

Ladies Mile Update

Draft Report by Tim Wilson, Director of Estates, Bristol Zoo Gardens, for submission to the Downs Committee on 27th January 2014

Introduction

The Downs Committee currently grants Bristol Zoo Gardens a seasonal licence for 60 days per calendar year to park vehicles on the Downs off Ladies Mile. This has been the subject of agreements going back to the 1970s, and a number of temporary planning consents since 1998.

The zoo confirms that the continued use of Ladies Mile is essential to the viability of the organisation, as it provides overflow car parking at busy times to reduce congestion in the area.

This report is designed to give an annual update.

Latest position:

- The Zoo has recently completed the necessary legal agreement for Ladies Mile which means that planning permission has been granted for the Zoo to continue to use the Ladies Mile site for overflow parking for the next three years. That permission includes a requirement to agree a Park and Ride Strategy (which is to be updated and agreed with the Council annually) and also a requirement to prepare, implement and continually update travel plans.
- The planning permission also includes a requirement to reduce the total number of days that Ladies Mile can be used in any one year to 55 in 2014, 50 in 2016 and 45 in 2017. The Zoo will ensure that it fully complies with this requirement. Indeed, parking data shows that, whilst the Zoo is able to use Ladies Mile on up to 60 days per annum, it only uses the site when absolutely necessary. This is typically between 30 and 40 days per annum. However, the potential introduction of residents parking bays in the Clifton area may lead to greater demand for visitors to park in the Zoo's overflow car park.
- Whilst discussions with Council Officers are ongoing, in order to agree the Park and Ride Strategy for 2014, the Zoo expects to agree a service which runs during the entire school summer holiday, typically its busiest time of the year and when the Ladies Mile site is used most. As such, the Zoo hopes to see an increase in the use of the park and ride service which will lead to a reduction in the number of cars that need to park on Ladies Mile.

- The Zoo runs the overflow parking site in accordance with its licence requirements. Furthermore, the Zoo manages the Ladies Mile overflow car park in accordance with a strict parking protocol that has been agreed with the Council and conditioned as part of the planning permission. That protocol outlines when and how it should be used. The Zoo employs parking attendants to deal with the arrival and parking of its visitors, typically during the morning hours. The Zoo recognises that this situation could be improved and has taken steps to make sure the attendants manage the overflow site later in the day, to ensure that the car park is not misused.
- The zoo is reviewing the way staff car parking works and how public transport can serve staff more effectively, all with a view to providing more parking for visitors. A trial was carried out over the last August Bank Holiday, when staff did not park in the Zoo car parks.
- The Zoo is also looking at the best way to manage car parking for volunteers, again to provide more spaces for visitors.
- Outside opening hours, the Zoo recognises that some criticism has been received about indiscriminate parking in the area of Ladies Mile at times when the Zoo is closed. However, the Zoo notes that it cannot be held responsible for non-Zoo visitors who choose to park illegally on the Downs. The Council is able to enforce against any such parking.
- Every year, the Zoo commissions an independent ecological assessment of the site to ensure that no unacceptable damage is occurring as a result of parking. Any mitigation proposed by the ecologist is implemented, including sensitive repair of entrance areas. Surveys have shown that no long term ecological damage occurs as a result of parking on the site.
- The Zoo charges for parking on Ladies Mile at the same rate as parking on its existing north and west car parks. The cost of parking seeks to strike a balance between maintaining visitors to the site and seeking to encourage visitors to use non car modes of travel where possible.

Background

- In 2012, The Downs Committee, as landowner, gave its support for a two year extension to the licence agreement for the Zoo car park giving a total licence period of five years. This was to bring the licence in line with the length of planning permission originally sought, whilst recognising that the City Council as Planning Authority has the ultimate power to determine whether a subsequent planning application for the overflow car park should be granted planning permission.
- Bristol Zoo is one of the city's premier visitor attractions, and plays a key role in bringing visitors to the city. Sitting within a densely populated area, neither

the zoo itself nor the surrounding highway network has the capacity to accommodate demand for parking spaces on peak visitor days.

- Bristol Zoo Gardens is the city's most popular tourist attraction with some 500,000 - 600,000 visitors per year drawn both locally and from an extensive catchment area extending into South Wales and large parts of the South West of England.
- Over many years Bristol Zoo Gardens has worked closely with Bristol City Council, to encourage travel to the Zoo by non-car means. This has met with considerable success and the Zoo continues to work with the Council to review and improve its Visitor, Staff and Corporate Visitor Travel Plans. Nevertheless, it is unsurprising given the extensive catchment for its visitors and the fact that many visitors are families with young children that the vast majority of visitors still arrive by car. On peak days (up to about 60 days per annum subject particularly to the weather) the number of visitors arriving by car means that the number of vehicles exceeds available parking spaces within the Zoo's two existing permanent car parks by a significant margin.
- Bristol Zoo has sought to deal responsibly with its car borne visitors and, since the 1970s The Downs Committee agreed that BZG could use a 1.34 hectare area of The Downs close to the Zoo for overflow car parking accessed off Ladies Mile. This arrangement has served to prevent reduced visitor numbers to the Zoo and road safety concerns from cars being driven around looking for spaces and parking stress in surrounding streets.

Tim Wilson
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