

VICTORIA PARK ACTION GROUP (VPAG) ANNUAL REPORT

March 2023 - February 2024

Victoria Park continued to be used by a wide range of people and groups throughout the year, with thousands more people likely to use it once local housing developments are complete. The VP130 bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund in Spring 2023 was sadly not successful, but many of the proposed initiatives were progressed in other ways, as shown in the year's achievements below:

Achievements

Features:

Skatepark: work on the new skatepark, for which funds were raised by local skater, Daniel Higginson, started in November 2023 and is almost complete.

Gardens: the community garden managed by Barney Smith won a South West In Bloom "It's Your Neighbourhood" Award Level 4 (= Thriving). City of Bristol College continued teaching vegetable growing in the beds by the Lodge over the summer, with produce going to the local foodbank.

Panorama: the panoramic viewfinder that looks north over Bristol was restored and a plaque added in memory of Alf Havvock, a local Councillor who was very active in VPAG for many years.

Wildlife: Victoria Park became part of Greater Bedminster Urban Nature Reserve and a new VPAG wildlife group was formed, led by Harry Lock. Work started on rewilding parts of the park.

Coffee van: there was a gap in coffee provision in the park when the Stuffed van left, but Amir Sufiani was granted a short-term licence and his Afista Barista van opened in October.

Activities:

VPAG events: annual events were run successfully, including the Spring Clean (1st April), Festival, Dog Show & Fun Run (16th Sept.) and Bonfire (5th Nov.)

Community involvement: in litter-picking, noticeboard restoration, cleaning up park entrances and removing graffiti looks set to become regular throughout the year, with additional help provided by Duke of Edinburgh Award volunteers.

Survey by UWE MA Architecture students: 8 Masters students carried out a project in the autumn with a focus on how the old Park Keeper's Lodge might be restored and put into use.

Sport: Sporting activities continued in the park throughout the year, including bowls, tennis, football, five-a-side, table tennis, basketball, running and outdoor gym.

Walks: Various public walks came through the park, including the South Bristol Skyline walk, St Mary Redcliffe Pipe walk, South Bristol History walk and South Bristol Parks walk.

Communication:

Website: an updated website was created (vpag.org.uk) which included information about all aspects of the park and VPAG's activities.

Communications: better communications were developed with dedicated print media and social media leads on the VPAG Committee, as well as a monthly emailed newsletter about park issues and activities reaching 250+ park-users.

Ways of working:

Community Interest Company (CIC): VPAG finally became a CIC in January 2024 to give it a more formal status that will help for future projects and fundraising. In the process, VPAG Members were converted into VPAG Friends.

Collaboration: there was ongoing collaboration with BCC Parks Department and other BCC staff, Windmill Hill Councillors, local schools, Bristol Parks Forum, BS3 Wildlife Group, Victoria Park Bowling and Tennis Clubs and local police.

Accessibility: wheelchair access to the park was reviewed and photos of all entrances put on the website to enable easier planning by visitors. Also, a local Guide Dogs team reported on how Victoria Park might be made more accessible for visually impaired park-users.

Ongoing projects:

Park-Keeper's Lodge: the long-standing desire to restore the semi-derelict Lodge and make it into a community hub with café and toilets has returned as a possibility with a VPAG sub-group working with Windmill Hill City Farm, looking at how to take this forward.

Accessible recreation area: the creation of an all-age, all-ability recreation area was planned after community consultation with features specifically designed for teenage girls who are under-represented in public parks. It is currently pending, awaiting further CIL (= Community Infrastructure Levy) money.

Wildlife pond: progress with a proposed pond that will capture some of the excess water in the south-east corner of the park was stalled by the need to put in a proper planning application as major groundworks are needed.

Defibrillator: work continues to provide a publicly available defibrillator (or two) in the park.

Challenges:

Victoria Park suffered the usual challenges this year, including waterlogged ground during very wet weather and anti-social behaviour such as out-of-control dogs, tagging of walls and noticeboards, flyposting, speeding e-scooters and e-bikes, plus two burnt-out motorbikes in the summer. Despite a lack of funding, the BCC Parks Department did their best with basic maintenance, including emptying of litter bins, toilet cleaning, plant pruning, and essential path and wall repairs. We are very grateful to Steve Clampin and his team for the ongoing support that they give to VPAG and users of Victoria Park.

Kerry Chester & Shaun Hennessy
VPAG Co-Chairs 2023-24