

BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL

DOWNS COMMITTEE

11 April 2016

Report of: Service Director, Environment and Leisure

Title: Downs Management Report

Ward: N/A

**Officer Presenting Report: Andrew Gordon,
Heritage Planning and Partnership Officer**

Contact Telephone Number: Internal 74497

RECOMMENDATION:

Members:

To note the points and recommendations made in the report.

Summary

This report reflects the objectives of the Downs 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.

1. Policy

Not Applicable

2. Consultation

a) Internal

John Williams, Area Manager North.

Andrew Gordon, Heritage Planning and Partnership Officer

Mike Allen, Business Manager
Becky Belfin, Nature Conservation Officer
Richard Ennion, Environmental Improvement Manager

b) External

Mandy Leivers, Avon Gorge and Downs Biodiversity Education Officer
Jack Penrose, FOD + AG
Chris Westcott, Natural England

3. Context

Enjoyment:

Following members agreement to the commissioning of Bristol Design to produce three welcome signs officers have ordered the signs but will ensure this comes out of next year's budget.

Access:

BCC Security Services recorded 13 incidents of anti-social behaviour from 9 January to 13 April 2016 all relating to unauthorised parking on the grass. More specifically we have received e-mails from a local resident at Downleaze reporting damage to the edge of triangle of Downs land (opposite this road) as result of both vehicle parking and a bus being rerouted along this road. In addition the resident reports regular parking of vans on the grass at this location. Highways officers have advised that as the Parking Scheme has only recently finished being installed and as a consequence the knock on effects elsewhere are still settling down. They have agreed to review the scheme in about six months' time, to see where they may need to consider making modifications or adding further measures.

Based on the incident records received so far, officers consider it is reasonable to conclude, that BCC Security Services have been so far been reasonably effective in resolving anti-social behaviour on the Downs, principally related to unauthorised parking on the grass.

Working Groups

Movement and Place Framework workshop

A workshop facilitated by Paul Bramshill was held on 21 March 2016 and attended by:

Downs Committee Members: Councillor Clare Champion-Smith, Lord Mayor, Councillor Peter Abraham, Councillor Martin Fodor, Councillor Bill Payne, Tim Ross, Merchant Venturers (MV) Master, Anthony Brown (MV), Andrew Densham (MV) and Dayrell McArthur (MV)

Officers: Andrew Gordon (Heritage Planning and Partnership Officer), Richard Goldthorpe (City Design) , Lucy Empson (City Design), Becky Belfin (Conservation Officer) Ed Plowden (Sustainable Transport Manager), Robert Grieve (Highways Officer) and Mark Spurduty (Highways Manager)

The outcomes for the day were:

Draft Vision

There is an appetite to develop utility and recreational cycling and pedestrian access on the Downs, including options to reconfigure the highways and changes to the open downs by enhancing existing facilities and creating new ones. The end result should be greater connection within City, enhanced user experience, as well as contributing to reduced car dependence.

Do nothing scenario

There was no appetite for this, because of the demand to provide for greater cycling access on the Downs and the need to improve existing paths and create new ones.

Scenario A. - Improvements to existing routes for walking and cycling (see attachment)

Everything was accepted except the bridge proposal. The idea of a bridge had previously been accepted by the DC in principle but the specifics will now need to be considered by the DC as a planning application.

Scenario B - New and enhanced routes for walking and cycling

The DC is interested in exploring the options for one way systems along Ladies Mile and Saville Road and acknowledges this will require more detailed traffic assessment. For Ladies Mile there was a request to explore the layout options more closely.

Westbury Road proposals were accepted.

Scenario C - An enhanced recreational network for walking and cycling

Seven Sisters recreational route supported with the modification that the route from the Water Tower to Westbury Road to the bus stop.

No appetite for the Julian Road - Blackboy Hill cross route but there was support to explore the cross route Upper Belgrave Road to Ivywell Road, linking to a loop past Seawalls to Circular Road and back to the cross path.

In addition there was a proposal to review a pedestrian only path parallel to Upper Belgrave Road linking the cross routes on a better surface.

