

**BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL**

**DOWNNS COMMITTEE**  
**April 23<sup>rd</sup> 2012**

**Report of:** Service Director, Environment and Leisure

**Title:** Downs Rangers Report

**Ward:** N/A

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

**Contact Telephone Number:** 0117 9736210

**RECOMMENDATION**

**(1) that in order to facilitate the lighting of the Jubilee Beacon, the Committee seek approval from the Strategic Director Neighbourhoods and City Development to grant a waiver under his delegated powers, on the byelaw prohibiting fires on the Downs.**

**(2) that the Committee support the table tennis event to be held on the Downs throughout July 2012.**

**(3) that the Committee consider the formation of a Traffic sub group to seek solutions to traffic and parking related issues around the Downs.**

**(4) that the Committee agree to accommodate a temporary parking area for coaches along Ladies Mile to support the Olympic Torch relay scheduled for the 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2012.**

**(5) that the report be noted.**

**Summary**

The significant issues in the report are:

This 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

Richard Bevan, Manager, Parks Estates, Play, Cemeteries & Crematoria.

John Williams, Estates Manager.

Tony Whitlock, Principal Accountant.

Amanda Grubb, Events team.

Richard Ennion, Horticultural Service Manager.

Peter Malarby, Senior Solicitor.

Richard Stransom, Parks Operations Manager.

### 3. External

Chris J Westcott, Natural England

Mandy Leivers, Avon Gorge and Downs Biodiversity Education Officer.

Jack Penrose FOD+AG

## Context

### 4. Enjoyment:

Planning for the Downs Jubilee Day on June 4<sup>th</sup> is well advanced.

The Diamond Jubilee Downs Day sub group have met and agreed the layout, entertainment and attractions for the day. Incorporating the Jubilee celebration has had a significant logistical impact on what had originally been planned, this includes additional sanitary arrangements, extra stewarding and lighting. In addition to the musical attractions listed in my last report we have secured, hot air balloons, The Great Western Air Ambulance, tour bus, and a military display. A small display of Bristol cars and buses is also planned. The event will be opened by the Lord Mayor and the High Sheriff and will conclude with a children's fancy dress competition and lantern parade

followed by the lighting of the Beacon at 10.00pm. In order to facilitate the lighting of the Jubilee Beacon it will be necessary to seek approval from the Strategic Director Neighbourhoods and Development who has the authority under delegated powers to grant a waiver on the byelaw prohibiting fires on the Downs.

Following a 'mystery shop' by Green Flag judges late last year a response has been forwarded and a reapplication for continued Green Flag status for the Downs for 2012 has been submitted. We await a further visit from the Judges.

One additional memorial bench has been installed at Sea Walls since our last meeting.

I have had early discussions with a local sponsor seeking an arrangement whereby the purchase of the Talking Telescopes first discussed last year can be facilitated.

The football season has ended and works to reinstate the pitches are underway. In addition some minor improvements to the dressing rooms are planned during the close season.

In line with the Management plan aspirations to improve the range of sports available at the Downs we have hosted an American style Flag Football event. Unfortunately the planned Polo tournament has been deferred. I have also had early talks with the Universities Sports Participation Coordinator to consider introducing sports that encourage more female participation. The Events Team have received a request to host a small table tennis event on the Downs. This is part of a City-wide initiative called P.I.N.G. and aspires to get people actively participating in sport. The event will run throughout July, involve less than fifty people, and will require the setting up of a concrete base on the Downs for the table. All other equipment will be provided free. Subject to final details being acceptable I seek Committee approval to support this initiative.

The year long celebration of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Downs Act concludes next month. In addition to the successful Downs Day in 2011 several other significant projects have been undertaken [please see appendix 1]. It should be noted that if further funding is available there are outstanding ideas and initiatives that could be progressed.

## **5. Access:**

### **Bristol Water update:**

Downs Committee were advised in July 2011 of the proposal by Bristol Water install a new water main across parts of the Downs.

Bristol Water have now received a Section 38 consent from the Secretary of

State to carry out the proposed works.

