

BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL

DOWNS COMMITTEE

April 11th 2011

Report of: *Director of Neighbourhoods*

Title: *Downs Rangers Report*

Ward: N/A

Officer Presenting Report: *Robert Westlake, Downs Ranger.*

Contact Telephone Number: (0117) 9736210

RECOMMENDATION

**That the eight dual use litter bins are retained.
That the wheel clamping scheme is continued
That initiatives to manage barbecues are continued.**

That the Report be noted

Summary

The significant issues in the report are:

The report reflects the objectives of the Downs Management Plan which is a five year work plan and has six key themes.

- Enjoyment
- Access
- Landscape
- Wildlife
- Anti Social Behaviour
- Management and Resources

Policy

1. *Not Applicable*

2 Consultation

Internal:

Matt Bennett Arboricultural Officer.
Peter Parkinson, Security Services
Barry Wiles, Licensing Team.
Sheelagh Dawson, Contract Solicitor.
Helen Hall, Conservation Officer.
John Knowlson, Play Officer
Frances Horner, Senior Solicitor.
Joanna Mellors CSS Valuation

External:

Ian Douglas, BSG
James Godwin PCSO (Stoke Bishop)

Context.

3

Enjoyment:

Over 120 benches have been repaired, jet washed and treated this winter. This represents nearly one third of the total benches on the Downs. Ten additional memorial benches have been added this financial year contributing over £6000 to the budget. In line with the Management Plan some benches that were in poor condition have been removed.

A letter from a Clifton resident has raised concerns about the Children's Play area. The main concerns highlight the facts that [a] the site is close to a rock face that young children could climb and fall from, [b] the lack of a perimeter fence, allowing dogs access to the area, and [c] that the Park is outdated with unsuitable equipment. The resident has asked that consideration be given to funding for future improvements.

I have contacted the City Council Play Officer John Knowlson for his views. He reports that the play area was discussed during a recent stakeholder consultation for the Neighbourhood Partnership. General consensus was that the play park is well used, that it should be enlarged and improved and made dog free. It was further recommended that the views of this Committee be sought with possible funding from the Neighbourhood Partnership.

Preparations for the 150 year celebrations are well underway. A programme of events for the Victorian pic-nic on Sunday the 22nd May has been agreed

by the steering group. The event will be formally launched by the Lord Mayor on the 16th May. An aerial photograph of children from St. Johns school depicting the figure 150 is planned. Members of this Committee and local ward councillors will be invited to attend.

The ice cream concession has been renegotiated. The new agreement prohibits the use of units that require the running of the engine to dispense ice cream. A bid has been accepted from one applicant for all four sites. The outcome is an increase on the previous arrangement of over £15,000, up from £33,751.00 to £49,400.00. The agreement will run for three years and is subject to an annual increase.

Access:

Observatory tower. The owner of the Tower has now signed the agreement detailing access rights. However members of the Committee will be aware that the owners solicitors have raised concerns that the agreement is restrictive and could impact on the future development works to the Tower and the operation of his business.

Meetings will be arranged with representatives of this Committee, Council Officers and the owners legal representative to discuss the terms of the licence.

A complaint has been received from a local resident about damage to the grass area's at Saville Road. This is the result of pedestrian traffic wishing to access the bus stop from the University campus. The damage is unsightly in that the area has become extremely muddy during the winter months. In an attempt to avoid the muddy areas pedestrians are encroaching still further, resulting in a muddy area approximately fifteen metres wide. {See appendix1} The resident has suggested the installation of a footpath to relieve the situation and I seek the Committees views on whether to approach the University for a solution or to monitor the area during the Summer months.

Landscape:

Significant tree works have been completed around the Downs this winter, this included lifting, pruning and tidying.

Water main across the Downs:

Consultation meetings continue with colleagues and Bristol Water. Our position on minimising disruption and concerns regarding previous works have been brought to the attention of Bristol Water. Further meetings and recommendations on alternative routes have taken place. Reassurances have been sought from Bristol Water that the project in so far as it impacts on the Downs will be minimised, that the work will be carried out expediently and that reinstatement will be carried out to the highest possible standard. Bristol Water have given a commitment that every effort will be made to ensure that all our concerns are met.

Wildlife:

Monthly reports received from the Education Officer.

Scrub clearance at Zoo bank has now been suspended to avoid disturbance to nesting birds.

The Downs Ranger, the Head Gardener and two members of staff have received training in animal welfare. This is in preparation for the goats arrival into the Gully. It is planned that training will be extended to the Friends group so that members can take a pro-active role in assisting with the management of the livestock.

There is a legal requirement for someone to be the nominated Registered Keeper of the goats and that responsibility will fall to myself.

Anti Social Behaviour:

Security patrols: Security staff continue with their reduced winter patrols. Meetings with the Head of the Security team will be undertaken to further refine the service for this Summer.

Recent initiatives to reduce scrubland along Circular Road and the installation of the goat enclosure has had a positive effect in reducing the amount of anti social behaviour in this area. This is evidenced by a reduction in the amount of sex litter deposited, and fewer sightings. A recent 'sweep' of this section was carried out by the Downs team and the Blue Sky organisation who are all ex offenders looking to get into work. The amount of litter collected was much reduced from previous forays. Efforts in this area have also been carried out by FODAG.

