

BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL

DOWNS COMMITTEE

22ND APRIL 2013

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

That the Committee notes the report of the Traffic Working Group.

Summary

The significant issues in the report are:

- Enjoyment
- Access
- Working Groups
- Landscape
- Wildlife
- Management and Resources.

This report reflects the objectives of the Downs Management Plan.

1. Policy

Not Applicable

2. Consultation

a) Internal

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

Andrew Gordon Estates Management team leader
Tony Whitlock, Principal Accountant.
Becky Coffin Conservation Officer
Richard Ennion, Horticultural Service Manager.
Peter Malarby, Senior Solicitor.

b) External

Mandy Leivers, Avon Gorge and Downs Biodiversity Education Officer.
Jack Penrose FOD+AG

3. Context

a) Enjoyment:

Last month Funderworld set up as usual behind the water tower, difficulties brought about by persistent wet weather and the continuing presence of Bristol Water were overcome and the event ran relatively smoothly. Committee should be aware that local Ward Councillors received several complaints about Funderworld vehicles left on public highways over night, leading to congestion and some inconvenience. Discussions with organisers took place to improve the situation which was caused by the weather hampering vehicles accessing the site. Protocols need to be in place to avoid a similar situation in future years.

Reinstatement of the site is under way.

Seven sets of broken wooden football posts have been replaced at a cost of 7k. I am continuing to pursue the Downs League to seek external funding to replace the remaining redundant equipment. Further purchases will be required to ensure we are able to provide a full fixture programme next season.

At the end of February the BBC featured the Avon Gorge in its flagship programme 'Countryfile'. Mandy Leivers and one of the Downs Ranger team Ben Skuse featured in the programme and explained the project to manage scrub and its impact on the Gorge.

The Community pay back team continue with internal improvements to the dressing rooms. I am in discussion with the Probation Service to provide further support at the conclusion of the project with seat painting and goal post refurbishment.

In addition I have arranged for a further team to carry out regular litter picking forays in some less accessible areas of the Downs.

A group of volunteer students carried out a litter pick of the Hill Fort.

The Blue Sky team of ex offenders and Parks staff have installed a set of steps and viewing platform in the gully, this is to assist safer access for visitors viewing the goats. The project has been well received.

Materials were provided from Downs budgets.

FODAG members have also committed to an "Adopt a Hawthorn" scheme. Members carry out basic clearance work to selected specimens and clear around the bases of the trees.

The plan is to ensure that some of the more venerable trees can recover their old glory and to allow younger specimens to flourish.

It should be noted that though volunteer activity is a valuable and welcomed resource in the maintenance of the Downs, there is an impact in terms of additional resources and the time required to manage, support and co-ordinate all the various initiatives.

Last month Francis Greenacre and myself were invited to speak at a FODAG discussion evening. The chairman wrote "To have had 48 participants from a membership of 140 was, in itself, very encouraging and says a lot about the health of FODAG. The trick now will be to build upon the enthusiasm and momentum generated and turn it into projects and a bigger and more active membership"

Both talks were well received and comments ranged from "Interesting" to "Visionary"

In February I attended a meeting with Mandy Leivers and representatives of FODAG to consider ways to increase visitor diversity to the Downs.

Several initiatives were discussed on how best to deliver actions from both the Management Plans (*7.1.3a Engage with new groups to ensure involvement of people from different backgrounds*) *Downs Management Plan* and (*6.34 Engage with new groups and audiences to ensure the involvement of people from different backgrounds*) *Avon Gorge Management Plan*)

This is a work in progress and further reports and updates will be brought to this Committee.

b) Access:

Bristol Water update:

The pipeline works to install a new supply is coming to the final stages. The site agent for the contractor has remained co operative throughout the project and has provided regular progress reports. (Appendix A)

Committee should be aware that fencing will need to remain in place to permit establishment of grass seed.

Following the heavy rains at the end of last year significant washout has occurred to the footpaths in the goat enclosure. Warning signs have been posted and I have been in consultation with colleagues from the Rights of Way team.

I have received an estimate from a contractor frequently used by the Rights of Way team to repair the washed out steps (£15,000 – £18,000) and for reinstating the lower part of the path (£2,500 -£3,000) I intend to get the lower section completed first and review funding for the remainder.

I have asked Highways to investigate the problem of large puddles forming on Circular road, the overspill may be contributing to the excessive run off into the Gully.