It was agreed to permit early access to Bristol Water for the installation of the compound, this was to avoid complications associated with the closing of Parry's Lane. An additional sum by way of compensation has been negotiated with Bristol Water.

Ongoing discussions include the arrangements to minimise disruption during construction and compensation for disturbance plus a sum to be agreed to cover the cost of officer time spent on the project.

Officers are close to concluding negotiations with Bristol Water and will continue to monitor the project as it progresses.

In January a draft discussion paper was presented by FOD+AG to consider traffic problems around the Downs. Meetings with FOD+AG have taken place to agree how best to take forward a working document that can be discussed with Traffic Managers. Subsequent meetings should include stakeholders affected by any proposals. The Committee is asked to consider the formation of a sub group to further progress the management of traffic related problems. The application to install parking for disabled visitors at Stoke Road have been temporarily deferred and will now form part of the wider study currently being undertaken by FOD+AG.

Cycle racks have been installed near to the Downs changing rooms.

To support the Olympic Torch relay scheduled for the 23<sup>rd</sup> May I have been asked to provide a parking area for coaches that will be transporting school children to the event. Subject to the Committees agreement I propose to accommodate the coaches along Ladies Mile. The area will be coned off and managed by event marshals. The event starts and concludes early in the morning so I do not anticipate any disruption to traffic or inconvenience to regular Downs visitors. In addition I have asked the Olympic Torch Relay organisers to consider extra security to ensure general visitors to the event do not park inconsiderately.

## **6. Wildlife:**

Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project:

The goats have survived their first winter in the Gully and continue to thrive. The keepers assisted by volunteers from FOD+AG at weekends check on their welfare. No additional supplementary feed was required during the winter. All six goats appear to be in excellent health.

The project is proving to be a popular visitor attraction, with many casual visitors as well as organised groups. 'Meet the goat keeper' days have been over subscribed and additional events have been added to the programme. Some viewing area's have proved so popular that plans to improve access and reduce erosion are being considered.

The first of two new interpretation panels has been installed in the Gully, a

second will be located when concerns over safe access have been resolved. A volunteer scrub clearance initiative organised by Natural England and ably supported by FOD+AG was carried out during the winter months.

Many events have been organised by the Education Officer Mandy Leivers, including a talk by Richard Bland about the bird life of the Downs which was attended by 42 people. Tours were arranged to look at 'Identifying Mosses and Liverworts' attended by 11 visitors and taken by Justin Smith.

Numerous activities for children, including learning to build bird boxes was a great success. An excursion to identify Lichens on the Downs led by Sheila Quinn was again fully booked. An interesting quote from one visitor *'Waiting in the porch of the Retreat Cafe I chanced upon your Tree and Lichen Trail leaflets and I just wanted to thank and compliment you on their excellent production, both friendly and informative. I've been walking the Downs intermittently for well over fifty years and realise that there is still much to learn'*

The Somerset and Bristol branch for Butterfly Conservation have produced the results of their annual butterfly transect. The report concludes that 2011 was a mixed year for butterflies. Few species showed an increase in numbers, however there were notable successes, particularly the Red Admiral which had it's best year since 2003.

## **7. Landscape:**

Tree works and planned copse clearance has been completed by the Downs team and specialised contractors. A programme of stump removal is ongoing. The planned work to restore the viewpoint at Observatory Hill has been completed resulting in a dramatic improvement to this iconic view. I have received many positive public comments supporting the project.

The clearance of scrub from the Hill Fort which started early in the New Year has been completed on target. This is part of a phased programme with this being the clearance of the first two compartments. Once again the work has received many positive comments. Two new information panels will be installed once the required consents from English Heritage have been acquired. The next stage of the programme will continue again next winter. The six monthly health check of the Downs tree stock has been completed. On advice from the Tree Officer a programme of works to remove some dangerous trees and reduce others has been completed.

The Downs team have repaired and extended the 'dead fences' along Circular Road.

The work to continue scrub clearance at Zoo Bank delayed by bad weather at the end of last year was completed in February, well ahead of the bird nesting season.