However the Committee should be aware that there is evidence that this particular type of anti social behaviour has increased at the the first part of Circular Road near the top of Fountains Hill. This area was litter cleared on the same day and a considerable amount of sex related material removed. I will shortly be exploring with colleagues and local Police Officers options to curtail anti social behaviour in this area.

Wheel Clamping:

The wheel clamping scheme has had significant success in managing illegal parking on the Downs. Complaints about the scheme and appeals have been minimal.

I seek the Committees approval to extend the scheme in it's present form for a further year. The alternative options are to extend the scheme to allow other parts of the Downs to be covered or to abandon the scheme entirely.

Barbecues:

Initiatives introduced in 2010 have had a significant impact on the illegal use of barbecues on the Downs. Joint initiatives included:

Extending and refocusing security cover, particularly at weekends.

A programme of public education, meeting, informing and leafleting barbecue users.

The use of banners and signs.

Public complaints about barbecue use in 2010 were minimal compared with many complaints in previous years. I seek approval to continue with these initiatives and to refine further for 2011.

The options previously discussed by this Committee were to create designated managed barbecue areas for visitors or to try and enforce the bye-law more robustly. Research from other Local Authorities around the Country suggest that strict enforcement is likely to be problematical and unlikely to lead to a successful prosecution. However I have had early contact with the PCSO for Stoke Bishop James Godwin who has promised his full support and has offered to further research and issue fixed penalty notices if offenders refuse to extinguish barbecues.

Litter bins:

A twelve month trial period for eight dual use litter/dog waste bins has now ended. The results of this trial do not confirm that the bins have had any significant impact on the amount of litter deposited on the ground. The amount of resource to remove litter from the Downs remains unchanged. However there have been benefits in that the dual use bins provide additional receptacles for the depositing of dog waste and having some bins on the Downs also mitigates often heard public complaints about a lack of bins. The eight bins are strategically located to provide maximum benefit and are emptied daily. I seek Committee approval to retain the eight bins. The previously considered options were to increase the number of bins on the Downs or to have no bins at all.

Management and Resources:

The Downs team continue with the Spring programme of works carrying out day to day response maintenance and projects in line with the Downs Management Plan and the Avon Gorge Management Plan.

Works include:

Sports pitch maintenance, grass cutting, bedding, inspection and maintenance of play equipment, clearing litter and emptying bins, seat cleaning and repair, and installing memorial benches.

Following an agreement at the last meeting work to repair/re-point the last section of walling at the Seawalls is due to start.

FODAG continue to carry out regular deep litter/rubbish clearance from various locations around the Downs. Organisers report that they are now having an impact on areas of deep seated litter.

The Downs team and Officers together with the Blue Sky organisation got together for a 'team day' at the Gully. This was to carry out preparatory works for the arrival of the goats.

Projects funded from reserves: {Please see appendix 2} Please note that item three, install power supply to two locations for ice cream units is

complete at Sea Walls but not at the Observatory Road site, this installation has been deferred as a review of ice cream provision on the Downs was underway.

The Probation Service continue with works to the dressing rooms.

Proposal

1 That the wheel clamping scheme is extended in its present form.
That initiatives to manage barbecue use are extended.
That the eight dual use bins are retained.

Other Options Considered

No other options considered

Risk Assessment

A risk assessment has not been carried out.

Equalities Impact Assessment

Not applicable

Legal and Resource Implications

Legal:

The Clifton and Durdham Downs (Bristol) Act 1861 provides that the Downs should remain as a place for the resort and recreation of the citizens of Bristol, and that a committee should be appointed to manage them. The recommendations of this report are within the powers conferred by this statute.

Legal advice given by: Frances Horner, Senior Solicitor

Financial:

(a) Revenue:

(b) Capital

Not Applicable

Land

The land is under the control of the Downs Committee.

Personnel

Not Applicable

Appendices: 1 Photograph of damage to grass area on Saville Road
2 Projects funded from Reserves

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

Background Papers: None



Appendix 2

Projects funded from reserves

The table below details the budget and the expenditure to date for those projects agreed by Downs Committee to be funded from reserves. Most of the projects are completed with a number awaiting invoicing. Expenditure in connection with the Downs 150 Celebration will continue into 2011/12. The Downs reserve at the beginning of 2010/11 stood at £254,540.

Project	Approved Budget £	Actual Expenditure to date £
Works to railings at Sea Walls to complete project*	45,000	45,000
Replace / refurbish Downs depot toilet block*	9,000	10,239
Install power supply to two ice cream locations	6,000	Pending
Install five replacement information panels	5,000	Pending
Repair / replace security shutters at depot*	3,000	1,030
Replace one third of football posts*	10,000	2,200
Install security lighting at Downs Depot*	2,500	To be invoiced
Contingency fund to support goat project*	16,000	16,000
Update emergency lighting and fire procedures at dressing rooms*	3,000	1,730
Outside painting to Downs changing room*	4,000	4,717
Materials – Community Payback Scheme*	2,000	2,000
Stone Walling at Sea Walls*	4,000	3,489
Clifton Camp Project*	10,260	10,256
Downs 150 Celebration	25,000	3,906
Part time Seasonal Education Officer	5,900	In 2011/12
Total	150,660	100,567

*Completed project