

Bishopston, Cotham & Redland Community Partnership



bcrpc.org.uk

Status Report – February 2024

Bishopston, Cotham and Redland Community Partnership (BCR CP) was formed in February 2018. This status report looks at the changes that have taken place over the last few years and in particular the recent changes that impact on the role of the Partnership.

Introduction

BCR Community Partnership was formed to fill part of the gap left by the former BCR Neighbourhood Partnership, which, along with all other Neighbourhood Partnerships in the Bristol city area, was dissolved in 2017.

We set out to continue the Neighbourhood Partnership practice of holding public forum meetings at which local residents and community groups could gather to discuss local issues. Our aims (see bcrpc.org.uk/aims/) and constitution (see bcrpc.org.uk/constitution/) remain as approved at the inaugural AGM on 18 February 2018.

We received funding from our local councillors in 2018 and 2019 to hold community forum meetings and in particular to help the councillors solicit and prioritise local projects that could be supported by devolved funding such as Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). These local funding decisions were previously made by Neighbourhood Partnerships that included representatives from local community groups. They are currently made in Bristol by six Area Committees of councillors.

Partner Groups

BCR CP started in 2018 as a partnership of community groups (see bcrpc.org.uk/partners/). Many of these groups still exist, though some are no longer active.

In particular, with the loss of The Bishopston Society, Gloucester Road BID (Business Improvement District) and GRE&T (Gloucester Road Enterprise & Trade), we are underrepresented in the Bishopston area.

In addition, several of the groups representing parks and green spaces now find they have better and more relevant contacts with the council through the Parks Forum and directly with council parks officers.

There is one very active new group, Family Food Action, who joined during the pandemic. However in recent years many community groups in our area have given up expecting anything from the minimal support that the council can offer.

Committee

BCR CP is run by a committee selected from its partner groups and individuals. The number of people on the committee has reduced over time so that we now have a minimal committee of three people (see bcrcp.org.uk/committee/).

At the most recent committee meeting, the Chair expressed a wish to step down, partly in response to the Council's intention to set up new area committees and the way these committees are being set up (see below). The other two members agreed that, unless new people came forward to take on the role of the committee, it would be necessary and appropriate to dissolve the organisation.

Council Changes

In January 2024, the council approved a new constitution that would apply from May 2024. At that time the new committee-based council structure will start, replacing the current mayoral system.

There are some changes that will affect local democracy, which in turn will have an impact on our Community Partnership. These changes will happen primarily because the Area Committees are being reorganised and given a slightly wider remit.

Area Committees

The councillors from Bishopston & Ashley Down, Cotham and Redland wards currently participate in Area Committee 2 (AC2) along with councillors from Horfield, Henbury & Bently and Southmead wards. This is one of six Area Committees across Bristol. The role of AC2 of apportioning CIL (and some legacy S.106) funds for local projects has been constrained by the limited funds arising from developments in the area. In the 2023/24 municipal year no funds at all were available for allocation in the AC2 area.

From May 2024, there will be nine Area Committees. As well as continuing to distribute CIL and S.106 funds, they are being given a wider remit to be consulted on and to refer matters raised about local services such as road safety, parks and waste management. They will be required to hold two meetings a year in local venues, and potentially a further two meetings online, which will be open to public participation.

Unfortunately, in the new structure our three wards will no longer be in the same area committee. Bishopston & Ashley Down and Redland wards will join with Stoke Bishop and Westbury on Trym & Henleaze wards. Cotham ward will join with Clifton, Clifton Down and

Hotwells & Harbourside wards. This would imply working across two completely different sets of councillors according to which of our three wards were involved.

Public Forums

As BCR CP, we have been holding regular local public forum meetings over the last six years, though none since January 2023. Reports of these meetings as well as annual reports of our activities can be found on our website (see bcrcp.org.uk/reports/).

The new area committees will be required to have a public forum as part of their meetings. At these, members of the public will be able to put forward petitions, statements and questions to the members of the committee. This will mean that there will be at least two local opportunities a year for the public to raise issues of importance at a public forum with their councillors.

In many respects, these public forums should enable the kinds of interactions that BCR CP was set up to foster with the council after the demise of the Neighbourhood Partnerships.

Partnership Assets

BCR CP acquired several physical assets, including a PA system and a digital projector and screen, as part of holding public forum meetings. We have also loaned out these assets to other local groups.

We also currently have £727.50 cash in our bank account, of which £526.50 remains from the grants made by our local councillors for holding public meetings and associated communications.

If BCR CP is dissolved, these assets will be distributed to one or more local charitable (not-for-profit) organisations.

Roger Gimson (BCR CP Chair)

8 February 2024