria Park**. By the end of 2013, there should be play equipment at **South Street** and **Malago Vale Open Space** (c12 acres) and **Luckwell Park**, although quantity and quality has yet to be tested. £110 has been secured from BCC/Knowle, Filwood & Windmill

Hill Neighbourhood Partnership for children's play at **Malago Vale**. The community lead on this has been taken by the Marksbury Area Community Association (MACA) which is also interested in wildflower and tree planting along with better maintenance of the Malago stream which here forms the boundary between Bedminster and Windmill Hill wards. The Malago is part of a wildlife corridor.

Wheels parks/Skateboard areas are at **Dame Emily, Victoria Park and 'Cumberland Road'**. This space isn't on Cumberland Road, but is otherwise known as **'Sylvia Crowland' or Ashton Meadows**.

In terms of allocating future resources (such as there may be) there will be a constant tension between maintaining and developing existing centres as equipment wears out as opposed to starting new focuses.

### **3. Informal and Natural Green Spaces**

All green spaces have some wildlife potential and several park groups have been keen to promote this, even in spaces with a high degree of 'built environment' (eg Dame Emily) or formality including sports opportunities such as football pitches (eg Greville Smyth). The Strategy distance criteria for Informal Green Space and Wildlife Space are 550 metres and 700 metres respectively.

The main wildlife areas are to the north and west of the GBCP area. These are the **Avon New Cut** (c3.5 acres), the grounds of **Ashton Court** and the **Town Green**/disputed area in Ashton Vale. To the south, just outside GBCP, Bedminster Down, Novers Common and the Northern Slopes are wildlife areas, but possibly under threat from development. The Malago running in from Windmill Hill ward via **Cotswold Meadow and St John's Burialground** is a potential corridor, but much of the Southville end is either heavily urbanized or underground. **Cotswold Meadow/St John's Burialground** (c3.5 acres) itself is under the protection of the Kingfisher Group which is currently negotiating a wildlife planting strategy and maintenance plan with BCC as well as applying for Town Green status in order to head off developers.

The **Avon New Cut** is a major archeological site and a significant wild-life corridor with a support group, Friends of the Avon New Cut or FrANC, drawn from both banks. FrANC ([www.franc.org.uk](http://www.franc.org.uk)) members are currently active in the BCC sponsored Wild City Project and hope shortly to establish a Management Plan and secure recognition as a Local Nature Reserve. During 2012 the group has campaigned against the BRT 2

proposals which are seen as potentially damaging to the Cut as an amenity. A decision on this is expected shortly.

Compared to most of Bristol, BS3 is poor in wildlife (see the 10 year study of garden birds by Avon Wildlife Trust). GBCP ranks 14<sup>th</sup> out of 14 neighbourhood partnerships in tree coverage with Bedminster ward being particularly treeless.

Private gardens are probably at least as significant as public parks for wildlife in some parts of BS3, although as shown above, some park groups are keen to make their spaces more welcoming to animals and plants. Foxes, finches and flies need safe corridors and feeding opportunities to make it easier for them to move from space to space, let alone settle down to breed. Although the BS3 Wildlife Group is undertaking some research into winter garden birds and have started looking at bat habitats, we really have little systematic idea of what's out there, how they move about and what measures need to be undertaken to stimulate greater biodiversity. Efforts to improve habitats in individual parks are welcome, but they are not yet part of a strategic approach. **GBCP should contact agencies such as BCC, the universities and Avon Wildlife Trust to seek advice on how we might progress on this issue.**

Some comments on particular spaces

- **Ashton Court.** (850 acres) Most of Ashton Court lies outside the city and neighbourhood partnership area. It is a major destination park. Its funding is secured directly from BCC and is therefore not dealt with in detail here. See [www.ashtoncourtestate.co.uk](http://www.ashtoncourtestate.co.uk).
- **Ashton Vale (Town Green).** (c45 acres) Ashton Vale is either very rich in green space or very poor, depending on the outcome of current controversies. For the last few of years it has been the focus of a dispute regarding the establishment of a Town Green that would either protect a large green space or, if the Town Green was not established, lose it to major development. The controversy continues with about half the area now confirmed as a Town Green and the other half awaiting the results of a Judicial Review. None of this land belongs to BCC. All or part of it certainly meets the wildlife and informal play aspirations, at least for older children, of the BCC Strategy although it does not appear in the Strategy document.
- **Ashton Vale Playing Fields** (c6 acres). This is BCC owned, but about 85% is leased to a local football club for 7-8 months pa. Colliters Brook runs along one side. It is generally poor in terms of wildlife, general amenities (there are two benches), visual impact etc,

although inexplicably scored at 5 (Fair) on the 2011 BCC assessment. There is a very unattractive and derelict iron storage trailer previously used for storage. There are no formal children's play facilities. The nearest are at Gores Marsh Park about 1000 metres away across a busy Winterstoke Road. A significant local and often repeated concern is that access to the Fields is very poor, especially for buggy pushers, wheelchairs etc. Lighting is poor. 'The Playing Field is accessed via a narrow lane and then a steep grassy incline which is difficult to walk on when wet'. For the last couple of years, much of the local energy has been diverted into the Town Team controversy. **Now that that seems to be nearing a conclusion, one way or another, GBCP should be looking to establish a support group and develop a parks' and wildlife plan in the area.**

