

**BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL**

**DOWNS COMMITTEE**

**January 27<sup>th</sup> 2014**

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

**Title:** Report of the Downs Ranger

**Ward:** N/A

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

**Contact Telephone Number:** 0117 9736210

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**1 That the Committee considers an application to install a second item of outdoor training equipment.**

**2. That Committee agrees a protocol for the management of trees considered a danger to the general public.**

**3 That Committee notes the Downs annual plan (appendix1)**

**Summary**

The report reflects the objectives of the Downs 5 year Management Plan and to inform members of progress since the last meeting.

**The significant issues in the report are:**

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

## **Policy**

Not applicable

## **Consultation**

### **1. Internal**

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

John Williams, Estates Manager,

Andrew Gordon, Estates Management team leader,

Mike Allan, Finance Business Partner,

Becky Coffin Conservation Officer,

Richard Ennion, Horticultural Services Manager,

Terry Hannan, Head Gardener, Blaise & Downs

### **2 External**

Mandy Leivers, Education Officer,

Jack Penrose, FODAG.

Chris Westcott Natural England

2.

## **Context**

### **a) Enjoyment:**

I have received a proposal for the installation of a second item of outdoor fitness equipment to be installed at the Downs. This would be an identical arrangement to the OTIS equipment already installed along Ladies Mile. The equipment has proved popular and is a useful addition to the range of activities available at the Downs.

The application is timely as a further item of equipment has recently been removed from the Trim Trail due to its unsafe condition.

The equipment will be installed and managed free of charge by the proposer and will be sponsored again by Simply Health.

Should the Committee be minded to accept this recommendation a suitable discreet location will be identified?

Members should be aware that three public enquiries relating to the equipment have been received, two raising concerns that the equipment is sponsored by a commercial organisation and one concerned that the equipment was not in keeping with the Downs and an unsubstantiated claim that two children had been injured as a result of falling from the equipment.

Parks Events have received an approach from Climb Bristol to hold a Festival of Climbing event in the Gorge. The area is the parcel of land off the Portway and where the currently closed toilet block is located.

The event is scheduled for July 26<sup>th</sup> 2014 and will involve opening up this area to permit the event to take place.

I support the proposed event in principle subject to the protection of the SSSI / SAC interest, Natural England's consent and a full report from the organiser at the next meeting of this Committee.

The Community Payback team continue with internal improvements to the dressing rooms and additional teams provide occasional litter patrols at various locations around the Downs.

I have had talks with the Probation Service to discuss the possibility of scrub clearance and seat maintenance.

#### **b) Access:**

The area at Parry's Lane where the Bristol Water works compound was located has been reinstated and the final fencing removed.

The in-house security team continue with patrols across the Downs, but now provide reduced winter hours coverage. Since the last meeting officers and the Ranger team have removed or ticketed 25 illegally parked cars.

A problem with parking along Ladies Mile on Saturday match days was resolved with a combination of warnings, ticketing, and temporary physical barriers.

FODAG volunteers continue across the Downs on their regular winter litter patrols and continue with valuable assistance with weekend goat monitoring.

The repairs to the dead fences along Circular Road carried out by FOD+AG volunteers continues. The simple fences constructed from local materials are designed to direct joggers away from sensitive areas.

Other FODAG members continue with the 'Adopt a Hawthorn' scheme.

Further works to clear scrub from Zoo banks was undertaken in December. This is a rolling programme to open up this educationally valuable area of the Downs.

Bristol University have instructed City Council colleagues to remove the redundant bus stop at Saville road and to reinstate the turf back to its original condition and profile.

I am in the process of increasing the capacity to secure cycles at the Downs. This will see an increased facility outside the Downs changing rooms and a new installation at Seawalls.

The phased programme to remove scrub from the Iron Age Fort at Observatory Hill continues this winter. Members should be aware that the planned programme of works may have to be curtailed this winter due to operational and weather related difficulties.

The project overall is still ahead of the original six year schedule.

### **C) Working Groups:**

There are currently three working groups considering a diverse range of Downs associated topics.

#### **1 Traffic Management Group.**

The report of the traffic group was presented to the first of the Neighbourhood Partnerships on December 2<sup>nd</sup> 2013. The report was referred to and noted at the meeting.

It was stated that the Partnership and the Downs Committee were in agreement regarding proposed schemes and that the N/P was supportive of the work being done by the Downs Committee on shared issues.

