

The Northern Slopes

Imagine just for one moment.....



The Northern Slopes Initiative

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Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/177126825777076/>

.....if we had a nature reserve on our doorsteps.

A place where you are safe to wander freely, which is clean and with beautiful views. Where wildlife is able to thrive and you can escape the stress and strain of city life.

A place where you can have fun, have a family picnic and the kids are free to explore and play. Where you can capture that amazing photograph of the city when the balloon fiesta is in full swing, or the colourful firework display in Central Bristol from a totally different perspective.

Those who are more adventurous are able to forage for wild fruits, or discover natural habitats where birds, animals and plants live. Inquisitive minds can learn more about the importance of local nature conservation and how it fits into the wider global picture.

Where there are opportunities to go walking, running and cycling. Sledging takes place when the snow arrives and our four legged friends are spoilt with a plethora of sniffing opportunities. A space where the pace of life slows down, where you can breathe the fresh air while standing in the lungs of south Bristol. This is our vision for the Northern Slopes.

Here at the Northern Slopes Initiative we passionately believe that good quality open space, free to access, is at a premium when living in a major city like Bristol. It is places like the Slopes that we can easily take for granted and they are not missed until they are gone. But it's not only about protecting our open spaces. It is equally about how we can work together to improve them. Over the past 12 months we have been working on our ideas and this is our draft 11 year plan.

Take a look at what we are suggesting, the ideas are not set in stone - so if you have comments or suggestions we want to hear from you. Please let us know your thoughts and more importantly join us to make it happen. FaceBook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/177126825777076/> Email: [enquiries@northern-slopes-initiative.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@northern-slopes-initiative.co.uk) Website: <https://www.northern-slopes-initiative.co.uk>

Bob Franks

Chair: The Northern Slopes Initiative

**Our Community.** The Northern Slopes are situated 3 kilometres to the south of central Bristol. They consist of areas known as Novers Common, Novers, Kingswear, Glyn Vale and Wedmore Vale (The Bommie). Parts of the Slopes were designated one of Bristol's 12 Local Nature Reserves in 2015. They are a fantastic gift from past generations to us in the present; and people in the future.

Our surrounding community is made up of three Council wards, Filwood, Knowle, and Windmill Hill, with a population of just over 40,000. We are a socially and economically varied community. People with secure careers, homes and social networks living alongside people desperate to achieve more for themselves and their families. We are predominately a white British community (83%) with a diverse range of minority ethnic communities.

Regardless of who you are we believe our Parks and Open Spaces, like the Northern Slopes, should be the space where our communities bond and grow. They are vital to our community wellbeing, personal health, and our economy. It is not just us who are saying this, but health professionals and national charities like Fields in Trust who share this opinion. In 2018 Fields in Trust published *Revaluing Parks and Green Spaces*, which found:

- £34.2 billion per year - The wellbeing value associated with the frequent use of parks and open spaces.
- £111 million per year - parks and green spaces are estimated to save our health service.

These public spaces become increasingly important in our neighbourhoods where some people are living with the consequences of low incomes, poor physical and mental health, inadequate housing and social isolation.

There are many things to celebrate when living in one of the UK's most diverse and dynamic cities, but this can also mask issues for those living on the periphery of the city often cut adrift from the opportunities enjoyed by our fellow Bristolians. In these circumstances local facilities are very important. They provide stability; helping to build communities.

Filwood ward remains one of the most deprived neighbourhoods in Bristol and is among the 10% most deprived in England. In 2015 it was also in the top five wards in Bristol where income deprivation is affecting children. According to Bristol's Joint Strategic Needs assessment 2016 – 2017 (JSNA); a document that should drive public sector priorities in the city:

- The life expectancy gap between the most and least deprived areas in the city is 9.6 years for men and 7 years for women.
- A higher percentage of people (over 20%) with long-term health problems or disability live in the most deprived south Bristol wards.
- 35% of people living in Filwood ward have below average mental wellbeing.
- only 56% of people living in our deprived neighbourhoods are physically active.
- Significantly more residents in deprived areas are diagnosed as being obese or overweight
- Parks and Open Spaces are popular, with over half (55%) of us visiting them weekly, this drops to 41% in our most deprived neighbourhoods.

