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Response to Castle Park consultation – October - December 2015

The Society welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation on Castle Park. The Society has been actively involved in the drawing up of the proposals for Castle Park since 2011. We recognise that the purpose of this consultation is to consult on the details of proposals previously agreed, and to seek views on additional proposals, both within the current available budget and aspirations for the future.

The Society supports the proposals that have already been agreed: tree management, restoration of the water feature, removing the existing play area, interpretation panels, improvement of Castle Keep remains, Wine Street boundary improvements.

The Society invited contributions from other interested parties, and the following have contributed to this response: Willie Harbinson and Paul Bradburn (Old Market Community Association), Fraser Bridgeford (Chair of Cabot, Clifton, Clifton East Neighbourhood Partnership).

General assessment

Castle Park struggles to find an identity. It is valued as a **public green space**, in an area with very little green space nearby, and is used particularly by employees at lunchtime in summer. It is a **through-route** on several pedestrian desire lines.

But it cannot be called a **community park**, as its location lacks a cohesive community, as is evidenced by a lack of an active community 'Friends of' group. This may change a little with the new bridge across the river from Finzel's Reach, and the imminent ambulance site development. Longer-term, more residential development in Redcliffe will help. Whilst the Old Market area lacks green spaces, it is not clear if residents from the area will be inclined to cross the inner ring road to go to Castle Park ?

And it is not a **destination park**, as it lacks stand-out features or activities that would make it a popular destination for tourists or shoppers.

Addressing this deficit is partly about physical changes, which is the subject of the consultation, but it is just as much about other changes that will attract people to the park. For instance, activities and artwork to attract both local residents and visitors. But it needs a community group with an events team, and marketing. Without a community group, these things will not happen. With a community group up and running, these other pieces of this puzzle might begin to take shape and eventually drop into place.

Specific comments

The Society makes the following specific comments on the proposals:

1) New path from St Peter's Square

We would include as essential a short length of new path from St Peter's Square, because it follows a desire line from the direction of Old Market. This would run parallel to the Still Waters lime avenue, joining this at the east end where the existing stone steps can be used to connect to the (renewed ?) timber steps and the path heading East towards Old Market. This will mean relocating the present 'throne' sculpture.

Ideally, this through-route between St Pater's Square and Old Market should be step-free, and the feasibility of doing this should be explored.

2) East end of the park

The eastern end of the park is under-used, and feels problematical. We propose a number of changes, but are unsure whether these alone will revive the area.

The south-east corner should be improved by

- passive surveillance from the tall new building on the ambulance site,
- removing the walls opposite the ambulance site and pedestrianising Castle Street to make a continuous public space between the ambulance site and the park,
- finding a viable use for the Vaulted Chambers

This could be funded by s106/CIL money from the ambulance site

The north-east corner could be improved by making it a more obvious entrance from the direction of Cabot Circus. The current maze of multi-level walkways serves very little purpose. We support re-landscaping to make the route into the park more visible at this corner.

Better connection between the old play area and the rest of the park would help. We would not want to remove entirely the high mound that separates the two, but we would want somehow to make the old play area more visible.

As for the level area left by the removal of the existing play area, Perhaps the best solution in the absence of clear demand for anything else is simply to grass it over to allow informal football, frisbee etc.

Maybe we should accept that this is the quieter part of the park. One of the functions of parks is to be a haven from busyness.

3) Benches

The park could do with more public benches. This is not mentioned in the consultation, but is a simple but important intervention.

4) St Peter's Square

The paved areas around St Peter's church have potential for more activity, eg daytime activity spilling out from the café, evening activity such as small-scale outdoor drama or concerts, using a temporary covered stage.

And the church itself feels wasted and in need of development, despite its function as a war memorial. One idea is a lightweight structure within the walls of the church that could be used as an interpretation centre for the history of the castle and the whole area up to the Blitz.

The present occasional use of the St Peter's Square as a lorry and car park sends all the wrong messages and should be stopped.

The surface of St Peter's Square needs a bit of repair in places.

5) Water feature

Whilst we support the renewal of the water feature, it being a distinctive part of Castle Park, we think it could be appreciated more if its setting was improved. If the new path is created from St Peter's Square (see 1 above), it will cease to be a main through route, and if seats are provided it can become a quiet area for sitting. One possibility would be to take the hedge out on one side to expose the river view.

Responses to online consultation survey questions

Play

2. Play areas are expensive facilities. If we provide a new one, this will restrict the other things that we could do, therefore it is important that we understand how much of a priority a new play area is.