The Area Coordinator will forward the report to the other N/Ps that share a boundary with the Downs.

The working group met last week to discuss how best to further the aspirations of the Traffic Plan and will continue to monitor progress.

Regular updates will be brought to the Committee.

## **2 Rock fall Group.**

Parsons Brinckerhoff has now received the completed tender submissions for the remedial work at Seawalls.

Three companies have applied and City Council colleagues have met with Parsons Brinckerhoff for final evaluation and preparation of contract documents.

Committee members will be circulated separately the outcome of the process.

The smaller rock fall at Suspension Bridge Road will be considered separately.

## **3 Your Downs**

A small group comprising myself , Mandy Leivers and FODAG representatives have had several meetings to discuss how best to promote the Downs to a more diverse range of visitors.

This is an aspiration of the Downs Management Plan and seeks to encourage people from all backgrounds and abilities from right across the City.

A range of activities including guided walks and football coaching for youngsters are being considered.

Further updates on progress will be brought to the Committee.

## **Inappropriate Behaviour.**

In addition to the three groups above a fourth working group meets occasionally to consider how best to manage inappropriate behaviour at the Downs.

This relates to behaviour of a sexual nature and the problems associated with discarded sex litter. This has long been a concern of this Committee and various actions have been agreed in the past in an attempt to improve the situation. **There is clear evidence that this activity is still an issue.**

It may be proper at this stage for the working group to reform to consider further measures that can be adopted.

The group is made up of, the Downs Ranger, a representative from FODAG, the Master and a City Councillor.

NB. Due to annual changes to the composition of the Downs Committee there is currently no Councillor representation.

**I seek the Committees approval to reform the working group and request a volunteer City Councillor to sit on this group.**

**d) Landscapes.**

I intend this winter to open up a recently identified 'lost view'

The location is off the Promenade at its junction with Percival Road. The status of the site requires the consent of Natural England. This has been applied for and granted.

Works will be undertaken by the Downs team and it is intended to complete the work by the end of February

Veteran Ash.

At a previous meeting members agreed to the felling of the dangerous Ash tree located along Ladies Mile. This was a decision taken on grounds of safety and disregarded the City Councils tree officers recommendation to prune and protect.

The implementation of this recommendation would have cost in excess of £4500.

The Ash tree has been the subject of expert scrutiny for several years and was examined for any further deterioration every six months. In 2011 a decision to fell was taken on the grounds that the tree now posed a risk to visitors.

Because of the status of the tree a licence to fell was applied for and granted.

Concerns about legality, the ecological value of the tree, adverse weather conditions in early 2012 and the expiry of the original licence led to delays in felling the tree.

Following a Freedom of Information request to the City Council the Committee decision to disregard the tree officer's recommendation was challenged and members will have been previously circulated information intimating that this decision might be unlawful.

To permit felling a reapplication for a licence was required from Natural England, effectively to meet European legislation for the destruction of a Bat roost.

However before the new licence was issued fate intervened and the tree was blown down during high winds on December 19<sup>th</sup>.

The fact that the tree eventually succumbed to the forces of nature validates the original submission that the tree was in a dangerous condition and ably demonstrates the value of regular tree inspection.

Though it may seem fortunate that nature took its course it should be noted that this tree despite its status and ecological importance posed a potential threat to visitors and could have left this Committee and the City Council exposed to significant claims for damages and /or personal injury.

**It is recommended that an urgent legal opinion is sought to confirm that faced once again with a similar situation that this Committee, if required, has the authority to proceed with remedial action without seeking recourse to other bodies.**

The remains of the tree will now be re-evaluated to maximise its remaining potential as a haven for wildlife.

#### **e) Wildlife.**

Please refer to the Education Officers and Conservation officers' detailed report.

#### **f) Management and Resources.**

The Downs Annual Plan (appendix 1) is a snapshot of current progress against the five year Management Plan and will dictate our priorities for the coming year.

The Downs has benefited from regular volunteer work placements. This has proved to be a rewarding experience for the placement as well as a welcome addition of manpower.

The Downs team continue with the winter 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 and in line with Parks and Open Spaces grounds maintenance specification.

On-going general maintenance including, path cleaning, maintaining spring bedding, managing the goats, leaf clearing, maintaining football pitches and dressing rooms, clearing litter and emptying bins, cleaning signs, seats and shelters and removing graffiti.

