

Save Stoke Lodge Parkland

Chairman's fifth Annual Report on behalf of the Committee

To be presented at the AGM on Friday 27th March 2015

I am pleased to submit my fifth Chairman's report on behalf of the Committee.

Ours is a voluntary Community Group ruled by its Constitution and I must firstly thank the Committee for their ongoing work and support and secondly thank the Membership for their continued support and responses to the calls for their help and involvement.

My Report will be in four parts: -

1. Firstly the Town or Village Green Application
2. Secondly the Children's Play Facilities
3. Thirdly the upkeep of the Parkland
4. Fourthly the sustainability of the House and Gardens

1. The Town or Village Green Application

The Application was issued on behalf of the Community on 4th March 2011 i.e. four years ago. The Application (600 pages) addressed all of the qualifying criteria detailed in the 2006 Commons Act.

The application went out to public consultation in July 2011 and this prompted objections from 4 parties i.e. Bristol City Council, The University of Bristol, Cotham School and Rockleaze Rangers. These initial objections were issued to us in November 2011 and we submitted our initial response of contra arguments (187 pages) on 30th January 2012.

Our initial response prompted revised objections from the University of Bristol and Rockleaze Rangers which were issued to us at the end of February 2012 and we issued our second response containing our contra arguments (197 pages) on 31st March 2012.

On 12th September 2012 we received revised objections from Bristol City Council. We issued our third response containing our contra arguments (30 pages) on 5th October 2012.

In August 2012 the Registration Authority appointed Philip Petchey as an Independent Inspector to review our Application and the subsequent documentation and present his recommendation of whether or not the Application for Registration should be granted or not. In September we received the Inspector's Draft Directions confirming that:-

- a. It was agreed that the majority of the qualifying criteria had been accepted
- b. The only issue remaining in dispute was 'as of right', which is described in law as 'without force' 'without permission' and without secrecy', with the Objectors claiming that Community use was 'with force' and 'with permission' i.e. conflicting arguments.
- c. A Public Hearing was still contemplated
- d. The Inspector set out a timetable and issued a list of submissions he required

We responded on 17th September 2012.

On 6th December 2012 we received the Inspectors Directions confirming:-

- a. That the only issue in dispute continued to be 'as of right' (importantly this included a request for BCC to clarify how they were going to maintain their argument that Community use was both 'with force' and 'with permission' at the same time?
- b. That a Public Hearing was no longer contemplated because the evidence provided was sufficient to make the need for a hearing unnecessary
- c. His timetable for future events and a list of further submissions he required
- d. That he should decide his recommendation on the 'papers' only, because the only remaining issues in dispute were based on points of law, not matters of evidence

On 21st December 2012 Bristol City Council issued their second revised objection confirming that they were now acting on behalf of all the objectors and that they had withdrawn their objection based on Community use 'with force' and that their objection was now limited to Community use 'with permission' and their assertion that Registration as a Town or Village Green would put their Statutory Duty at risk. On 31st January we issued our fourth response containing our contra arguments and our legal statement (102 pages).

On 21st February 2013 the Inspector made his site visit to Stoke Lodge and during that meeting he confirmed that he intended to issue his recommendation by the end of April 2013. We responded on 10th March 2013 to the questions that were raised by the Inspector during the site visit.

On 22nd April 2013 the Inspector issued his Report in 24 pages, importantly in his Conclusion at paragraph 75 the Inspector recommended Registration of Stoke Lodge Parkland as a Town or Village Green. As part of his Conclusion he invited comments from the parties. This document is in the public domain and is available for inspection.

Upon receipt of the Inspector's report Bristol City Council (BCC) as Landowner and objector confirmed that they did not agree with the recommendation and they would issue a critique highlighting where they considered that the Inspector's report and recommendation to be flawed.

Save Stoke Lodge Parkland (SSLP) obviously confirmed that they agreed with the recommendation.

On 08.07.13 the Public Rights of Way and Greens Committee (PRoW&GC) met but were unable to consider their decision with regard to Stoke Lodge Parkland because of the announcement by BCC to make further submissions.

On 22.07.13 Cotham School unexpectedly issued their further submission for consideration by the Inspector.