Next steps

- The full DC to consider the outcomes from the workshop and to consider supporting the vision.
- Consider identifying major sources of funding and their requirements for funding.
- Production of business plan including market analysis and costing

Rock Fall Group:

The rock face stabilisation works including rock netting and bolting at Bridge Road have been completed satisfactorily.

Landscape:

Rubber matting has now been installed around the Downs playground bespoke bench. This should significantly improve visitors experience during wet conditions. Arrangements can now be made with Howell's and Clifton Downs Improvement Society to formally present the bench to the Downs Committee.

Officers have recently met with Councillor Lucas (Clifton Down ward) who has provided the following statement about the succession of compounds on the part of Clifton Down opposite Sion Hill, over the last couple of years and the visual impact this has had on this part of the Downs. The Bridge Trust response to points and questions raised are given in bold

"I would like to stress to the Downs Committee the need to consider the residents of Clifton when dealing with the Bridge and other organisations. I do appreciate the Downs Committee has a special relationship with the Bridge which is such a vital asset to Clifton, but that relationship should not come at the expense of people who live here.

My main points are:

1 We had a compound adjacent to the Clifton toll buildings all last summer for the Clifton Tower works.

2 We had a compound adjacent to the Clifton toll buildings for a chunk of this winter to accommodate rock face repairs adjacent to the public wc's, albeit these were BCC works.

*3 The hard standing and temporary post has been in situ the whole time. **The Bridge Trust had agreed to remove it and re-turf over the winter, which would have been done had it not been for the need to use it for BCC's rock stabilisation works.***

4 The Bridge only removed the heras fencing in the autumn when I asked

them to do so.

5 There was a smaller compound there the previous year if I remember correctly

6 We now have an even bigger compound adjacent to the Clifton toll buildings for the whole of this summer to accommodate works to the Leigh Woods tower.

So:-

The Compound is large, green and beige and unsightly with no surrounding hoarding. **The Trust would be happy to implement any other measures to help to disguise the compound.**

Why is the compound on this side and the works on the other when the bridge has land on the other side? **The Trust owns very little land – essentially just the site of the new visitor centre and offices/stores - and nothing large enough for a works compound to service a large works contract of the current type.**

Why is the compound bigger this year than last? **It is a little larger this year (approx. 2.5m in one direction). This is because the contract includes additional works this year – the painting of the under-deck girders – which requires additional personnel and storage.**

Why weren't both towers done simultaneously to minimise the effect on local residents? **This was partly for cash-flow reasons, partly to reduce the visual impact of the scaffolding works, and partly to avoid over-loading the contractor's resources and jeopardising the quality of the work.**

I am aware the Bridge has ambitions, which I support, to replace the Clifton toll buildings. Does this mean another year of compounds? **It is intended to undertake any toll house re-building works in the shortest possible time, for example by off-site prefabrication where possible. This will minimise disruption and shorten the duration of any necessary compound.**

I would like to see greater consideration to the residents of Clifton as to the planning of these works. Obviously the Bridge needs maintenance and we all welcome the security these works bring, but to have three successive summers staring at a compound is unreasonable. **The Bridge Trust agrees that three successive years of compounds is highly undesirable, but point out that recent years have been exceptionally busy. There has been a very intensive period of major maintenance over the last 9 years, particularly with the abutment and tower stone conservation works, and the future programme now involves lower-impact works with a much reduced requirement for contractors' facilities.**

I also consider the Downs Committee/BCC should be charging an appropriate fee for having a compound on the Down. This will help focus minds. **The Bridge Trust would be concerned if a fee was levied, as this would increase project costs. The Trust is a non-profit making charity, with the bridge toll being it's only significant source of revenue. Additional**

fees would ultimately reduce the funding available for maintenance of the bridge.

The Downs are fortunate to have a magnificent Grade I listed structure in the Bridge acting as a glorious entrance to the hub of the city. The Downs are also fortunate enough to have thousands of supportive residents some of whom live in listed buildings overlooking the Bridge. A balance must be maintained.”

As explained in previous meetings the current compound is due to be place until the end of October this year. Once the works are completed the Bridge Trust are committed to reinstating the grassland by turfing and have indicated that the need for compounds will be much reduced for several years hence.

