

BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL

DOWNS COMMITTEE

September 12th 2011

Report of: Service Director, Environment and Leisure

Title: Downs Rangers Report

Ward: Stoke Bishop.

Officer Presenting Report: Robert Westlake, Downs Ranger

Contact Telephone Number: 0117 9736210

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee agree in principal the establishment of an annual Downs Day and endorse further research into the feasibility of such an event taking place in 2012.

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

Consultation

2. Internal

Helen Hall Conservation Officer
Richard Bevan, Manager, Parks Estates, Play, Cemeteries & Crematoria.
John Williams, Estates Manager.
Tony Whitlock, Principal Accountant.
Matt Bennett, Tree Officer
Amanda Grubb, Events team.
Vicki Abel, Project Development Officer.
Steve Bird, Passenger Transport Infrastructure Manager

External

Chris J Westcott, Natural England
Mandy Leivers, Avon Gorge and Downs Biodiversity Education Officer.
Ian Douglas, BSG.

Context

3. Enjoyment:

Following on from the success in May to celebrate the inauguration of the Downs Act, the Committee requested that consideration be given to the creation of an annual Downs Day. I have had an initial meeting with a colleague in Events to look at how this might best be achieved.

Should the Committee wish to pursue this further it is recommended that in the first year any event is kept relatively low key, this is to assess how well such an event might be supported, to minimise any financial risk and to consider the logistics of how future possibly larger scale events might be brought to the Downs.

Early thoughts are that a 'Music in the Park' type of event might be acceptable. This could follow a similar format to an initiative previously held in Parks city wide but now discontinued. The music would not be amplified and could include, choirs, brass bands, swing bands, soloists and acoustic performers. NB { The music acts at the 150th celebrations were very well received } Suggestions and ideas from the committee on potential acts and performers would be welcome.

The event would be held on a Sunday, last for approximately 2/3 hours on a date to fit in with the 2012 events calendar. The event will be an opportunity for amateur local bands and musicians to showcase their talent to a larger audience. Costs for performers should be minimal but this is yet to be

explored. The infrastructure for the event will need to be provided by the City Council, to include, staging, tentage, signs and marketing etc. Friends of the Downs and Bristol Rotarians could be approached to support the event with volunteers to assist on the day.

The cost of setting up this kind of event could be offset by selling catering concessions and should as close as possible be cost neutral.

Should such an event prove successful, in future years alternative themes could be considered.

The likely cost of setting up such an event will be between £3,000 - £5,000 and will require funding from the Reserve.

Final preparations are underway for the start of the new football season. One unused pitch has been brought back into service to accommodate a local junior team.

One further memorial bench has been installed since our last meeting and several have been repaired. Some benches no longer fit for purpose have been removed.

Access:

To ensure that passengers taking the bus tour around the Downs can do so safely, works to raise tree branches along Ladies Mile and Circular Road have been completed. The work was carried out from the top of the tour bus which was kindly loaned by City Sightseeing Bristol.

Works are planned to cut back vegetation ahead of the Bridge Valley Road reopening later this month.

Following the installation of several DDA compliant bus stops along Westbury Road concerns were raised that the installing contractors had encroached onto the Downs. Reassurances have been received from the Manager of Public and Passenger transport that this is not the case. A meeting is planned to consider works all ready carried out and any any future projects that may impact adversely on the Downs.

With the assistance of Francis Greenacre the cast iron plate located on a stone milepost at Ladies Mile has been replaced with an aluminium replica. The original which was stolen in 2001 has been recovered and has been secured for display at the Museum Room, Merchants Hall.

Wildlife:

Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project:

The six feral goats introduced earlier in the year have settled well into their new surroundings and there have been no problems with their welfare.

A daily log is maintained by staff and volunteers detailing locations of the animals within the enclosure, what they are consuming and their general condition.

I have requested a quotation from Bristol Water to install a mains water supply to a trough to be located at the bottom of the enclosure.

Five juvenile Peregrines have been observed honing their hunting skills and Kestrels have fledged from nests at Seawalls and St Vincent Rocks.