Downs staff will assist with disposal of debris and litter collected by volunteers

from the banks of the Avon below the Suspension bridge.

As requested at the last meeting a summary of the rock inspections carried out by Parsons Brinckerhoff in 2011 has been circulated to Committee members. A hard copy of the full report is available on request. Included in the Consultants report there are recommendations for works to the Zig Zag path. This is to be progressed and a subsequent update will be brought to Committee.

### **8. Anti Social Behaviour:**

The in-house security team continue with patrols across the Downs. Summer hours are now in force. Since the last meeting Officers and Downs staff have ticketed or removed from the Downs 25 illegally parked cars, requested 3 barbecues be extinguished, requested the removal of 1 tent, spoke to two visitors regarding kite boarding and one group using a go-cart. In addition Officers have assisted the wheel clamping company with agrieved motorists. Additional posts have been located in area's not covered by the clamping scheme, particularly along Upper Belgrave Road.

The wheel clamping scheme continues to be enforced robustly. Since our last meeting BAS Parking Services have clamped 37 illegally parked cars dealt with 8 appeals. No vehicles have been towed away.

Several motorists have contacted the Council directly to complain about the scheme, all have been responded to and referred to BAS.

I have contacted the University to once again point out the excessive wear to grass areas of the Downs near the new bus stop at Saville Road. This is caused by pedestrians wishing to access the bus stop from the Halls of Residence. This winter there has also been a problem with buses pulling in ever tighter to the grass edge and causing significant damage. I await a response from the University.

Following an agreement at the last meeting to explore the possibility of installing a designated barbecue area, legal advice has been sought to establish if a modification to the byelaw would be required and if so any financial implications. The advice is that the creation of a barbecue area could be authorised by the council under delegated powers from the Strategic Director Neighbourhoods and City Development. There are no legal cost implications. The process is underway and on completion the necessary arrangements will be made to instal slabs, bins, and signs. It is anticipated that start up costs will be less than £1000 and can be met within the existing budget. I also propose to reinstate and improve the text on the vinyl banners which have been used in the past to advise on barbecue restrictions.

### **9. Management and Resources:**

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

Works include:

Minor tree works around the Downs, maintaining spring bedding, managing the goats, grass cutting, sports pitch and dressing room maintenance, stump removal, seat repair, installation and cleaning, inspection and maintenance of play equipment, clearing litter and emptying litter and dog bins, replacing worn out dog bins and refurbishing others, cleaning signs and shelters, graffiti removal, and retaining scrub areas previously cleared.

The Probation team will be working on another project away from the Downs for the summer months, but will return in the winter to continue the repainting of the Downs dressing rooms.

The Downs is supporting a student on a work placement scheme.

FOD+AG organised a further deep litter clearance day on the 31<sup>st</sup> March. The area targeted this time was Fairyland. This initiative did generate a story on Radio Bristol after the group reported on the amount of sex litter collected on the day. The invaluable efforts of the group are much appreciated and will be crucial in our efforts to impress the Green Flag judges when they visit. I will be reconsidering how best to manage this area in the future.

## **10. Risk Assessment**

No risk assessment has been carried out.

### ***Public Sector Equality Duties***

*10a) 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.

10b) *Not Applicable.*

## **Legal and Resource Implications**

### **Legal**

*An opinion regarding a modification to the byelaw to permit the use of barbecues in a designated area has been sought*

*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**

*None*

#### **(b) Capital**

*None*

*Financial advice provided by Tony Whitlock, Principal Accountant*

### **Land**

*The land is under the control of the Downs Committee.*

### **Personnel**

*Not applicable*

**Appendices:** *Appendix 1 Work achieved as part of the Downs 150 Project*

## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985**

### **Background Papers:**

*None*



## Appendix 1

### Work achieved as part of the Downs 150 Project (HLF Funded/Downs Committee funded)

#### **Downs 150 Victorian Themed Picnic**

Despite difficult weather conditions this event was hugely successful it attracted a lot of visitors and succeeded in raising awareness about the historic importance of the Downs.

