

Fishing at St George Park Lake

Report from the St George NP Environment Sub-Group

The Neighbourhood Partnership is asked to agree to the proposal at the end of this report.

Introduction

Injuries to birds in the park caused by fishing line and other fishing litter has been raised at Neighbourhood Forum meetings as a priority to be addressed and concerns have also been raised about anti-social behaviour by some fishermen. In the AGSP consultation during 2010 'Ban fishing on the historic boating lake' was considered to be important or very important by 66% of those who responded. As well as the distress caused, dealing with injured wildlife also has significant costs to Bristol City Council and to charities such as the Secret World Wildlife Rescue and Swan Rescue when they are called out. There have also been incidents of pet dogs being injured resulting in significant vet bills.

The Environment Sub-Group has discussed this issue at its last few meetings and it has also been discussed at the environment workshops at the Neighbourhood Forums. A survey was distributed at the February Neighbourhood Forum; 19 were completed and the results are attached. More information is available on the sub-group website at <http://tinyurl.com/SGNPenviron>

There is a large measure of agreement on this issue. The majority of residents seem to agree that:

- A) The current level of wildlife injuries due to discarded fishing line etc is unacceptable.
- B) There is a problem with anti-social behaviour around the lake that needs to be addressed.
- C) The lake and the island should be managed to benefit wildlife.
- D) All users of the park should be able to enjoy walking round the lake and watching the wildlife.
- E) Any signs or notices restricting fishing should be legally enforceable.

The Neighbourhood Partnership and Bristol Parks need to be seen to take action to improve the situation.

Many residents and park users further believe that fishing should be banned completely - this is the view of the majority of the Environment Sub-Group and Friends of St George Park. However some residents object to a total ban, including those who use the lake for fishing. The Sub-Group has also accepted that other actions to resolve the issues should be tried before a total ban is considered. We are therefore not proposing a total ban on fishing.

We believe that the following actions would have the support of the vast majority of residents and park users and would improve the situation:

- F) Fishing should be banned after dark.
- G) Fishing should be banned during the 'traditional' closed season (15 Mar - 15 June) to protect nesting swans, ducks, coots and other birds.
- H) Fishing should be banned from the area around the island, and an area where the path width is restricted near the play area.
- I) Signs should clearly state when and where fishing is permitted.
- J) Anyone fishing at the lake should follow Bristol Parks code of conduct for fishermen
- K) Any fishing ban should be enforced by Bristol Parks and the Police working together.
- L) Any fishing ban should be reviewed each year and changes to the times or areas made as necessary.

Fishing Club

With Bristol Parks the sub-group has investigated the formation of an angling club to regulate fishing on the lake. The group does not believe that this is a viable option for the following reasons:

- i) for a club to be able to control fishing it would need to lease the lake, this would give too much control over the lake to a small minority of park users.
- ii) leasing the lake to a fishing club would give out the wrong message - this is a lake in a public park not a dedicated fishing lake.

Bye-law

Regardless of whether a partial or full ban on fishing is introduced it will be necessary to introduce a bye-law so that the regulations can be enforced. A breach of a bye-law is punishable by a fine through a magistrates court. If the bye-law set down the times and locations that fishing was permitted then any alterations to those times would require a new bye-law. As an alternative it is possible to draft a bye-law that allows fishing only as authorised by the Council. The Council through Bristol Parks could therefore vary the hours and/or locations whenever it wished.

BCC lawyers have confirmed that the introduction of such a bye-law is possible and that the cost would be of the order of £1,000. Any new bye-law will take several months to put in place due to the legal process involved.

Any bye-law could also be applied to Eastville Park, but the regulations would not need to be identical in both parks.

Enforcement

The introduction of a bye-law that regulated fishing would allow the Police to become more involved in dealing with anti-social behaviour where breaches of the bye-law had occurred. Bristol Parks currently employ 'security guards' on The Downs to enforce bye-laws such as the ban on barbecues, parking on The Downs or the erection of tents. We have been advised that the cost of mobile patrols at St George Park to enforce a fishing bye-law would be £20 per visit at night, £10 per visit during the day. Further discussion on this matter is required with the Police but targeted visits during the closed season and the first few weeks of any night-time ban may be effective and not prohibitively expensive. Once the message has got across that the ban is being enforced the number of visits could probably be reduced.