In 2018 71% of us are satisfied with the quality of our Parks and Open Spaces but this drops to 45% in Filwood ward.

Bristol public Parks and Open Spaces are held in common and managed by Bristol City Council. However budget cuts require the City Council to consider ways of saving money with £2.8 million being cut from parks funding up to 2019 and there is a risk this is likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

As we look to the future and the positive role that the Slopes could play, it is important to note that the 2011 census identifies that the greatest rise in Bristol's child population is likely to be in south Bristol wards.

“Improving the availability of quality green spaces will help reduce inequalities”

The Fair Society, Healthy Lives Report 2010

**Today.** The complex needs within our community, aligned with the financial pressures facing Bristol City Council, give cause for genuine concern for the future of the Northern Slopes. We know there is no single solution to these challenges, but working together to create a sense of stability for the future of the Slopes will provide a good starting point.

The Northern Slopes attracts an abundance of wildlife, not just from the local area, but birds that fly in from North and West Africa in the summer, such as Chiffchaffs and Whitethroats; or from Europe in the winter such as Blackcaps. Birds such as Tawny Owls from other parts of Bristol are also starting to use the site. If you look carefully enough you can see flashes of various colours, such as red from the Robins and Bullfinches in the greyness of winter. The yellows of Bird's-Foot Trefoil and the Yellow Vetchling (which is rare in Bristol) brighten up the Slopes in the summer.

Look even closer under twigs and below stones, and you will find a world of mini-beasts, creepy-crawlies and slow worms. Already we are starting to see more bats, more bees and butterflies and other types of animals arrive to live on the Northern Slopes.

While the Northern Slopes are enjoyed by many people; problems remain with general neglect and the continuous threat of parts of the Slopes being built on.

Budget cuts are biting. Ability to resolve minor repairs and any suggestions of major improvements, given the financial pressures, seem to be limited. We find ourselves increasingly fighting for resources. We know this is not the relationship the Council and other organisations, or ourselves want. It's a waste of time and energy.

Much is said about wanting to work with communities by various organisations and we share in this ambition. We continue to meet, involve local people, provide advice to the City Council on their plans, help organise activities on the Slopes, assist with the maintenance of the site and raise money to improve them where we can.