#### **Geo Physics Survey of Clifton Camp**

a geo physics survey of the whole of the Clifton Camp area was carried out with the assistance of pupils from Ashton Park School and members of FoDAG. The children were given guidance on what geophysics is and how it works and then carried out parts of the survey. The results were downloaded onto a laptop to give immediate results on site. A report was produced on the findings of the survey by Archeoscan.

#### **History Trail Leaflets and Temporary Exhibition**

Francis Greenacre produced a series of information panels for a year long exhibition at the heart of the Downs showing historical images of the changing appearance and use of the Downs together with explanatory text. Approximately 30 panels are located on the railings to the water tower and others are dotted around the Downs as close as possible to the actual viewpoint of the historical image.

Francis also produced two leaflets - one on Durdham Downs and one on Clifton Down both of which concentrate on the visual history of the Downs and include a map and images with accompanying text. These leaflets will encourage visitors to explore the full extent of the Downs. The leaflets are available through local libraries, Council offices and the Downs Tea Rooms.

#### **Oral History Project**

##### Testimony Collection

Recordings of peoples memories of the Downs and interviews with selected people. All recordings were transcribed and edited to a standard suitable for publication across a variety of media.

##### Book Publication

The production of a bound copy of the oral history transcripts. This is currently in production and should be complete by mid April 2012.

##### School Workshops

The oral histories and a time line of the history of the Downs were used to develop a Downs History Game with pupils from Christchurch Primary School and Burnbush Primary School. An understanding of the history of the Downs was developed through 4 main themes of human influence - agriculture, industry, construction and leisure. This

project helped children to recognise the importance of the oral tradition and promote respect for an older population. The children also gained a wider understanding of the value of the Downs in terms of heritage, natural environment and leisure opportunities. The children played the game both in class and on the Downs. The game is currently in production and should be available by end March / early April. A copy of the game will be distributed to all Primary School in Bristol.

#### Downs 150 Website

The website will begin by hosting oral histories and other material such as historic images. This will be added to through the life time of the project as activities take place and results are captured and posted on line. It will also include an on line version of the game and an interactive resource where people can upload or download their own content about the Downs.

#### Oral History Exhibition

There will be an exhibition of works from the Downs 150 material that has been collected as part of the oral history project. It will start on Tuesday 24th and run until Monday June 11th. It will be based in the children's section of the Central Library with the website and the book being promoted on the other desks and the website will be accessible from all the computers in the library.

#### **Interpretation Panels**

Two interpretation panels regarding Clifton Camp have been produced. One panel is about the history of the iron age camp and the other is about preserving the archaeology that remains. Due to the Scheduled Ancient Monument status of the camp English Heritage will need to give permission for the installation of the panels. Potential locations for the panels have been agreed with EH and we are currently waiting for consent from EH to install the panels. Hopefully they will be in place by the end of April 2012

#### **Writing the Downs Project**

- to be completed

#### **Further Work**

If further funding was to be made available it has been suggested that the following ideas should be followed up as part of this project.

There is a great deal of potential to add to the collection of stories on the website and in the book. Tot Foster who collated and edited the stories has a number of stories who haven't been included as the budget for this part of the project didn't allow for sufficient time to process such a wealth of stories and information.

There are about five more stories that could put up on the website. To edit, transcribe, write the paragraph about the stories, and put them up would cost £500. One is about the rare plants and the meadow areas, another is about grass maintenance and how it has changed. The others are small stories from individuals.

There are also more interviewees and stories that haven't yet been recorded. Other stories that could be followed up is about the people who do voluntary work on the Downs such as weekend litter collections. It would also be good to record some of Mandy Leivers work with groups, and do more on unorganised sports - frisbee, five a side, kites etc. To record five more recordings, process them and put them on the website would be £1000.

It has also been suggested that a photographic record of different activities on the Downs could be made. Such a project is as long as a piece of string and would be scaled to fit whatever budget was available but this would provide a valuable record from 2012 and support the audio stories well.