

Food handouts and the Bearpit notes of meeting on Tuesday 16th December 2014

Present

Bearpit Improvement Group (BIG):

- Alan Morris (Chair of BIG), Miriam Delogu (trading), Chris Carley (infrastructure)

Voluntary providers of food handouts in the Bearpit:

- Jackie Stephenson (Churches Together in Clifton, Cotham and Redland - CTCCR)

Other voluntary organisations:

- Paul Hazelden (Bristol Churches Action Network)

- Jonnie Angel (Wildgoose Cafe)

- Steve Jones (Bristol Soup Run Trust)

- Richard and Sue Townsend (Edge Church, Aztec West)

Bristol City Council

- Richard Hawkrige (Streetwise)

- Hywel Caddy (Senior Commissioning Officer, Strategic Housing)

Apologies and others not present

Bearpit Improvement Group (BIG): Sara Venn

Providers of food handouts in the Bearpit:

- Jackie Harvey (Jackie's Feed Programme),

- Jamuna Fisher (Hare Krishna Food for All)

Other voluntary organisations:

- Jenny Riley (St Mungo's Broadway - Outreach Manager, Compass Centre)

- Lindsey Jones (Caring in Bristol - Bristol Nightstop, Christmas and New Year night shelter.

Also volunteers with Bristol Methodist Centre on Midland Road, and Bristol Soup Run Trust)

1) Introductions

Those not at the first meeting introduced their organisations:

Bristol Soup Run Trust: running for 26 years, nightly every night of the week at Pip n' Jay and Redcliffe Wharf. 20 teams on a continuous rota, acting autonomously, 5 to 10 on each team. Mostly church groups, 1 secular group. The organisation is secular. Give out food, clothes, toiletries, rucksacks. Typically 70 clients on a Saturday, 30 on a Friday.

Street Life: run by Edge Church, Aztec West. Feeding and clothing programme. Running since 1997. Brunswick Square on a Saturday evening. Typically 100 clients.

2) Developing the proposal of a weekend premises

Jonnie Angel described again his idea for a premises at weekends where food and shelter is provided, filling the gap in the week between other services. A central, safe, neutral ground. A place to go to, not for a specific service. To include signposting for where else to go. A partnership of volunteers from many groups.

The higher numbers of clients using food handouts at weekends is evidence of the need for a weekend premises.

Hywel said that the Council does not have a council-owned building to offer. It is slimming down its owned properties from 52 to 10, and making other budget cuts. The proposal would therefore be to look for a redundant unused building not council-owned.

There are pros and cons between going for one big premises that could accommodate say 100, and a number of smaller premises. This would have to be decided. Issues to consider include: disruption to surrounding community, size of place in which clients feel comfortable, ease of management, ease of signposting, logistics.

The group **agreed** to work together towards the weekend premises proposal.

It is thought that there is no single up-to-date list of vacant buildings. The information is spread across a number of estate agents.

The **next step** is get a small group together to develop the proposal into a package that can be communicated, in order to publicise it and invite others to join in with it.

There is currently a momentum behind initiatives for the homeless in Bristol, and a drive to encourage partnership working. Events are being planned in February, and the weekend premises proposal can be fed into that.

3) Management of Bearpit handouts

3.1 Update on actions from last meeting

Jackie of CTCCR reported back on the two actions she took from the first meeting:

Management of food handouts: she has started to discuss with the vicar of her church, Holy Trinity Hotwells, a proposal to draw on the members of an existing church men's group to help man the food handouts.

Seek feedback: in the rota of CTCCR churches, it is Jackie's church that is doing handouts in January, so she could seek views of clients during that month. [But see later in these notes.]

3.2 Aims for the Bearpit and impacts of food handouts

Miriam spoke of her first-hand experience of the impacts of food handouts in the Bearpit. She put this in the context of the aims of the Bearpit Improvement Group (BIG) – to make the space more safe, welcoming, diverse and inclusive, and the experience of trading in the Bearpit.

BIG is making incremental changes, working with the council who are making the physical changes to the space. BIG has conducted consultation to find out what people want. A relaunch event is planned for 28th March, and further changes – greening, arts, play – will follow.

A particular proposal is for a Community Hub, holding workshops with a wide range of groups, including recovering alcoholics, aiming to work with organisations such as Second Steps and Bristol Drugs Project. Community engagement is also planned for a Community Garden.

She has traded in the Bearpit since 2012, and has seen how the presence of trading does make people feel safer. However, there continue to be issues. Traders have been threatened and she has had to attend a court case. There has been vandalism.

The food handouts the previous Saturday had led to an altercation in which china plates were smashed on to the ground. There had been families with young children present for activities put on by the Protect Our NHS group, but they disappeared when the incident started. BIG wants to make the Bearpit attractive as a family environment. By being inclusive, we are to some extent sacrificing the aims of being safe and welcoming.

3.3 Management actions - options

Richard T and Steve expressed surprise at the violence that Miriam had reported, as it is not their experience with their handouts. Richard explained his approach: start with a welcome to calm people down, make it clear who is in charge, make it clear that if there is any tension they will go away, one blast on a whistle if trouble starts etc.

Richard and Paul offered to mentor CTCCR and other groups on how to manage handouts. (Paul runs a course in “Helping vulnerable people”.)

The pros and cons of different venues was discussed:

- Bearpit: a confined area, offers some shelter which encourages people to hang around before and after the handouts. Planned to be used for family activities.
- Brunswick Square – with 5 exits, dissipation happens easily. Works well on a Saturday evening, but on Saturday at midday, the number of motor traffic movements would make it less safe as a venue for food handouts. There are residences at the square.
- College Green – an open, accessible space. It is used too much for other activities for it to work well for handouts.
- St James’s Park – the park is in two parts. The smaller section is sometimes used by homeless people, and would seem a good venue for handouts.

The consensus amongst those at the meeting responsible for food handouts was that St James’s Park is the best venue.

If the venue is to be changed, it will be a significant change in routine for service users, and the date of the change should be notified some weeks before, through leaflets and posters, in the Bearpit, at Wildgoose Café and at the Methodist Centre. The notice will say that it will be a better service at the new venue. It was provisionally decided to move straight to doing this, rather than first seek feedback from users.

It was provisionally agreed to move to using St James’s Park as a venue, but first some checks need to be made. **Richard H** will check this out with the police and the Council’s Parks department. **Alan** will check with St James Priory whether it would be OK for

providers to use the St James Priory car park (CTCCR already does this). [Post-meeting: it is OK for up to 3 providers to use the StJP car park. Susan Jotcham of StJP is not aware of any problem with using St James Park for food handouts.]

4) Date of next meeting

Monday 5th January at 6pm at Surrey Vaults

Agenda:

- Developing the proposal of a weekend premises – agree on the small group to develop the proposal into a package that can be communicated.
- Management of Bearpit handouts – review provisional proposal to move to St James Park, and plan for it.

(There is a BCAN meeting on Thursday 8th January.)