The Bridge Master has written to Cllr Lucas explaining he has reviewed options for locating the contractor’s compound at the Leigh Woods end of the Bridge. He considers the larger layby in Bridge Road, Leigh Woods provides a very inefficient space – being long and narrow, with half of the available space being required for lorries to pull into for deliveries, only leaving space for two story cabins and not much else. The proximity to heavy traffic, cycle and pedestrian flows also creates H & S concerns. The area released by the removal of the temporary visitor centre would give extra space, but its lack of vehicle access and being disjointed from the layby also does not work. The Trust cannot release enough space in the maintenance yard for a compound, because it is an active maintenance yard, required for access for deliveries, use by other bridge contractors and the maintenance team.

Compounds have located on the Downs for many years including Christchurch Green and all have received approval from members.

BCC Planning Team consider in practice the compound can be considered to be permitted development (not requiring planning permission) under the General Permitted Development Order namely:

The provision on land of buildings, moveable structures, works, plant or machinery required temporarily in connection with and for the duration of operations being or to be carried out on, in, under or over that land or on land adjoining that land.

The compound has been given licence by BCC Property Services to run until the end of October this year.

Recommendation: Members to consider the points raised by Councillor Lucas and the Bridge Trust’s response regarding locating works compounds on Clifton Down and decide whether they wish to permit future Bridge compounds and if a charge should be made for allowing this.

Wildlife

Summary of activities of the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project education programme for January – March 2016

During the winter months the project officers spent a lot of time planning and setting up summer events such as walks for the Bristol Walking Festival, activities for the Portway Sunday events and the Bristol Festival of Nature. We also took a lot of bookings for our Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project spring and summer programme which was sent to over 2,000 people on our mailing list, over the Christmas period.

During this period, officers engaged with 291 people directly through the education programme. We ran 13 public events including two guided walks, a talk, a course and a children's half-term event. Unfortunately, they had to cancel a talk about solitary bees which had over 80 people booked on it, as the speaker was unwell. The education officer also gave six talks to community groups such as the Thornbury Stroke Support Group, Lincombe Barn Natural History Society and the University of Bristol Retirement Association. She also gave a lecture to students on a Wildlife Conservation adult education course run by the Zoo.

The schools database was updated and the spring and summer school's education programme sent to 183 contacts. As a result, there has been a steady flow of education session bookings. The projects children's holiday and family events, and the Downs' family trails have also been validated by the Children's University.

Interviews were also held for the Avon Gorge and Downs seasonal education officer (who is funded by Downs Committee). Anastasia Bristow was appointed and took up the post on the 10th March 2016.

Management and Resources:

Downs Team report

The Downs team have continued daily and weekly duties including litter and waste removal, daily Goat monitoring, football pitch marking and football pitch provision on Wednesdays and Saturdays. In the period from January to end of February it requires a significant amount of tractor time, spiking and chaining the pitches as they meet the challenge to keep the surfaces playable for two games a week. In the face of numerous significant rainfall events they have had some cancellations but have worked hard to keep these to a minimum for our customers.

The team have been successful in finishing the tree clearance works on Observatory hill fort on schedule to coincide with the beginning of the nesting

bird's season. They met with an officer from Historic England who has commended their work and has deemed it finished from their point of view. Further work will be scheduled every autumn to keep new growth in check and clear up any fallen trees.

Back in January/February the Downs team carried out its yearly works on Bridge Valley Rd. The road was closed to traffic on three consecutive Sundays to allow them to carry the cutting back of vegetation and overhanging trees, thus allowing for rock inspections to take place.

To allow for upcoming grass cutting operations to take place it is necessary to lift the canopies of a significant number of the trees on the Downs to allow for mowers to cut underneath them. The branches cut in this operation have been used by Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge (FODAG) to renovate and rebuild the dead hedges that protect the wildflower meadows from joggers.

Repair and repainting of the Downs bench stock continues throughout the Spring. Following recommendations from rock survey reports, safety information signs have been put up to warn abseilers and climbers about the loose rock hazard.

Due to a combination of factors, namely heavy rainfall events, a hollow in the road on Circular Rd and insufficiently cleared drains, some of the stone used to surface FODAG's excellent Victorian steps renovation project have been washed away. Plans are being made to rectify this problem and Downs team will assist FODAG in any way that they need.