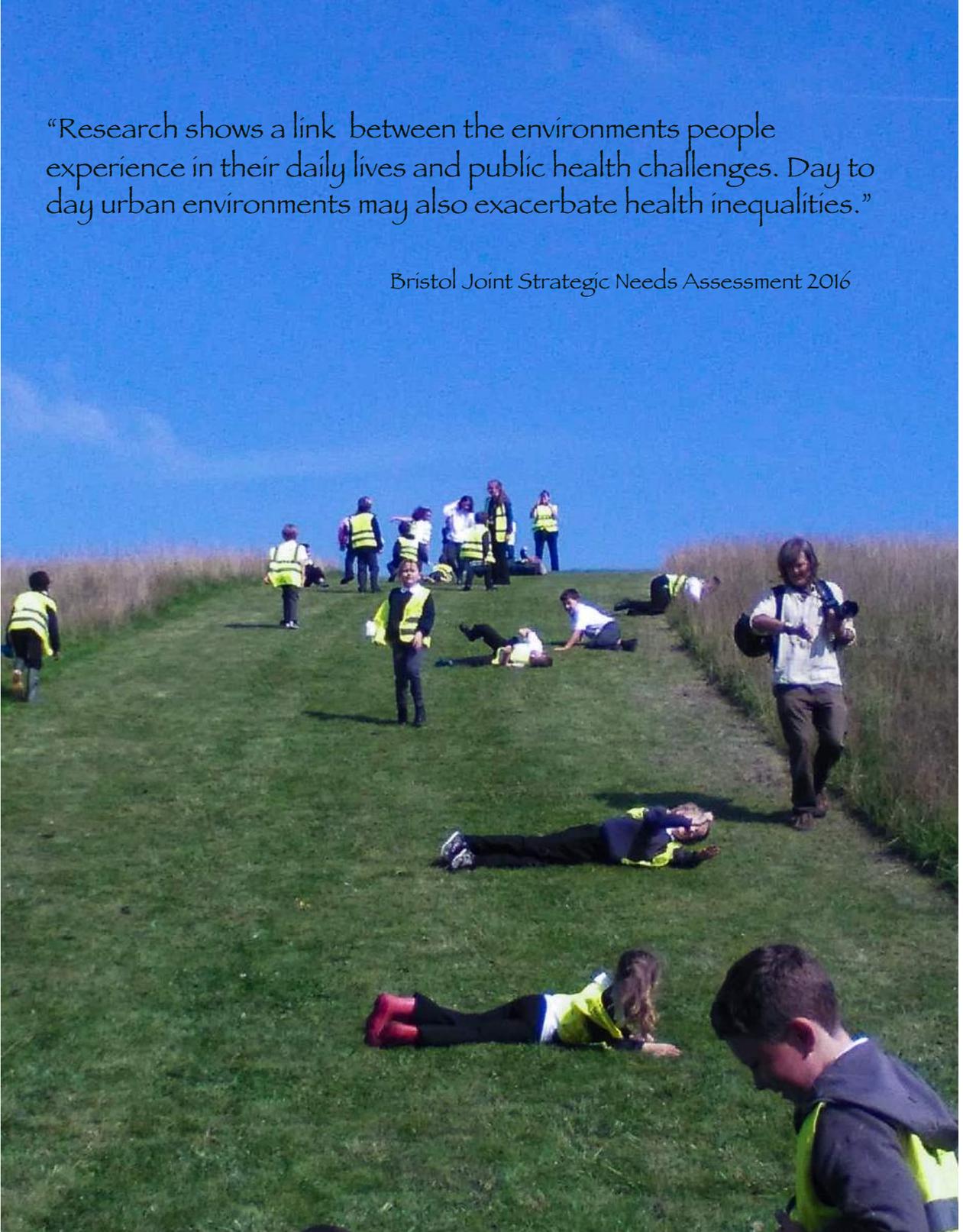
The reality is we are also facing the bite because cuts in services undermine our confidence. But now we are seeking our own direction through this plan. Our numbers are not growing fast enough to deliver this plan, so we need new blood, energy and purpose. We have taken the initiative to reignite an ambition and vision for the Slopes in the hope that mighty oaks from little acorns grow.





“Research shows a link between the environments people experience in their daily lives and public health challenges. Day to day urban environments may also exacerbate health inequalities.”

Bristol Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2016



**Tomorrow.** By 2030 The whole of the Northern Slopes will be a nature reserve for health and wellbeing of people and wildlife, where people can engage in learning, volunteering, exercising, escaping the stresses of modern life and simply have fun. The Slopes will have become a place that sparks curiosity in young and old alike. A place of connection and identity with the local community, a safe and clean space. The Slopes will help strengthen the bonds across all walks of life in our community.

They will have remained in public hands and free to access. We will have achieved this vision by working with others to meet our 5 priorities during the lifespan of our plan.

Priority 1	Planned Activity
The Northern Slopes benefits the health and wellbeing of our community.	<p>a) Aim for a year on year increase in the number of people engaged in activities on the Slopes as a result of our work.</p> <p>b) Explore how to work with others to extend our activities to cover social, health, learning and site based activities, including visiting schools, arranging tours for schools and groups, arranging specialist walks, extending Green Gym and My Wild Child to other parts of the Slopes. Organising dark sky events; walking and running; picnics; and teddy bear, fairy and adventure activities.</p> <p>c) Apply for funding to support our activities and where possible partner with other community organisations.</p>

Priority 2	Planned Activity
Safeguard the Northern Slopes for current and future generations.	a) Lobby politicians and other organisations to safeguard the existing footprint of the Slopes and expand them where possible. (eg: through planning systems and achieving more protection such as dark sky protection).