Retaining areas of previously cleared scrub.

The Downs team will be carrying out reinstatement works on behalf of Bristol Zoo to worn areas of grass in the area currently used as an overspill car park.

Bristol Zoo contractors will undertake repairs to the gravel footpath that crosses Zoo Bank.

Planned winter projects include, the next stage of scrub clearance at the Iron Age Fort, scrub clearance and improved management at Zoo banks, removing a large patch of scrub from in front of the Observatory tower, opening up a recently identified 'lost view'.

## **Proposal**

N/A

## **Other Options Considered**

3. N/A

## **Risk Assessment**

4. N/A

## **Equalities Impact Assessment**

5. 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 characteristic": 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

## **Legal and Resource Implications**

### **Land**

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 the. The recommendations of this report are within the powers conferred by this statute.

### **Financial**

#### **(a) Revenue**

Financial advice provided by Mike Allen, Finance Business Partner

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

None.

#### **(c) Land**

The land is under control of the Downs Committee.

### **Personnel**

N/A

## **Appendices**

1 Downs Annual Plan

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

None.

## The Downs Annual Work Plan 2013 - 2014

Key themes.

7.1 Enjoyment

7.2 Access

7.3 Landscape

7.4 Wildlife

7.5 Antisocial behaviour

7.6 Management and Resources

The work programme will be subject to change from outside influences including pressure from site users, from the results of surveys or monitoring. the availability of finance and operational changes within the Parks Section.

The management plan is to be reviewed every 5 years, this was completed in 2011 and implemented in April 2012.

Note that many items are on-going every year and so have not been highlighted as being **objective achieved** even though the work for 2011/12 and 2012/13 was achieved.

		2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	Comment
<b>7.1</b>	<b>Enjoyment</b>				
7.1.2	Investigate how to improve the changing facility for sport with provision for all genders.		#	#	A long running partnership with the Probation Service has brought about improvement to interior décor. There has been an increase in informal sports activity with local university teams.  A Downs Committee working group to look at all aspects of improving diversity has been set up and have had considerable success in its first year. One example, regular Downs teams
7.1.3a	Increase diversity by encouraging participants from all backgrounds, levels of ability and from across the City.				
	Increase the diversity of events at the Downs.				

		2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	Comment
					<p>agreeing to provide volunteer coaching for disadvantaged groups.</p> <p>Events new to the Downs will be Increase the range of Events to encourage visitor diversity and increase income. investigated, ie a Wool Fair and Rugby World Cup Fan Park</p>
7.1.3	<p>Develop and expand the existing education project to provide an integrated interpretation and education programme that increases people's enjoyment and understanding of the natural, historical and cultural heritage of the Downs and its relationship with the city. The good working partnership with existing partners such as the Zoo will be retained and new relationships with additional partners such as English Heritage and the Museums department will be developed.</p>	#	#	#	<p>Great strides have been achieved in the development of the educational programme, particularly with the assistance of the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project Education Officer.</p> <p>Over 10,000 participants in 2013</p> <p>Strong links forged with E/H with significant projects achieved, particularly the success of the goat herd. Signs advising visitors about the goats and how to use the Gully safely have been installed. Two interpretation panels about the project were installed in 2012. Meet the goat keeper days are under-way.</p> <p>In 2013 a panel describing the history of the Bristol Dinosaur</p>

		2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	Comment
					was installed.
7.1.5	Investigate options for developing a history education programme for the Downs.		#	#	History trails and leaflets are available. Together with history walks led by volunteer groups A series of history panels associated with the celebration of 150 years of the Downs Act were installed at Stoke Road.
<b>7.2</b>	<b>Access</b>				
7.2.1	Investigate the options of how to provide electric mobility scooters for disabled people.		#	#	The Downs Ranger has investigated this objective. Suitable vehicles are available but the implementation of such a scheme will need to be linked with any future development of a Visitor facility.
7.2.2	Investigate the alternative options and implications of extending the cycling routes on existing roads and paths and the provision of cycle parking facilities at visitor attractions.		#	#	The first cycle rack has been installed at Stoke road. The intention is to install a second at Sea Walls. . Consultation with City cycling teams to be undertaken. Better integration of cycle ways will form part of the traffic working group discussions.
7.2.3	Carry out an access audit of the site to identify where improvements (if any) can be made.		# Linked	#	

