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Parks to get even better deal from revised investment plans

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A revised proposal that will deliver over £100 million of investment to protect and improve Bristol's parks is to be considered by the city council's Cabinet later this month.

If agreed, the proposed Parks and Green Space Strategy would release much-needed resources to bring the city's parks up to the highest possible standard over the next 20 years - and create a fund to sustain any improvements and new facilities in top condition for generations to come.

The council has today released details of its proposed changes to the funding arrangements for the draft Parks and Green Space Strategy. It believes the new approach will meet the concerns of parks users and win widespread support when the issue is considered at Cabinet on February 21st.

Under the new proposal, over half of the capital investment in new and improved facilities would come from existing council budgets; section 106 planning agreements and special grants, including lottery funding. The rest would be raised through the sale of land with low recreational value - with 70% of all money generated in this way being reinvested back into parks. The remaining 30% would be used to support vital capital projects across the city, such as improved schools; housing; public transport and other leisure facilities.

The revised strategy due to be presented to councillors now projects that only about 90 acres of this marginal, surplus land - representing just 2.4% of all public open space in the city - might be re-used in this way.

The new approach follows a series of meetings between the council and representatives of the Parks Forum, set up after a decision on the draft strategy was deferred from the Cabinet's meeting on January 10th.

Cllr Rosalie Walker, Executive Member for Leisure and Health, said: "Bristol's parks are the jewel in our crown. They provide a haven to escape the hustle and bustle of city life and a healthy and fun environment for children to play in - as I know myself from the many hours my grandchildren have spent enjoying them. But a number of our parks really do need improving through new play equipment and other facilities, better landscaping and more planting.

"This proposed strategy has always been about protecting and improving our parks. Its aim is to deliver the investment needed from a range of sources to do just that over the next 20 years - and provide the essential funding that will be needed to repair and replace those improvements in the years to come.

"The meetings we have had with Parks Forum representatives in recent days have been extremely valuable and constructive. I believe we have now reached a way forward that delivers the investment our parks desperately need and satisfies the genuine concerns of parks users. The changes being proposed to the funding model for the strategy show just how much we are listening carefully and working closely with service users, residents and community organisations."

Proposal is 'good news' and should be supported, say Parks Forum reps

In a news release issued after the council's announcement, the Bristol Parks Forum described the proposal as 'good news'. They said their representatives who met with councillors were recommending endorsement of the new proposals by their members.

Fraser Bridgeford of the Forum said "We are delighted that we have a proposal that now has a clear and supportable funding model that will ensure the success of the...strategy."

He added that the Forum now would like all parties to support the proposal so that the Parks and Green Strategy is "a resounding success" for Bristol.

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