At the end of January a significant rock fall occurred at Seawalls, just below the public toilets. It is estimated that approximately 100 tonnes has fallen into private gardens below. Initial work to remove scrub has been carried out and the area made safe. Parsons Brinckerhoff have been retained to carry out a detailed investigation and prepare a report with recommendations.

Residents of properties affected by the rock fall have been kept fully informed.

Discussions are also under way with owners of adjoining properties to establish precise ownership of the cliff face and agree liability.

Following the rock fall at Suspension Bridge Road that smashed a bench, protective fencing was installed awaiting an inspection by a rope access contractor. This has been done and several suspect rocks have been removed, however there is one area of concern that is in need of further investigation and I have asked Parsons Brinckerhoff to carry this out.

I seek the Committees view to a request from the The Bridge Master that he be granted permission to access a small section of Downs land near to the bridge. This is to provide a fenced compound for contractors retained to carry out essential bridge maintenance.

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 19 illegally parked cars.

BAS Parking Services continue to manage the clamping scheme.

Approximately half of the 'No Cycling' signs have been repainted.

Additional rocks have been installed at the edge of Upper Belgrade Road to deter parking on the Downs edge.

Enquiries through the City Councils Complaints system regarding erosion of the Downs edges have been responded to.

c) Working Groups

1 Traffic Management

The group has now concluded its study of traffic issues around the Downs and have prepared a report for Committee members to discuss.

Advice has been sought from senior Traffic Officers and Neighbourhood

Partnership traffic coordinators. Traffic Managers have attended meetings to provide valuable professional advice to the working group.

If this Committee is minded to accept the recommendations detailed in the report it will be forwarded to Traffic Managers and Neighbourhood Partnerships for consideration, consultation and inclusion in future new schemes. The traffic Report is the next item on the agenda.

2 Inappropriate anti social behaviour

At the last meeting Committee accepted the recommendations of the second working group to implement the following actions.

- Increase the frequency of litter patrols to deal with sex litter.
- Accelerate the scrub clearance programme to open up this area and to encourage more general access. The ongoing clearance of scrub is in line with the Downs Management Plan.
- That a letter from this Committee will be sent to the Chief Inspector of Police responsible for the Downs seeking his views and advice on how best to improve the ongoing management of this area.
- That ongoing monitoring of the location takes place and updates of any public complaints received by the Police are provided to this Committee.
- That representatives of the working group meet from time to time with the Police Officer responsible for the Downs.

All these actions are now complete or under way. The scrub clearance work at Fairyland will form part of the annual work plan and is in line with the Downs Management Plan. I have received one complaint about the clearance work.

I have contacted the person that lodged the original Public Forum Statement and informed him of this Committees actions.

d) Landscapes:

The programme of planned winter works to clear scrub concluded at the end of February, this is to avoid any disturbance to nesting birds. Clearance work at the Iron Age Fort, which is part of a phased programme was completed within agreed time scales. The effect of the work can now be clearly seen and I have received many positive comments. Next winter should see the project coming close to conclusion.

Scrub clearance work planned at Zoo Bank has been deferred, this was due to other work commitments and the unusually poor weather.

Clearance work has been completed at the The large copses opposite the Peregrine Viewpoint at Circular Road, and the large Copse outside Saville Manor Nursing Home.

Significant works in the Gorge to rock faces and cliff edges have been completed this winter. This was a joint enterprise between a specialist rope access contractor and the Downs Ranger team.

This is part of ongoing works in line with the Management Plan and is overseen by the Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife steering group.

At the end of January, myself, the head gardener and an Officer from the tree section carried out the six monthly tree health check. Work in several areas have been identified for action.

e) Wildlife:

Butterfly transects.

2012 proved to be a poor year nationally for Butterflies due to the persistent poor weather. In our region the overall number of transect sightings was down on 2011 by 38%. However transects carried out by FODAG were only down by 6%.

55 regional sites are monitored nationally and in terms of diversity the Gully came 9th. Despite the weather significant numbers of Small Tortoiseshells and respectable numbers of Marbled Whites and Ringlets were recorded.

Numerous sightings of foxes have been recorded in the goat compound, both species appear to co-habit without any problem.

Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project:

Following an interview process a seasonal post has been confirmed for a part time Education Officer to support Mandy Leivers and her team, and commenced in March.

