

Stoke Park Public meeting

Notes from meeting held on 19th September 2018 at the Old Library, Muller Road, Bristol

Attendees

35 members of the public attended

BCC Representatives: Cllr Estella Tincknell (chair); Gemma Dando (Service Director); Richard Fletcher (Parks Manager); Richard Ennion (Parks Development Manager), Phil Wright (BCC Transport), Richard Bourne (BCC Transport).

Overview

An overview was given by Richard Fletcher, recapping on some information from the first public meeting. He explained the council had to consider the following in terms of restoration work taking place: financial sustainability, custodianship of historic importance and custodianship of ecological importance.

He said that in response to issues raised at the last public meeting Bristol City Council (BCC) had agreed to revisit the scope and methodology of the works and see if there were any revisions to the plans that would address some of the concerns raised. This needed to be done in the context that there are certain limitations - any changes need to be in line with the restoration agreements the council has with its partners, consideration of what good practice is, and our contract with EcoVigour who are implementing the works.

Meetings and discussions have taken place with Natural England, Historic England and EcoVigour and with the Stoke Park Partnership Group to go through potential amendments.

Details of changes to the plans

Richard Ennion detailed the main changes

- Fewer trees being removed - 70% woodland canopy retained instead of 50%
- Increase in area of scrub being retained. 10% instead of 5%
- Scrub removal now largely by use of hand held tools
- Reinstate additional historic fence line from Barn Wood to Duchess Pond
- Lay overgrown hedges after other hedges have re-grown
- Plant new hedge along M32 boundary
- Plant new hedge along St John's lane

Great Crested Newts have been found in the Dew pond but as yet no dormice confirmed in or near the works area. A method statement has been produced to mitigate risks to protected species. These include:

- 250m protection zone inc. 60m exclusion zone around the dew pond
- Works timed to avoid harm to protected species
- Works supervised on site by licensed ecologist
- Hibernacula refuges provided for great crested newt
- Using more hand held tools

The approach has been agreed with Natural England and Historic England.

In addition, Richard outlined what was happening with grazing which is due to start in October with Information about to be distributed across the park. Further, Richard outlined that One Tree Per Child will be assisting with additional tree and hedge planting and that there are a range of volunteering opportunities being organised by EcoVigour to assist with the landscape restoration works.

Q&A session

Detailed below are some of the key points / questions raised and the response given by officers/councillors :

Question: Who is ultimately responsible for the project?

Response: Cabinet member Cllr Asher Craig.

Question: What do we mean by scrub?

Response: Scrub includes bramble and hawthorn which are due to be removed to allow restoration of species rich meadow and to provide a more open landscape character.

Question: Is the M32 screening hedge proposal part of the Countryside Stewardship scheme?

Response: No it isn't – it is part of a grant application to Highways England for a fund which is available to mitigate the impact of roads on historic sites.

Question: When will grazing be introduced?

Response: The intention is to start grazing in October.

Question: Will badgers be culled as result of the works?

Response: The project does not involve culling badgers and the works will avoid impact on badger setts.

How will the vegetation in the Gun Battery be managed?

Response: Once the security fence has been erected the Battery will be periodically grazed by sheep.

Point raised: Only leaving 10% of scrub doesn't seem sufficient to maintain the bird population – it will have an impact on breeding birds especially White Throat.

Response: removal of scrub is about ensuring a balance of habitats to enable the restoration of species rich grassland. A significant amount of scrub will be retained over the site as whole.

Question: What wildlife corridors are being created as part of scrub removal?

Response: Areas of scrub are specifically being retained to create wildlife corridors linked to woodland habitat.

Point raised: Over the past 35 years the spread of scrub has been overstated.

Response: There is good evidence that the extent of scrub had become harmful to wildlife and landscape quality and that the area of scrub has increased.

Point raised: BCC should have employed an ecologist last year to survey the land where scrub is to be removed and trees thinned.

Response: Protected species surveys had been commissioned at the appropriate times and with the appropriate methodology.

Have water bodies other than the Dew pond been surveyed for Great Crested Newts (GCN) and other protected species?

Response: GCN are assumed to be present in these water bodies and the 250m precautionary working zone will be applied, as per the ecological method statement. The ditch in Pale Plantation is not considered to be suitable for great crested newts.

Question: What are the results of dormouse survey?

Response: The survey has shown no signs of dormice to date and the last survey is at the beginning of October.

Question: Why weren't survey boxes put in April as required by NE guidance?

Response: Ecological advice received was that the timing and number of samples examined was sufficient to meet the survey guidelines.

Point raised: Concern about tarmac cycle path installed outside Duchess Gate.

Response: This was a Highways project not a parks project but enquiries will be made about this. **What provision has been made to restore Duchess Gate - Duchess Gate is being damaged by cars being parked on grass? It needs to be fixed now.**

Response: There are no provisions to undertake repairs under the Countryside Stewardship agreement but this could be included in a Heritage Lottery Fund bid resubmission along with restoration of other historic built structures.

Point raised: The cycle/pedestrian path between Jellicoe Avenue and Duchess Gate is damaged.

