

Statement for 5th May 2022 Cabinet Meeting

Sylvia Sinclair
Director St James's Square Bath Limited

I am speaking on behalf of St James's Square Bath Limited. We represent approximately 130 households in St James's Square. We work very closely with our neighbouring residents' associations and together we represent hundreds of people in the Lansdown area.

I wish to speak about the Council's latest proposals to turn the High Common, our neighbourhood park, into a commercial golf course.

Since golf ceased two years ago, there has been a VISIBLE increase in the number of people of all different ages and backgrounds using the High Common for all sorts of purposes, sometimes multiple times a day, and always free of charge. The myriad of activities the park is now used for includes all manner of exercise, children's games, family celebrations, picnics, painting, yoga, dog walking and simply people sitting in the park and enjoying the views and fresh air. Since the pandemic, this space and tranquillity is so much more highly valued.

This increase in users enjoying a full range of activities has been a direct result of people, their children and their pets, no longer facing the risk of being hit by a golf ball or harmed by chemicals. The High Common has been "DISCOVERED" by local residents and visitors alike.

Your proposals to return golf to the High Common, WITH the associated risks and the toxic chemicals necessary to maintain the greens and fairways, will immediately result in people

stopping using the High Common in the way they have. A huge number of people who have enjoyed FREE and UNRESTRICTED access to this open parkland will lose this benefit, causing real anger and disappointment.

In February 2021, your Cabinet, and Cllr Paul Crossley in a press interview a few days later, recognised these issues and made a commitment to retain the High Common as public open space for informal uses. Many of you supported that decision, including you Cllr Guy. Returning golf to the High Common reneges on that commitment and will be a VERY unpopular and backward step for your administration.

We ask you to consider the following:

1. Firstly, this proposal will give priority to a single activity which does not have widespread appeal and is played by a declining and narrow range of people who will need to pay for access. Historically golf on the High Common has been loss making and has required significant Council subsidies. This proposal would almost certainly be a drain on the Council's financial resources. Why should your taxpayers subsidise a single activity, a declining in popularity one at that, when there are so many other far more pressing calls on their finances?
2. This proposal risks the Council becoming embroiled in a lengthy and costly legal dispute. Only last week, it was announced that North Somerset Council has been involved in a lawsuit with a commercial operator of a very similar municipal golf course in Portishead where the Council ended up bailing out the operator, regaining

access to the land, which it has now turned into a green park available for all.

3. This proposal to return golf is in direct breach of your Council's climate and ecological commitments. Reintroducing toxic chemicals on to this parkland risks biodiversity, water courses and animals.

4. Finally, this proposal has not been consulted on with local residents. An informal petition from a golf campaigner is being cited instead, despite that petition being driven by residents' associations to prevent the Council's last attempt to commercialise the High Common. Proceeding without proper consultation is completely contradictory to your election manifesto where you committed to listen to residents and put them first.

In summary, your latest proposals to commercialise the High Common will result in the loss of amenity for a huge number of local residents favouring a single activity with a limited appeal which will undoubtedly require a commercial operator to be subsidised. Rather than this, you have before you a unique opportunity to preserve this wonderful parkland in perpetuity for free and unrestricted use and the benefit of ALL the residents of Bath, as it was intended when the land was originally gifted to the Council. Such a bold decision by this Council would be overwhelmingly welcomed by our residents, and I am sure by the significant majority of Bath's other residents and visitors to this iconic city.

Thank you