- **Dalby Avenue** (c5 acres) This is seen as a route rather than a destination. It links Windmill Hill to the retail heart of Greater Bedminster. **We should be talking to BCC Highways about their Walking Strategy as well as to Parks.**
- **'Sylvia Crowland' or Ashton Meadow** (c22 acres) This is described in the Strategy as 'Land at Cumberland Basin' (although it isn't) and 'Brunel picnic area'. Its status is 'informal green space'. It is not surrounded by housing as are other parks so there is no readily available support group. Nevertheless, it is well used by dog walkers and cyclists and pedestrians travelling from north to south of the river; up the river towards the Clifton Suspension Bridge and to the nearby Bower Ashton Campus. The uncertainty about its name is symptomatic of a failure of focus by both Bristol Parks and GBCP on this space. In March 2012 a delegation from GBCP met with the Acting Chief Executive and other senior BCC officers to protest against the piecemeal development of this space with interventions such as badly sited trees, a wheels park and other unconsulted upon one offs. It was pointed out that when the Brunel Way flyover was constructed in the 1960s, far from being an informal green space, this area was designed by the distinguished landscape architect Dame Sylvia Crowe with special care being given to the way the roadway fitted into the landscape, the establishment of artificial 'hills' to create an illusion of extra space and to views of up to a kilometer in several directions, including towards the Clifton Suspension Bridge. It seems that Bristol Parks had no knowledge of this heritage feature. Undertakings (since broken) were given that piecemeal and unannounced developments would cease. Also in 2012 the area was incorporated into the City Dock'd Conservation Area and a designation request has been placed with English Heritage, but no



result yet. **GBCP should assert the need for a proper recognition of Dame Sylvia Crowe's vision and require that future interventions enhance rather than sabotage this now historic area. Should it be linked to Greville Smyth Park?**

#### **4.Active Sports Space**

Although the original BCC Strategy identifies this as a feature of the city-wide assessment, the document published in 2008 made little reference to it. **It has not been included in this summary either, although it would be sensible for GBCP to undertake a survey of sporting opportunity in BS3 and to identify gaps and possibilities.**

#### **5.Allotments**

There are several allotment areas in GBCP. These are not dealt with here, but it should be relatively easy to undertake a survey.

Report by Ben Barker and based on information from BCC Parks and local park organisations. Many thanks.

January 2013

#### **Appendices**

##### **List of major green spaces by acreage, status and ward. Does it have a support group?**

Ashton Court	850	Destination	S	yes
Victoria	49	Formal	WH	VPAG
Greville Smyth	23	Formal	S	FroGS
SylviaCroweland	22	Informal	S	no
Malago Vale	12	Informal	WH	MACA?
Dame Emily	6	Formal	S	DEPP
Ashton Vale PF	6	Informal	B	no
Gores Marsh	5	Formal?	B	Gores Ms
Dalby Ave	5	Informal	S	no
South Street	3.5	Informal?	B	WOW
Avon New Cut	3.5	Wildlife	S/C	FrANC
Cotswold/St J B'd	3.5	Informal	WH	Kingfisher
St John's Ch'yd	2	Formal	S	SJCA
Luckwell Pk	1.5	Informal?	B	LImP

### **Map 1: Access to formal play facilities**

This shows 450 metres radii from existing sites where there are reasonable play facilities (1, Greville Smyth Park; 2. Dame Emily Park; 3. Victoria Park and 4 Gores Marsh Park). Radii for sites to be developed in 2013 (Luckwell Park, Malago Road Open Space and South Street are not shown). However it will be seen that by the end of 2013 these developments will have partially, at least, plugged some of the gaps in GBCP. All the existing and potential sites are mainly for younger children, ie up to c11. Coverage is less comprehensive for older children/young people.

### **Map 2: Access to Formal Parks**

This shows 600 metres radii from existing 'larger' formal parks (Dame Emily, Gores Marsh, Greville Smyth and Victoria). Smaller spaces with some potential (Luckwell, St John's Churchyard, South Street, Ashton Vale Playing Fields and Malago Vale Open Space) are also on the map, but areas of influence are not shown.

### **Notes and key to maps**

- The distances shown are approximate only.
- Distances are 'as the crow flies' and take no account of journey difficulties created, for example, by main roads and railway lines.
- Just because something has play equipment or is described as a formal park doesn't make it good quality.

Greville Smyth Park(1)	Gores Marsh Park(4)	Dame Emily Park(2)
South Street Park(13)	St Johns Churchyard(10)	Ashton Vale Pl'ing (17)
Land at Dalby Ave(9)	North Street Green(15)	'Sturdon Road'(14)
Land at Francis Road16)	St Pauls Ch'yard(8)	'Cumberland Road'(6)
New Cut Open Space(7)	Ashton Court(5)	

And in Windmill Hill ward....

Victoria Park(3)	Malago Vale OS(12)	'Cotswold Road'(11)
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