Response: BCC have not lost sight of the wider restoration works and they will work with the Partnership Group to apply for external funding. Parks are striving to retain as much of the dowry as possible to be able to attract external funding.

Question: Why has the long wall along Sir Johns Lane been rebuilt?

Response: This was a requirement of the Section 106 agreement when Bristol City Council acquired Stoke Park- a set sum (restricted to this work only) was provided to do this as part of the dowry.

Point raised: People do not think the project provides benefit to the park.

The project is focussed on making Stoke Park a great place to visit and enjoy, where people can experience a high quality nature rich landscape. Grazing is being re-introduced to allow long term sustainable land management.

Point raised: Concern that grazing will affect accessibility.

Grazing will only be carried out on around 20% of the park at any one time and the fields that are being grazed will still be accessible.

Question: Where will the cattle track be located?

It will be along the M32 boundary from Duchess Pond towards the bridge to Elm Tree Farm.

Point raised: Water troughs are a health and safety issue - a risk of children drowning as well as a risk for wildlife getting trapped?

Response: Troughs are not considered to be a significant H&S risk or that they would adversely affect wildlife – they are a standard specification. Action: the risk assessment which covers the new water troughs will be uploaded to the Bristol City Council webpage www.bristol.gov.uk/stokeparkimprovements .

Question: What is being done about alleviating the flooding of M32 underpass?

Response: BCC have applied for a grant from Highways England to address this. This proposal has been shared with Stoke Park Friends Group.

Question: What are the plans for One Tree per Child in respect of tree planting?

Response: The three proposals include approx. 1.5ha Lockleaze Open Space, planting a new hedge along Sir John's Lane and enrichment planting of an area of scrub. Feedback from the consultation supported the first two but not the enrichment planting.

Question: Are we aware of presence of deer at Stoke Park?

Response: Yes

Have any archaeological investigations been undertaken with respect to the pillow mound on the plateau?

Response: Member of the audience confirmed that two investigations had been undertaken both relating to historical purpose built rabbit warrens.

How will the removal of scrub and thinning of trees be supervised?

Response: An ecological consultant has been employed to oversee the works every day, as well as visits from BCC and the contract administrator.

Question: Will BCC be marking up more trees to ensure 70% woodland canopy?

Response: More trees will be marked.

Question: Are there plans for updating the public on the works?

Response: BCC would provide more walks and talks subject to demand, attend Friends Group meetings and share information on the webpage.

How do people get involved in volunteering days?

Response: A volunteer programme around the restoration works is being produced by Ecovigour which will be posted on the Stoke Park webpage as well promoting via fliers. Most other volunteer work includes the Friends Group and UWE volunteer project. Members of the Friends Group invited people in the room to join their volunteer work.

Point raised: Audience member expressed that he was encouraged by proposals and wanted to work with BCC.

Response: a thank you was expressed and it was re-iterated that there is plenty of opportunity for people to get involved (see note above about volunteering)

Point raised: Concern was expressed that at new pedestrian gates in livestock fencing the ground would become boggy as it was not to be surfaced but will remain grass.

Response: The situation will be monitored and some stone could be put down to improve conditions if the ground does get muddy. Significant investment is needed to create a good network of accessible paths; the intention to re-submit a bid to do the Heritage Lottery Fund to do this. The Partnership Group has discussed using the dowry to improve footpaths now, but this needs to be balanced against the need to protect the dowry for it to be available for match funding.

All weather accessible path

Richard Bourne outlined the detail of the path and the forthcoming consultation due to start on 1st October and running until 4 November. (NB The consultation was delayed by a week, at the instruction of Cllr Threlfall, meaning both the start date and the end date have been moved back a week.)

Questions/points raised and response

Question: Why hasn't the alternative route suggested by members of the Friends Group been included in the proposal?

Response: There will be a chance to comment on the proposals and provide alternatives, which will all be subsequently reviewed and assessed - it will be a fair and transparent process.

Point raised: Concern expressed about using tarmac.

Response: The path would not have a black tarmac finish, but one option is that it would have a resin bound finish on top of a tarmac base - similar to the existing path from Duchess Gate to the Dower House. This is one of the possible options.

Question: Does the path affect Wildlife?

Response: Habitat and species surveys are being carried out and necessary mitigation will be undertaken. The scheme is widening and surfacing existing paths, so should have minimal impact.

Question: Are you keeping cows off the path as they could be H&S issue?

Response: The intention is not to keep cows off the path as they are not considered a significant H&S issue.

Point raised: In places the shared path is too steep and could result in pedestrians and cyclists coming into conflict.

Response: The proposal is for a 3.0m wide path, which is the minimum recommended for use by both pedestrians and cyclists and is similar to many paths through other parks. The majority of cyclists respect other path users. Concerns should be raised during the consultation period. The consultation will be carried out in accordance with good practice. There will be a survey online and paper copies available.

Question: Will paper copies be made available?

Response: Yes in local venues and libraries, including The Hub, Buzz Lockleaze and the Muller Road Old Library.