

Speech to Present to Council on 14th July

Restore the Ponds and Stream in Royal Victoria Park.

This is going to be the simplest of presentations based on the simplest of topics.

'Let's go to the park.'

'Let's feed the ducks.'

The Royal Victoria Park, Grade 1 registered by English Heritage and holding a Green Flag award is enjoyed by every resident of our city and holds irreplaceable memories for us all.

Integral to the park is water course that runs through it. Uniquely fed by natural spring, it connects the fish pond to the duck pond to the boating pond by a stream that runs under historic stone bridges and through colourfully planted gardens.

The poem, 'The Brook' by Alfred Lord Tennyson immediately comes to mind.

This evening, I have the simplest of requests, 'Will you please mend it.'

What started as a simple observation by a group of Year 9 students at Aspire Academy, in Bath, led to an English project aimed at restoring the water course. What a wonderful way to explore what it is to live in a democracy, to have a voice and the rights to effect change. The pupils at Aspire Academy believe that this is possible.

The students have written letters, interviewed the gardening team, surveyed residents in the park and tested the water. In addition, we have raised an online petition, which currently has nearly 500 signatures and contacted the BBC.

What has become clear is the strength of feeling about the ponds in the park and how they are valued by us all.

Aspire Academy is an SEMH School and the 'Thrive Approach' is at the core of our bespoke curriculum aimed at developing the emotional needs of every student. Part of this approach is the access to joy. Sadly, many of our young people have little understanding of happiness, as their life circumstances have inhibited their experience of it. Outdoor activities in beautiful spaces, such as Victoria Park, allow us to play, to walk, to relax and to thrive.'

Marine biologist Wallace J. Nichols wrote a book on the subject of water and its healing powers. In the book, Wallace explains that looking at, or being near water, can provide a wide range of health benefits. These benefits include reducing stress and anxiety, increasing happiness, lowering our heart rate, and other things that extend beyond just feeling calmer. He calls this the "blue mind" effect and says it's a response we have when seeing water.

In a time when the mental health of young people is at an all-time low, without the resources to support them and every family is suffering from the cost of living crisis, our parks are more important than ever.

So, I ask you again, on behalf of the pupils of Aspire Academy and the residents of Bath, 'Will you please mend it.'

Thank you for your time this evening and I truly hope there is something you can do.

Jennifer Newman

"I come from haunts of coot and hern,
I make a sudden sally,
And sparkle out among the fern,
To bicker down a valley."

The Brook – Alfred Lord Tennyson