Management Plan

Following members agreement in principle to the production of a Conservation Management Plan to replace the Downs and Avon Gorge Plans Officers have held a meeting with the South West Heritage Lottery Fund Manager. The possibility of making an HLF application, to deliver a number of major investment projects on both the Downs e.g. Movement and Place Framework preferred options and the Gorge e.g. visitor centre and café was discussed. They confirmed that a CMP is an important document for HLF when considering applications, but suggested that this can be produced and funded as part of stage 1 (developmental stage of an HLF project) HLF project if the application was approved. In making an application they would expect to see what is termed a Conservation Management Statement which sets out the features of significance for the Downs/Gorge and associated. Any HLF application will need to be considered in a strategic context by a BCC panel to be set up, to consider and prioritise applications within the Bristol Area, based on an agreed scoring system.

To ensure continuity of management on the Downs whilst external funding opportunities area explored for delivery of major investment projects on the Downs and Gorge officers consider as interim measure management plan actions need to be produced cover 24 month period.

The merits of CMP were also considered at the Movement and Place Framework workshop on 21 March. **Outcome's to be provided.**

Recommendation: Members to agree to:

- 1. the interim measure involving the production of management plan actions over 24 month period once the current Downs management plan has expired.**
- 2. the production of Conservation Statement with medium term aim of making Heritage lottery Fund application subject to the rock face liability of the gorge being resolved, an application being approved by BCC HLF panel and match funding being found.**

Finance

The Seawalls concession has started trading after signing the contract to start trading on 1 March 2016. As reported at the last meeting Parry's Lane will be retendered after the works to implement the parking restrictions have been completed to allow time ensure they are effectively create parking spaces for potential customers

Risk Assessment:

WSP Parson Brinkerhoff have completed the annual inspection of Bridge Valley Road and Downs playground rock faces and the sides of the Zig Zag path and the Black Rock Quarry risk assessment in February 2016. No significant concerns were identified.

WSP Parsons Brinkerhoff have completed a qualitative risk assessment of rock faces Black Rock Quarry (the rock faces adjacent to Sea Walls rock faces stabilised in 2015) and found the risk to the Portway, Network Rail and the public to be negligible, with significant risk in places to the adjacent land owners land. They have also recommended that catch fence on the quarry bench is inspected to ensure it is still fit for purpose i.e. it reduces the risk of a rock fall reaching the Portway.

Commercial and charity abseiling has been suspended at the Black Rock Quarry as result of evidence of an unquantified loose rock hazard. WSP Parsons Brinkerhoff have been employed to carry out qualitative risk assessment of risks of the rock faces the Portway, the public, event abseiling and climbers. Hazard warning signs have been erected to inform the public and climbers of this decision and make them aware of the hazard.

5. Public Sector Equality Duties

5a) 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.

6. 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:

(b) Capital

None

Financial advice provided by Mike Allen. Business Partner.

7. Land

The land is under the control of the Downs Committee.

8. Personnel

Not applicable

Appendices: 1& 2

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

Background Papers: None

Highway

Landscape



The purpose of this Elemental Option Summary is to support and inform discussions around the the Downs Place and Movement Framework. The Framework identifies the following three scenarios of potential change:



- A. Improvements to existing routes for walking and cycling
- B. New and enhanced routes for walking and cycling
- C. An enhanced recreational network for walking and cycling


The matrix cross-references each of the various potential highway and landscape options by scenario and with the following elemental plans:

- 1. Junctions
- 2. Stoke Road and Westbury Road
- 3. Saville Road and Parrys Lane Slip
- 4. Stoke Road and Westbury Road
- 5. Circular Road, Rockleaze, Downleaze
- 6. The Cross Paths and Durdham Trail



