

22 July 2020

Cabinet Meeting

Statement: Emilio Pimentel-Reid/ Chairman Friends of the High Common

STARTS

I speak today as the chair of the Friends of the High Common regarding the future of our local green space.

This section of Royal Victoria Park which some of you know as the Approach Golf Course is currently officially closed for golf without any specific reopening date. In the meantime, it continues to experience anti- social behaviour, limited maintenance which endangers the greens and more generally the natural environment, and a general sense of loss of council control.

Unlike Entry Hill, where persons from as far as Scotland have apparently been able to have a say - and been consulted in a controversial 250 page plus report - at the High Common this has not been the case and we understand, even though we are local residents, we won't be formally consulted about its future.

Cllr. Crossley has confirmed on the record, that there is no threat to, in his words, to "public open access" to the High Common.

He claims there will be no physical changes to the park, no additional allotments built and no change from the current golf activities. It has been confirmed that a new specialist golf operator is being brought and that they can pay the full cost of maintenance, guaranteeing that the golf course will not need to be subsidised by the council at all.

I would emphasise that the efforts of Friends of the High Common were crucial in winning this clear statement, after months of confusion and concern.

However, residents wonder whether these guarantees sound too good to be true:

- We've been told that golf does not only mean golf but the nebulous 'golf derived sports' which can include golf frisbee and possibly anything else the new operator suggests can be played on a green field.
- We understand that the 12 hole course on the Western side of the park is likely to close - but this apparently doesn't qualify as a change of use, even if maintenance is dropped.
- Finally, there is the phrase public open access which a new specialist golf operator may choose to re-define the High Common, just as officious Council employees have done in the recent past, trying to limit residents previously established use.

In an environ when residents voices are increasingly not being heard, our community hopes that we won't see children, the vulnerable, dog owners, elderly residents, the Nordic walkers and many other local residents excluded and corralled onto narrow paths.

We look for commitment from the entire council to back up Cllr. Paul Crossley's promises –

AND the Friends of the High Common with support from local residents will continue to campaign to keep this vital green space in central Bath open ---as it has been for years, for All.

ENDS