On 31.07.13 SSLP issued their response to the Cotham document setting out where they considered it to be flawed and/or irrelevant. (14 pages)

On 29.07.13 BCC submitted their further submission for consideration by the Inspector.

On 26.08.13 SSLP issued their response to the BCC document setting out where they considered it to be flawed and/or irrelevant. (27 pages)

On 16.09.13 The Inspector issued his response to these latest objections and responses in the form of Further Directions, Importantly:-

- a. He has not changed his recommendation
- b. He has dismissed some of the proffered arguments
- c. He has requested further clarification of certain arguments to better understand what the objectors case is and what they are seeking
- d. He has set down a timetable for submission of this further clarification
 - i. BCC and Cotham make their submission by 29.10.13
 - ii. SSLP respond to i. above by 10.12.13, which we complied with, (49 pages)

On the 30th January 2014 the Inspector issued his response in the form of additional "Further Directions" requesting further responses from all the parties by 14th February 2014, and we responded as requested.

The documents listed above since the Inspector's Report dated 22.05.13 were not in the public domain and remained Private and Confidential and we were prevented from distributing them, or discussing the detail, beyond our Committee, and our legal advisor, by a "gagging order".

We continued to object to the "gagging order", please see below an extract from the response from The Registration Authority to our letter dated 13th February 2014:

"In your letter of 13 February, you indicated that:

"The Registration Authority has issued all recent documentation (objections, reports and directions) with the heading of "Private and Confidential". When we sought clarification we were advised that we could not distribute the contents of the documentation beyond our Committee and our Legal Advisor. It would appear to us that the objectors' have made wider consultation to gather further evidence to enable them to prepare their submissions. We therefore consider that we are being disadvantaged in that, whilst the objectors have been permitted to continue to formulate objections, the gagging order has prevented us from distributing the contents of the objector's submissions, Inspector's Reports and Directions and from consulting the local community further on these issues. We therefore request that the Gagging order be removed to put this matter on a fair footing".

The Commons Registration Authority issued the 'parties' submissions, directions and reports as 'private and confidential', because the case is still part of a quasi-judicial decision making process. There is no intention to 'gag' the parties in any way or to prevent them from formulating their respective cases. In the event that you wish to share any documentation more widely please let me know and I will check with the inspector to ensure that this is acceptable.

I hope this clarifies the situation

Yours sincerely

Tom Dunsdon, Solicitor, Legal Services, Bristol City Council”

We continued to push for the “gagging Order” to be lifted.

Whilst I was not permitted to disclose the details of the latest objections, our responses and the Inspector’s Further Directions I did consider it important to share some of the overriding principals contained in the Further Directions dated 16.09.13:

- a. The Inspector is considering if the objectors can re-introduce arguments that they previously accepted as made in our favour
- b. This may potentially reintroduce the need for a Public Inquiry
- c. The Inspector is considering the objectors request that his recommendation for registration should be put on hold pending the result of the Newhaven Appeal
- d. If the Inspector agrees to this request it could delay further consideration until after the hearing of the Appeal and the publication of the subsequent findings which could be in 2015

On 10th January 2014 Committee members: David Mayer, Alan Preece together with Richard Nosowski (representing Stoke Lodge Preservation Working Group) met with senior Cotham staff at their invitation. Cotham have difficulty distinguishing between the TVG group and SLPWG. They expressed general concerns including dog fouling and dogs not on leads which interfere with games sessions and alarm students. They hinted at wanting to commence improvements to the playing surfaces and changing provision but they were not forthcoming on details.

David expressed our concerns that they had not followed up our wish to be considered as an associate group in their co-operative academy framework. Richard informed them that they should be aware of the negative impact of some of the pronouncements of their partners from the university and the junior football clubs. Alan invited them to the next Stoke Bishop Forum meeting to give a brief presentation of their current concerns and future plans.

At the Stoke Bishop Forum on 29th January the Head, Dr Malcolm Willis, and the vice chair of governors, Sandra Fryer, attended. Dr Willis expressed Cotham’s desire to work in harmony with the SB community but there was criticism from the floor of the tone of the school’s written objections to the TVG application.

Speakers at the Forum stressed the need for continuing public access to Stoke Lodge but there was a sympathetic response to the problems of fouling and dogs off lead when Cotham pupils are using the pitches as well as to the poor state of the changing rooms. It was pointed out that the footprint of the building had been left out of the TVG application and so Cotham did have scope currently for their proposals to refurbish the changing rooms.