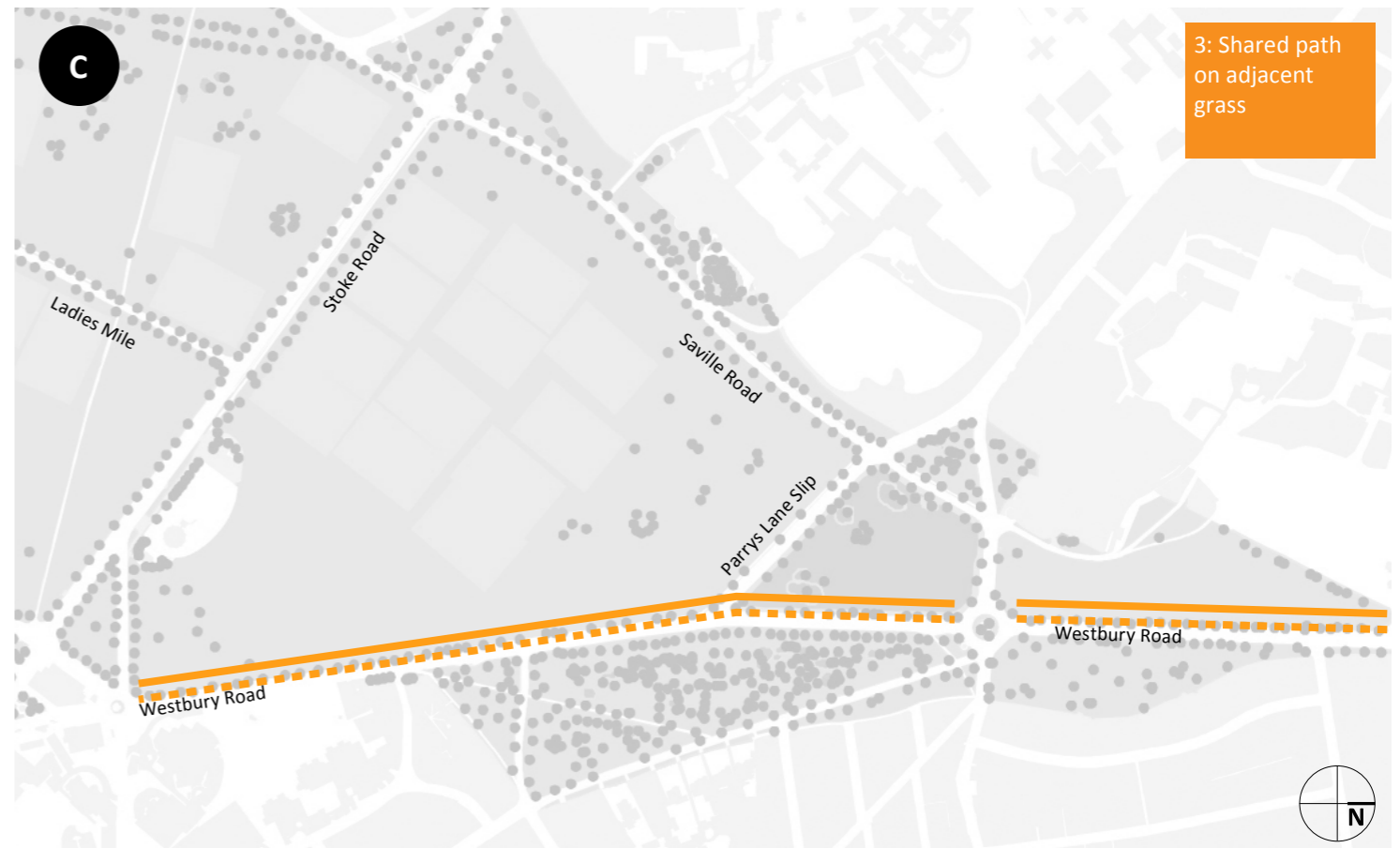
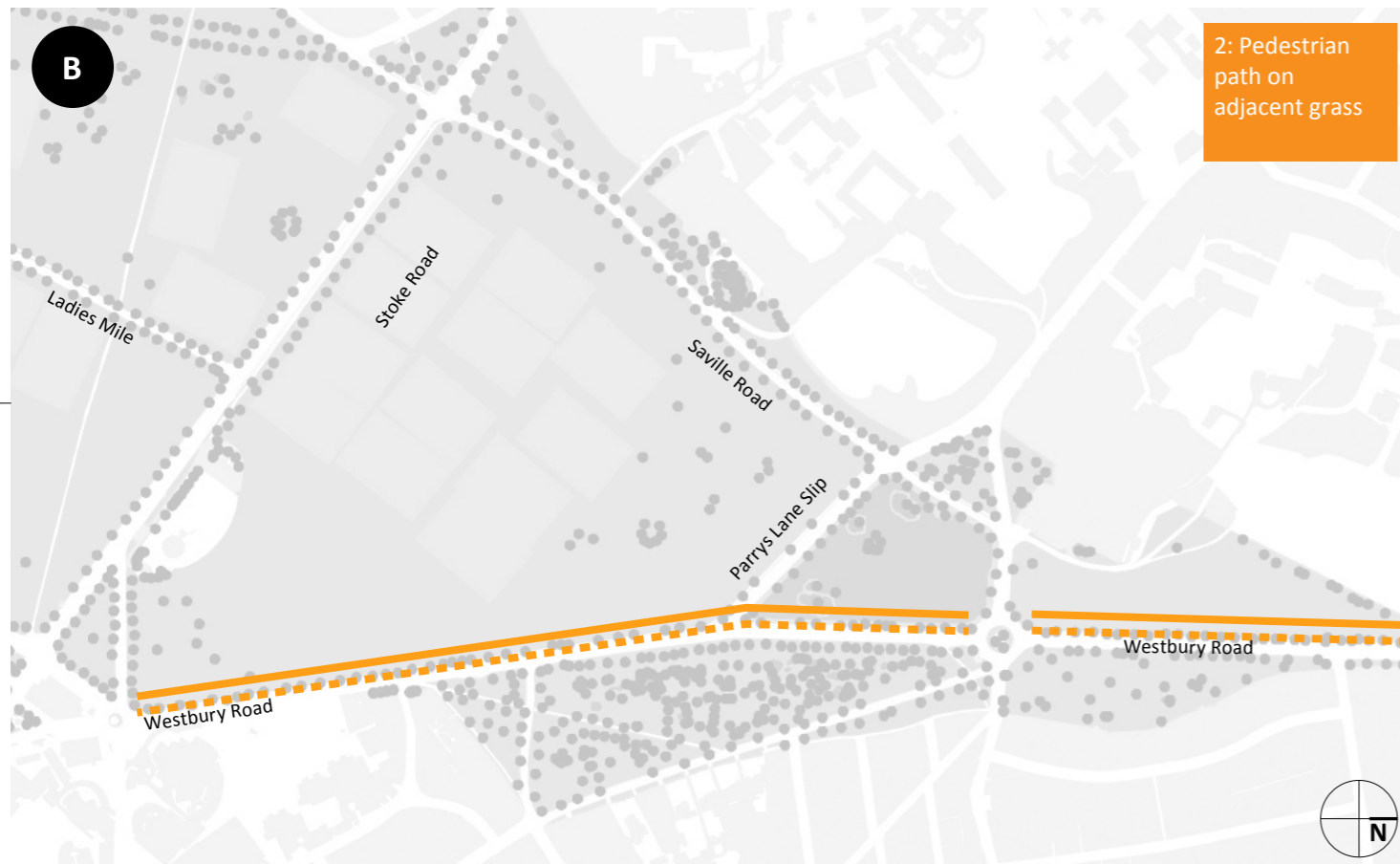
- 1: Bridge Valley Road Junction
- 2: Ladies Mile/Stoke Road