		2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	Comment
			with 7.2.1		
7.2.6	Liaise with Highways Dept to provide disabled parking bays at Stoke Road cafe, Seawalls and other areas.		#	#	A working group formed 2012 will consider all aspects of traffic management and will report to committee. This will include provision for better parking for people with disabilities.
<b>7.3</b>	<b>Landscape</b>				
7.3.2	Implement a programme of scrub management .	#	#	#	This is a rolling programme agreed with the Conservation Officer to recover and retain areas of scrub
7.3.3	Remove all scrub growing within the boundary of the scheduled ancient Monument known as Clifton Down Camp , an Iron Age hill fort.		#	#	Consents for this work (E/H)applied for and granted to permit the first stage of this programme to commence in 2012. The second stage will be progressed winter 2012/13
7.3.4	Check the condition of all trees growing on the iron Age Fort annually and maintain them to reduce the risk of them ever being blown over in strong winds.	#	#	#	This is linked to above and in future years will form part of the annual tree inspection. The first inspection completed in Summer 2012
7.3.5	Review the provision and design of all 'park furniture' e.g. seats, litter bins, signage, obstacle fences etc. and produce a design guide.		#		All new seats installed follow a style previously used on the Downs. Some redundant seats removed. 8 corporately styled dual litter bins installed in 2011.
7.3.6	Create and implement a replacement programme of existing park furniture and the provision of additional			#	

		2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	Comment
	items – following 7.3.5.				
7.3.7	Identify and open up 'lost' views across the Downs and the Avon Gorge. (See map 11)		#	#	A significant piece of work completed in winter 2012 to restore 'viewpoint' at Observatory Hill. Further 'views' to be identified for clearing include an area off of the Prom and a large copse in front of the Observatory tower and the rolling programme to recover the Iron Age fort.
7.3.8	Continued inspection and proactive management of the Downs Tree Stock in line with the risk management strategy. <b>Objective achieved</b>	#		#	The trees on the Downs are inspected on a six Monthly basis, usually in June and again in January. All works required are reported to the Downs Committee.
7.3.9	Prepare a tree planting plan for the Downs to include options for replanting with existing or new species to fill gaps within existing avenue planting and / or phased felling and replanting of horse-chestnut avenues.	#	#	#	The Tree officer is currently working on this plan for presentation in 2013/14
7.3.10	Maintain a sanitation elm tree felling and removal programme where elm disease is identified in an effort to remove the residual disease base with a view to possibly reintroducing elm trees through a planting scheme later.	#	#	#	The Tree officer is currently working on this plan.
<b>7.4</b>	<b>Wildlife</b>				
7.4.4	Develop the idea of introducing grazing to the gully and other selected areas.		#	#	The plans to introduce grazing in the gully will be reported as

		2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	Comment
	<b>Objective achieved</b>				part of the Gorge Management Plan. Goats were introduced successfully in June 2011 and continue to thrive.
<b>7.5</b>	<b>Antisocial behaviour</b>				
7.5.1	Produce a plan to better manage Fairyland with the aims of encouraging greater public access and increasing ecological interest through the reduction of scrub.		#	#	This is a rolling programme to reduce scrub cover and retain areas all ready cleared. A small working group formed in 2012 will present recommendations for the improved management of this area.
7.5.2	Consider ways to control traffic speed on The Downs.				This will form part of the traffic group's recommendations to N/P's Committee voted to reject a 20mph restriction in 2013
7.5.5	Further the process of "preventing" vehicles from parking on the grass by the use of physical barriers and reinstate existing damage to turf (whilst being sensitive to ecological considerations, where appropriate).	#	#	#	Implementation of the wheel clamping scheme In 2011.  Additional posts installed on verges at Clifton Down Road and Upper Belgrave Road. (2012/13) The traffic working group will consider further physical barriers.
7.5.7	Evaluate the arguments for and against the provision of litterbins and the cost thereof. <b>Objective achieved</b>		#	#	Following a 12 month trial period the Downs Committee agreed the installation of 8 additional