We think that some play facilities are desirable, particularly as there is a lack of facilities in nearby areas. It is difficult to tell how much a formal play area would be used. It is more likely to be used by shoppers than local residents, who are few in number. Some targeted canvassing of shoppers and residents might help evaluate the demand for play facilities. If the children at the local school in St Jude's are brought into the park to give their views, it may help to generate future usage.

As a group, we therefore have mixed views on whether a typical neighbourhood play park with a large area enclosed with railings is justified. But this includes some of us who are strongly in favour, due to the lack of an alternative nearby, and the potential of a play area to bring activity to the park, with passive surveillance, drawing in members of the growing local residential community. Indeed, the facility may encourage more building of family homes nearby.

If there is a formal play area, the site suggested is good. It is close to the shops and near public loos, and would deal with a poorly drained area of grass.

3. If you do agree that a new fenced play area is needed what type of play equipment would you like to see in Castle Park?

We prefer modern style steel play equipment.

4. Do you have any other suggestions for play facilities?

Play facilities could be in the form of dispersed 'play sculpture' – instead of, or as well as, a formal play area. There is a need for equipment for all age groups, not just for small children. If nothing is provided for older kids/teenagers they will, not surprisingly, make use of equipment provided for the younger ones.

St Peter's Square

5. The area around the Castle Keep remains could also be used for low-level informal/natural play features as shown

in the pictures below. We cannot install large pieces of play equipment in this area as it may disturb important archaeology underground but we can consider putting natural play features here, that need minimal ground works. Do you like this idea for the Castle Keep area?

Yes

6. The Union Street entrance area adjacent to St Peter's Square and the surrounding area could be used to accommodate more activities, examples of which are shown in the pictures below:

Please rate how much you like each idea below: chess table, petanque, table tennis

All of these. These are relatively cheap interventions which encourage activity.

7. Please see the plan below that shows the tree avenues and how they could be improved with new surfacing consistent with that proposed for the Wine Street boundary. New surfacing would improve the uneven and broken paving that currently exists in St Peter's Square. Do you support the proposal for new permeable surface treatment to the tree avenues as shown in the pictures below?

Yes

Nature

8. To improve wildlife habitats would you like more wild flower/bulb planting in the park?

Yes

9. Grass coverage in the arena area by the bandstand

Which one of the following options do you prefer? (Mark one only)

By laying a more durable turf

By installing a reinforced system that better supports park events

There plainly needs to be some grass renewal in this area, as the current condition is very poor. The Love the Day festival has been moved to Eastville Park, and it has been agreed that Castle Park is not suitable for such a large event. Therefore the "more durable turf" is probably sufficient for future uses.

Former play area

10. In the longer term it may be appropriate to develop the former play area for leisure activities. How would you like to see this space used?

Exercise equipment

Not sure if this will be used enough ?

Multi Use Games Area (MUGA)

Not sure: there are several nearby. More potential if it had a community group associated with it

Grass the area over

Perhaps the best solution. Allow informal football, frisbee etc

Parcour (free running) course

Not sure. The tiering at the NE corner already provides some scope ?

Do you have any other suggestions for using this space?

No

Other

11. What do you think of the following additional proposals?

Picnic tables in the park

Yes. Particularly near the café, at the west end of the church. And in area of the old play facilities, near the Vaulted Chambers building.

Measured running/walking route in the park

Yes. Simple to do and may be used by local workers at lunchtime

More park information available via smart phones such as QR codes

No. Not likely to be used.

New direction signs throughout the park (similar to the legible city signs)

Yes at certain places, eg to guide through the maze of paths between Cabot Circus and the NE corner of the park.

Future areas of work

12. What are your thoughts on the ideas for future developments below?

Improve all of the entrances into the park.

The NE and SE entrances are in most need of improvement

A matching style of park furniture

Matching style is not very important, but more park benches are

important

A major new entrance into the park at Broadweir and Lower Castle Street corner to link the park more directly with Cabot Circus, archaeology permitting.

We support re-landscaping to make the route into the park more visible at this corner.

Improve existing paths and create better routes through the park

Yes, following desire lines

Restore St Peter's Church as a usable space for events, exhibitions and visitors

Yes

13. There are several mounds in the park (shown below) that were created in the 1970s when the park was remodelled. Some people think they should be removed as they obscure views across the park and potentially provide opportunities for anti-social behaviour as they reduce visibility to passers-by. What would you prefer to be done with the mounds?

In general, the mounds add interest and character, and are fun for children, and the trees on them should not be removed without very good reason. However, it would help somehow to achieve greater visibility of the old playground area from the rest of the park

14. Please use the space below to make any other comments or proposals you may have for Castle Park