Priority 3	Planned Activity
<p>The Northern Slopes is a flourishing space for wildlife.</p>	<p>a) Encourage local residents to undertake wildlife surveys/ monitoring through existing initiatives for the Protection of Birds and Butterfly Conservation, (eg: BS3 wildlife, Bioblitz).</p> <p>b) Protect and enhance the wildlife interests of the site (eg: wildflowers for pollinators, hibernacula for reptiles, ongoing management activities).</p> <p>c) Attend training to help us do more for wildlife.</p>

Priority 4	Planned Activity
<p>More people are involved in the improvement of the Northern Slopes.</p>	<p>a) Recruit a volunteer activities coordinator.</p> <p>b) Listen and talk to local people and groups on the delivery of this plan.</p> <p>c) Increase the membership of the Friends of the Northern Slopes.</p> <p>d) Encourage new members (especially young people) as members of the NSI management core group; or as advisors to the group.</p> <p>e) Change the constitution of the NSI, so that it reflects our values, a wider geographical area of interest; and how we respond to wider issues such as health and social issues, climate emergency, wildlife loss, etc.</p>

Priority 5	Planned Activity
Ensure the Slopes become a destination for people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Use activities in Priority 1 and 3 to ensure more people are aware of the value of the Slopes to them.</li> <li>b) Ensure with the City Council/Bristol Waste that bins for litter and dog poo are provided across the the Slopes.</li> <li>c) Explore making more of water features on the slopes.</li> <li>d) Produce crystal clear on site maps for everyone.</li> <li>e) New and welcoming accesses situated at all entrances.</li> <li>f) Improve and increase our online and social media presence.</li> <li>g) More seating, picnic tables, children's play features and art work on the Slopes.</li> <li>h) Explore improvements to accessibility across the site, so that everybody can enjoy the Slopes.</li> <li>g) Produce leaflets and posters that promote the value to people and wildlife of the Slopes, including their positive features and our activities.</li> </ul>

**The Northern Slopes Initiative.** We are local residents and volunteers. Nobody gets paid, there are no freebies other than the satisfaction you get from helping your community and neighbourhood. We give our time freely to help protect and improve the Slopes for the reasons in this plan. Our purpose is to improve the Northern Slopes for everybody, its wildlife and general environment for current and future generations, both locally and across Bristol.

As volunteers all our work is reliant upon forming and maintaining good and positive working relationships with local residents and community groups, Bristol City Council, local doctors and police.

This is why our values are very important:

**Passion:** We will enthuse all residents and our partners to get involved in the Northern Slopes to achieve our vision.

**Integrity:** We will act with truth and honesty and we expect the same from those we work with.

**Open:** We will work in an open and transparent manner, which encourages accountability to local people and we expect all our partners to do likewise.

**Inclusive:** Everyone is welcome to take part in our activities. We will listen, learn and adapt to ensure everybody gets the opportunity to be involved in or influence our work.

Volunteers help organise activities, fundraising, campaigns and promotion. If you enjoy the Slopes, have time to spare, have ideas, and want to get involved we will have a place for you. You can keep in touch, find out more and get in touch here:

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## It's all down to you.

Our success is dependent upon working with you because without your support and involvement we will not be able to achieve what we have set out in this plan. You can take the first step in helping us both shape and deliver this plan by:

1. Visiting the Slopes.
2. Getting involved in one of the activities on the Slopes.
3. Posting your support for our work on your social media.
4. Making a financial contribution to our work if you are able.
5. Inviting one of us to come along and talk to your group or organisation.
6. Joining our Facebook Group.
7. Subscribing to our free Newsletter.

From little acorns mighty oaks grow



Produced by volunteers and totally funded through voluntary donations.