		2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	Comment
					dual use dog waste/litter bins {2011} . In summer months additional temporary bins are used to meet peaks in usage.
7.5.8	provide more comprehensive cover of dog bins		#	#	Subject to approval of Downs Committee following a 12 month trial. {See above} A rolling replacement programme of poor quality bins is underway. It is intended to seek further assistance from the Dog Warden Service.
<b>7.6</b>	<b>Management and resources</b>				
7.6.1	Investigate and experiment with all options to reduce the effects of joggers eroding grassed areas and any associated 'wildlife'.	#	#	#	Maintenance and extension of areas protected by 'dead hedges' completed and is continually monitored. 2013 FOD+AG volunteers carried out renovations of fences.
7.6.2	Monitor users enjoyment of the Downs through regular surveys		#		The Downs team require specialist assistance for this piece of work.
7.6.3	Continue to monitor the playing quality of the sports pitches and ensure the quality of the playing surface.	#	#	#	All playing surfaces are subject to an annual inspection by the Downs Ranger and remedial action taken as required.
7.6.5	Review the present specification for grounds maintenance.	#	#	#	The height of cut grass has been amended to reflect the



		2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	Comment
					requirements of Estates including the Downs. Formal monitoring of the specification revised in 2012. Downs Ranger and head Gardener carry out informal monitoring. Head gardener carries out formal monitoring
7.6.7	Investigate ways to increase income through donations and sponsorship of e.g. benches and trees.	#	#	#	Bench sponsorship averages 10 a year generating 7.5k . Sponsored trees form part of the Tree Bristol scheme. Concession rates have been improved (ice cream contract 2011) and is due to be retendered 2014. Explore further opportunities to increase income for example improved refreshment provision. Surplus hay is sold to local dealers, following donations to City Farms. Additional works carried out at neighbouring locations.
7.6.9	Retain Green Flag award		#	#	Following a 'mystery shop' in Nov. 2013 G/F accreditation retained for 2013. The Downs will be subject to a full judging in 2014.
7.6.11	Audit the EMAS action plan.	#	#	#	The Downs Ranger carries out an annual audit.

		2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	Comment
7.6.12	FODAG well established and the expansion of the groups role to evolve through the life of the Plan.	#	#	#	The group make a significant contribution to the running of the Downs, including, goat management, traffic surveys, mammal and butterfly monitoring, working parties, assisting at events, litter forays and supporting the Avon Gorge Wildlife project.
7.6.18	Carry out risk assessments and maintain accessible records	#	#	#	The Downs Ranger and Head gardener review R/A's on an annual basis. Electronic and hard copies are available at the Downs depot.
7.6.19	Review the five year Management Plan	#	#		The Plan was revised in 2011 and implemented in April 2012. The Plan will run until 2017
7.6.22	Downs Committee monitor the implementation of the five year plan.	#	#	#	The Downs Ranger reports directly to Committee with an update of current activities and progress against the Plan.
7.6.23	Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project.	#	#	#	The steering group present an annual report to Committee.
7.6.24	Parks Grounds Maintenance Manager reviews the Departmental Asset Management Plan for the maintenance of buildings and structures.	#	#	#	On-going.
7.6.25	Monitor income and expenditure against annual budget.	#	#	#	The Downs Ranger meets with the Downs Business Partner.

		2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	Comment
7.6.29	Play ground checks.	#	#		The playground is monitored weekly by the play inspector and records filed centrally. Ranger team also carry out ad-hoc inspections. The Avon Gorge steering group are considering a design for a revamped facility for installation in 2013/14 In 2013 Committee agreed to a trial period for an item of outdoor fitness equipment.
7.6.34	Downs Committee reports to the Council and The Society of Merchant Venturers.	#	#	#	This is reported annually.
	<b>Additional Works Undertaken</b>				
1	Established and managed successful partnership with Community Payback				Community payback have a long term project to refurbish the Downs dressing rooms
2	Bridge Valley Road				The Downs team carry out annual scrub clearance to permit rock safety inspections.
3	Downs Events				The Downs Day linked with the Diamond Jubilee in 2012 prompted the possibility of creating an annual event. This is still being progressed
4	Working Groups	#	#	#	The Downs Ranger currently sits on several Downs committee sub groups.

		2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	Comment
5	Bristol Resilience Scheme	#	#		Bristol Water installation of major new pipeline, BCC will be responsible for final reinstatement works. Complete 2013/14
6	Staff Development			#	.The Downs team have all received annual PMDS and training shortfalls and development opportunities identified. One staff member on a 12 month secondment to gain a wider experience within the wider estates.