No firm proposals emerged from the Forum but the school representatives were given much food for thought as to their future interaction with the SB community. They cannot

ignore our existence and determination and would be wise to involve us in their future plans.

The Head of Cotham, Dr Willis, was subsequently invited to attend the next meeting of Stoke Lodge Preservation Working Group held on 18th March 2014 but he declined to respond.

On 27th March 2014 (the day of the last AGM) we received a copy of the Inspector's Further Directions dated 26.03.15 confirming that he would defer any further consideration of his previous recommendation until after the Judgement on the Newhaven Case is handed down. The Appeal is scheduled to be heard on the 3rd & 4th of November 2014. Importantly, included in the covering e-mail from the Registration Authority, enclosing these Further Directions, Tom Dunsdon confirmed that the Gagging Order had been lifted.

TVG Events since the Last AGM held on 28th March 2014

On the 3rd & 4th November 2014 the Newhaven Case Appeal was heard by the Supreme Court. The Appeal sought to overturn the Recommendation to register the Beach at Newhaven as a Town or Village Green because it failed the test of use "as of right" and secondly it should be overturned because use of the Beach conflicted with the statutory obligations of a working harbour. David and Susan Mayer attended the hearing.

On 25th February 2015 the Supreme Court handed down its Judgement confirming that the Appeal was upheld on both counts, based on the particular circumstance at Newhaven.

On the 4th March 2015 Cotham Academy wrote directly to the Inspector requesting that he change his recommendation to register Stoke Lodge Parkland as a Town or Village Green based on the precedent set by the Newhaven Appeal success.

We do not consider that the circumstances at Newhaven are relevant to the circumstances at Stoke Lodge.

On 6th March 2015 the Inspector issued his Further Directions requesting that the Objector's submit their representations by the 7th April 2015 and that the Applicant should submit his response(s) by 5th May 2015.

We are currently preparing our response to the Cotham Academy letter dated 04.03.15 and await the receipt of any further representations from the Objectors.

2. The Children's Play Facilities

The Play Facilities finally opened on the 1st August 2014 after a long and difficult battle; 19 years after the money to provide the facilities was paid to Bristol City Council by the developers for Queen's Gate and Parry's Grove as Section 106 Infrastructure Funds.

Despite the difficulties I must record that once the battle had been won the delivery team under the leadership of Tracey Morgan (Strategic Director) worked proactively and delivered a first rate facility that is enjoyed by all the children (and adults) who now visit this part of the Parkland on a regular basis.

Bruce Quilter and his army of BS9 Mums and Dads have now taken on the role of custodians and I understand they are considering raising money to expand the facilities. Martin Bennett has indicated that they intend to apply to the Neighbourhood Partnership Well Being Fund for some older children's play devices for which there is space.

3. The upkeep of the Parkland

Committee member, Prof Alan Preece continues lead the charge on getting BCC to eradicate the Japanese Knotweed infestations and other related matters such as bramble bashing and cutting back overgrown hedges etc, most notably the driveway to the rear car park in the Adult Learning Centre.

It has been possible to use Community Payback workers to tidy overgrown verges in the car park with good effect. The result of this and the improved space in the rear car park has been considerably enhanced car park facilities which continue to be fully used. We particularly need to thank Gary Brentnall (BCC services officer) for very wholehearted co-operation in seeing implementation.

We continue to liaise with, and support, the exceptional and valuable work undertaken by Stephanie French in her role as Neighbourhood Partnership Tree Champion for the Parkland and the wider Wards. The magnificent Cedar of Lebanon is a continuing worry and will probably have to be felled. A small consolation is that we should get a replacement Cedar of Lebanon from BCC. Other trees are being replaced throughout the Parkland.

4. The sustainability of the House and Gardens

We understand that following the transfer of responsibility for the Adult Learning Centre from Libraries back into Education additional funds have been provided to undertake some of the long overdue maintenance to start the renovation programme on the Building Fabric

The new management team recognises the need to promote the service more proactively and the web site has been updated to encourage greater attendance on courses.

D Mayer

David Mayer

Chairman

Save Stoke Lodge Parkland

20th March 2015