Dry conditions in the Spring has led to a poor year for Orchids but benefited Purple Thyme and Red and Yellow bird-foot trefoil. Warm damp weather in July provided a perfect environment for Fungi.

FODAG continue with Butterfly monitoring in the Gorge.

Landscape:

The regular health check for the trees on the Downs has been completed . Actions have been agreed with the Tree Officer and works programmed for later in the year.

Reinstatement to the sward of the Downs football pitches and the area occupied by Funderworld has been very successful this year.

The hay cutting of the conservation area's was completed in August. In total 950 bales of hay were made. Donations of hay have been made to Hartcliffe City Farm, The Riding Centre for the Disabled, Windmill Hill City Farm and Lawrence Weston City Farm. The surplus has been sold to a local dealer and funds credited to the reserve.

I am pleased to report that the Downs has retained it's prestigious Green Flag accreditation. Downs personnel were presented with the award at a ceremony in July.

Britain in Bloom judges visited Bristol in July and again in August and the outcome of their deliberations is eagerly awaited.

Anti Social Behaviour:

An initiative to raise awareness of the bye-laws is under way, with the final of three forays across the Downs to take place later this month. This involves Downs personnel and security staff meeting and informing visitors of the bye laws and handing out information leaflets.

Barbecue use on the Downs continues but at a level much reduced from previous years. I have not received any public complaints since our last meeting. There has been one complimentary email from a visitor the Downs stating, '*Just wanted to say a massive thanks for really enforcing the barbecue ban this year. It's been wonderful to go to the Downs and not have*

to worry about breathing! I've spent at least twice as much time there this year, and it's been lovely to go up there even on hot days and find clean breathable air. Thank you very much.'

A recommendation on barbecue use is to be brought to Committee at a later date.

The security team continue with the patrolling of the Downs re-focusing on specific areas such as the goat compound and Observatory Hill.

Since our last meeting they have ticketed or spoken to 13 motorists about parking illegally. 14 visitors have been asked to desist from barbecue use. 1 group asked to remove a tent from the Downs and dealt with 2 incidents of disorderly behaviour. The security team have also assisted the Police in searching for a vulnerable person lost on the Downs.

Bristol Security group continue with the provision of the wheel clamping scheme. This summer they have clamped 15 cars. There have been three appeals, all unsuccessful. No cars have been towed away. There have been no complaints about the scheme received during that period.

A city wide procurement initiative for wheel clamping and tow away is due to conclude shortly.

Management and Resources:

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

Works include:

Grass cutting, summer bedding schemes, managing the goats, sports pitch initial marking, inspection and maintenance of play equipment, clearing litter and emptying litter and dog bins, cleaning signs and shelters, graffiti removal, tree feathering and lifting, and hedge cutting.

To support the goat project FODAG volunteers carry out additional weekend inspections.

The Probation team continue with the repainting of the Downs dressing rooms one day a week. The work proceeds slowly but the quality is of a professional standard.

The five year Downs Management Plan is due for review in 2012 and with colleagues work is underway to update the document.

Proposal; Not Applicable.

Other Options Considered

No other options considered

Risk Assessment

No risk assessment has been carried out.

Public Sector Equality Duties

Before making a decision, section 149 Equality Act 2010 requires that each decision-maker considers the need to promote equality for persons with the following “protected characteristics”: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. Each decision-maker must, therefore, have due regard to the need to:

- i) Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Equality Act 2010.*
- ii) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to --*
 - remove or minimise disadvantage suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic;*
 - take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of people who do not share it (in relation to disabled people, this includes, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities);*
 - encourage persons who share a protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.*
- iii) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to –*
 - tackle prejudice; and*
 - promote understanding.*

Not Applicable.

Legal and Resource Implications

Legal

None directly arising from the report.

The Clifton and Durdham Downs Act (Bristol) 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.

Financial

(a) Revenue

Not applicable

(b) Capital

Not applicable

Financial advice provided by Tony Whitlock, Principal Accountant

Land

The land is under the control of the Downs Committee.

Personnel

Not applicable

Appendices:

None

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

Background Papers:

None