The nine wildlife interpretation panels have been reprinted and installed. The Discover the Wildlife of the Avon Gorge and Downs leaflet has been redesigned, reprinted and delivered to tourist outlets in time for Easter.

Encouraging numbers of all ages attended events as part of the Wildlife project programme. Events included: winter tree identification and photography course; a wildlife Willow workshop; wild tales of the downs (story telling) Butterfly Britain talk; build a bird feeder; spring detectives family walk and as the Crow flies; meet the goat keeper day and spring plants and early bird walks

The steering group met last month and agreed a series of initiatives to take forward.

FODAG continue to support the Ranger team with the management of the goat project and ongoing litter patrols.

g) Management and Resources:

I am in the process of recruiting a new team member to the Downs team, the successful candidate will be selected from the current wider Parks workforce and is the replacement for a staff member who retired at the end of 2011. Committee should also be aware that another staff member will be retiring next month and I will be seeking a replacement for this post as well.

Through an arrangement with the Estates Manager the Downs have benefited from 2 work placements. These are unpaid volunteer positions designed to give the incumbent an opportunity to experience the work place.

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:

Planned Projects for the Spring:

- 1 Complete clearance works at Iron Age Fort.
- 2 Chipping up at various locations, including, Circular road, Portway.
- 3 Tidy up Fairyland.
- 4 Reinstatement works at Circus site, Funderworld, Zoo car park.
- 5 Reinstatement football pitches
- 6 Tree works at sector E (Clay Pit Road area)
- 7 Tree lifting.
- 8 Litter blitz Circular road (monthly)
- 9 Seat cleaning and maintenance.
- 10 Install new football sockets.
- 11 Fell dangerous tree, (New Zigzag footpath)
- 12 Start Grass cutting.
- 13 Fell dangerous Holm Oak at Zoo Bank.

This is in addition to general maintenance which includes maintaining winter bedding, managing the goats. Inspection and maintenance of play equipment, clearing litter and emptying litter and dog bins, repairing worn out dog bins and refurbishing litter bins, cleaning signs and shelters, graffiti removal, and retaining scrub areas previously cleared.

Other Options Considered

No other options considered

5. Risk Assessment:

No Risk Assessment has been carried out

6. Public Sector Equality Duties

6a) 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.

6b) Not Applicable.

7. 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.

Financial

(a) Revenue:

None

(b) Capital
None

Financial advice provided by Tony Whitlock, Principal Accountant

8. Land

The land is under the control of the Downs Committee.

9. Personnel

Not applicable

Appendices: Appendix A

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

Background Papers: None

Appendix A

Bristol Water Update from Adrian Parker. Site Agent

We have completed pipelaying right across the Downs (and the whole 10.2km scheme). We are in the process of Superchlorinating our main all the way from Horfield to Durdham Down Water Tower. The flushing of this should be completed today allowing us to take samples tomorrow and then if the results are successful we will connect this into service next week.

The section from the Water Tower down to Victoria Reservoir (across Clifton Downs) is undergoing its final pressure test. We did experience one leak on this section but we have located and repaired it. It is hoped that within a couple of weeks this will be tested successfully. Following this we can reinstate the topsoil on Clifton Downs. This will free up a lot more work for Andy Spargo's Team.

The topsoil has already been reinstated right across Durdham Downs from the Water Tower to Parry's Lane. The Topsoil remains to be reinstated on the two sections of Granny Downs and this is because it has been so wet, particularly on the section between Westbury Park and Westbury Road. We have even re-graded this section of the strip to try and get it to dry out quicker. I am hopeful that if it stays dry we may be able to look at this next week.

I met with Adrian Thorne W/C/ 18/02/13 and he was happy with the topsoil reinstatement on Durdham Downs. He intended to order the seed and then fit this in as soon as practical (probably after Funderworld demobilise). He was going to bring Andy Spargo out to have a look the following week.

The vehicular hardstanding was installed by the Water Tower prior to Funderworld's mobilisation. We have also removed three sections of fencing to allow them to set up their entrances and rollercoaster spanning the pipeline easement. I have been liaising directly with Matthew Poole for this which has worked fine. We have also now installed a stoned pedestrian crossing point across our easement opposite the bus stop/ pedestrian crossing on Westbury Road. This will stay until the easement fencing is removed.

Hopefully this gives you a fairly comprehensive update. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any other specific queries.

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Site Agent

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