Dealing with Injured Wildlife

It is hoped that the introduction of regulations to control fishing will reduce the incidents of injuries to wildlife. However, some incidents are likely to continue. At the moment there is no clear information for members of the public as to how to report birds in distress or caught in fishing line. Nor is there any set procedure for Parks staff to follow to arrange for birds to be rescued. This needs to be rectified.

Management for Wildlife

One of the aims of the St George Green Space Investment Plan is 'To improve the management of St George Park lake and the island for wildlife'. Some management work to the trees on the island was done recently funded by the NP. Friends of St George Park have some exciting ideas to improve the lake for wildlife and to introduce a nature trail around the park. The aim is to create a place of excellence for young people to engage with the natural world in this urban location.

Proposal

This proposal was agreed by the St George Environment Sub-Group at its meeting on 16th February 2012. As well as members of the sub-group, the meeting was attended by Denise James and Karen Lloyd of Bristol Parks Neighbourhood Engagement Team; The St George Park Community Park Keeper; Cllr Ron Stone and a representative of the Friends of Eastville Park.

The Environment Sub-Group asks the Neighbourhood Partnership to take the following actions:

- 1) To confirm that it is in agreement with statements A to L on the first page of this report.
- 2) To ask Bristol City Council to put in place a Bye-Law for St George Park as follows (or wording to the same effect to be agreed with BCC legal dept - this wording is taken from bye-laws used by other Councils):
 - a) No person shall in St George Park engage in hunting, shooting or fishing or the setting of traps or nets or the laying of snares or poison.
 - b) This byelaw shall not prohibit any fishing which may be authorised by the Council.
- 3) To advise Bristol Parks that once the bye-law is in place, it should authorise fishing only in areas away from the island where the path width is adequate, during the hours of daylight and outside the closed season and it should review the situation annually.
- 4) To support the enforcement of the bye-law and endeavour to find funds to put up notices and pay for security if it is considered necessary.
- 5) To support Bristol Parks in introducing a voluntary ban on fishing during the 2012 closed season through publicity and signing at the park.
- 6) To ask Bristol Parks to review the current code of practice for fishing and then to publicise it and make it available in the park (on notice boards and at the café).
- 7) To ask Bristol Parks put in place clear procedures for reporting and dealing with injured wildlife and if these procedures rely on charities to consider whether their costs can be reimbursed.

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for St George Environment Sub-Group

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Survey for the St George NP Environment Sub-Group

Whilst facing all the common problems of an urban park lake within a densely populated area, St George Park Lake generates above average levels of concern.

There have been on-going issues relating to conflict of use between general park users, the lake, island and fishermen for a number of years now. Background information is available on the sub-group website at <http://tinyurl.com/SGNPenviro>. The sub-group will be making a recommendation on this issue to the next Neighbourhood Partnership meeting.

Below are the responses received at the Neighbourhood Forum on 7th February 2012

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
A) The current level of wildlife injuries due to discarded fishing line etc is unacceptable.	47%	16%	37%		
B) There is a problem with anti-social behaviour around the lake that needs to be addressed.	58%	21%	16%	5%	
C) The lake and the island should be managed to benefit wildlife.	68%	16%	11%	5%	
D) All users of the park should be able to enjoy walking round the lake and watching the wildlife.	74%	21%		5%	
E) Any signs or notices restricting fishing should be legally enforceable.	58%	26%	11%	5%	
F) Fishing should be banned after dark.	58%	16%	26%		
G) Fishing should be banned during the 'traditional' closed season (15 Mar - 15 June) to protect nesting swans, ducks, coots and other birds.	68%	16%	16%		
H) Fishing should be banned from the area around the island.	53%	5%	26%	11%	5%
I) Fishing should be banned entirely in St George Park.	26%	5%	26%	21%	21%
J) Signs should clearly state when and where fishing is permitted.	68%	26%	5%		
K) Anyone fishing at the lake should follow the published code of conduct for fishermen.	63%	21%	11%		
L) Any fishing ban should be enforced by Bristol Parks and the Police working together.	58%	26%	11%		5%
M) Any fishing ban should be reviewed each year and changes to the times or areas made as necessary.	53%	5%	21%	5%	5%

There were two comments asking how restrictions would be enforced and one disagreeing with a entire ban but saying fishing should be regulated.