-  Improve pedestrian link
-  At grade junction improvement

 Bridge proposal for Bridge Valley Road

1. Junctions





2. Stoke Road, Westbury Road options

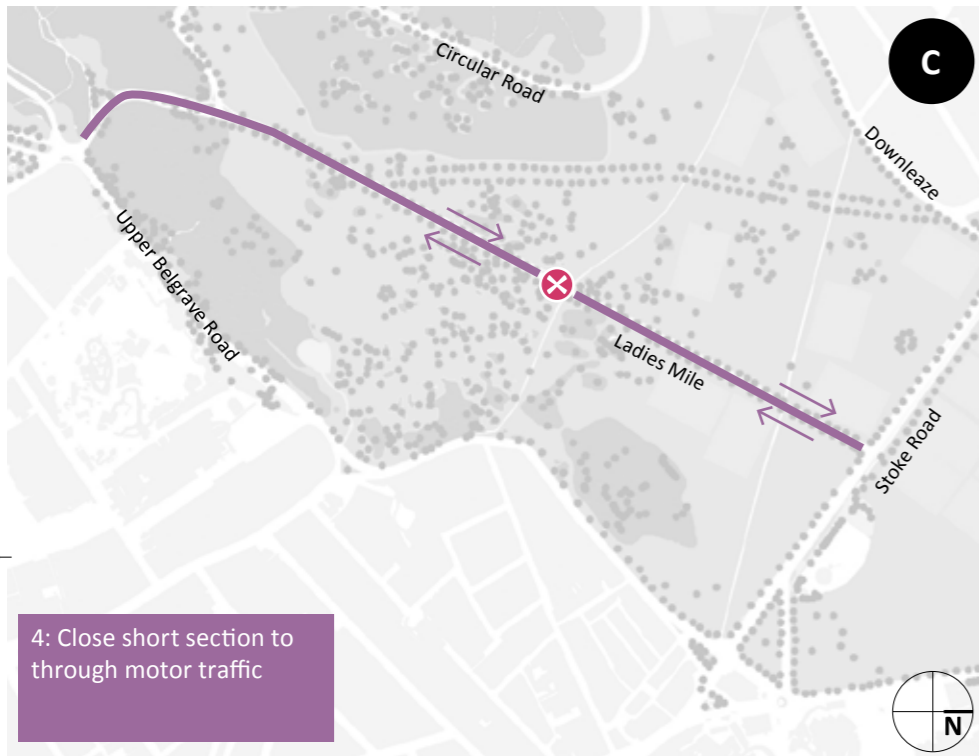
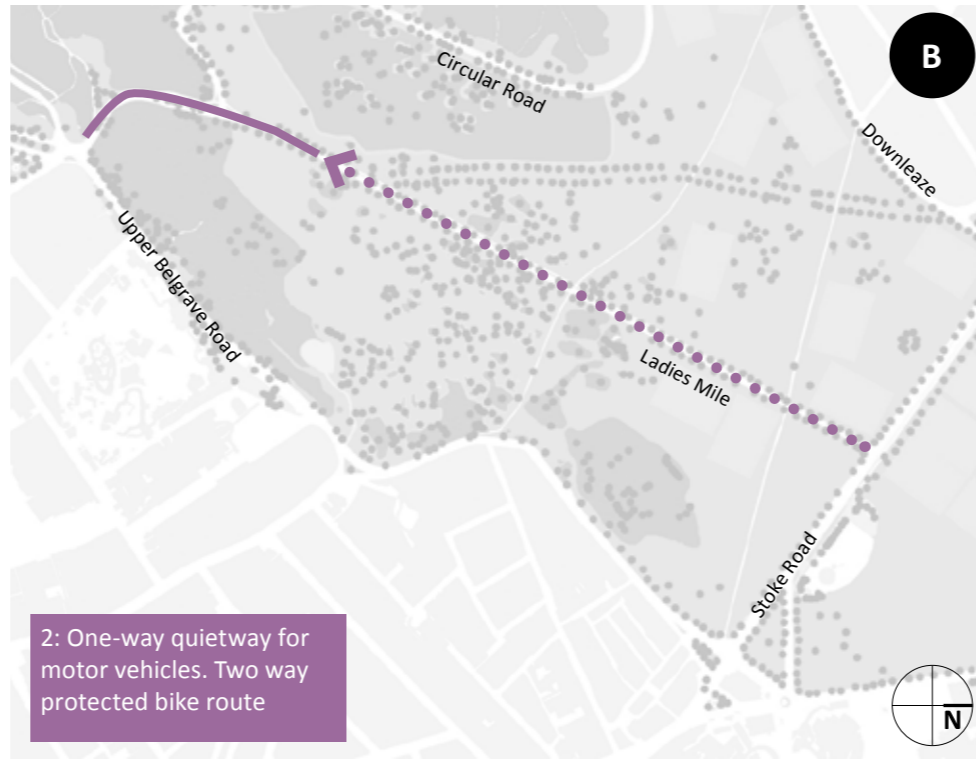


3. Saville Road, Parrys Lane Slip options

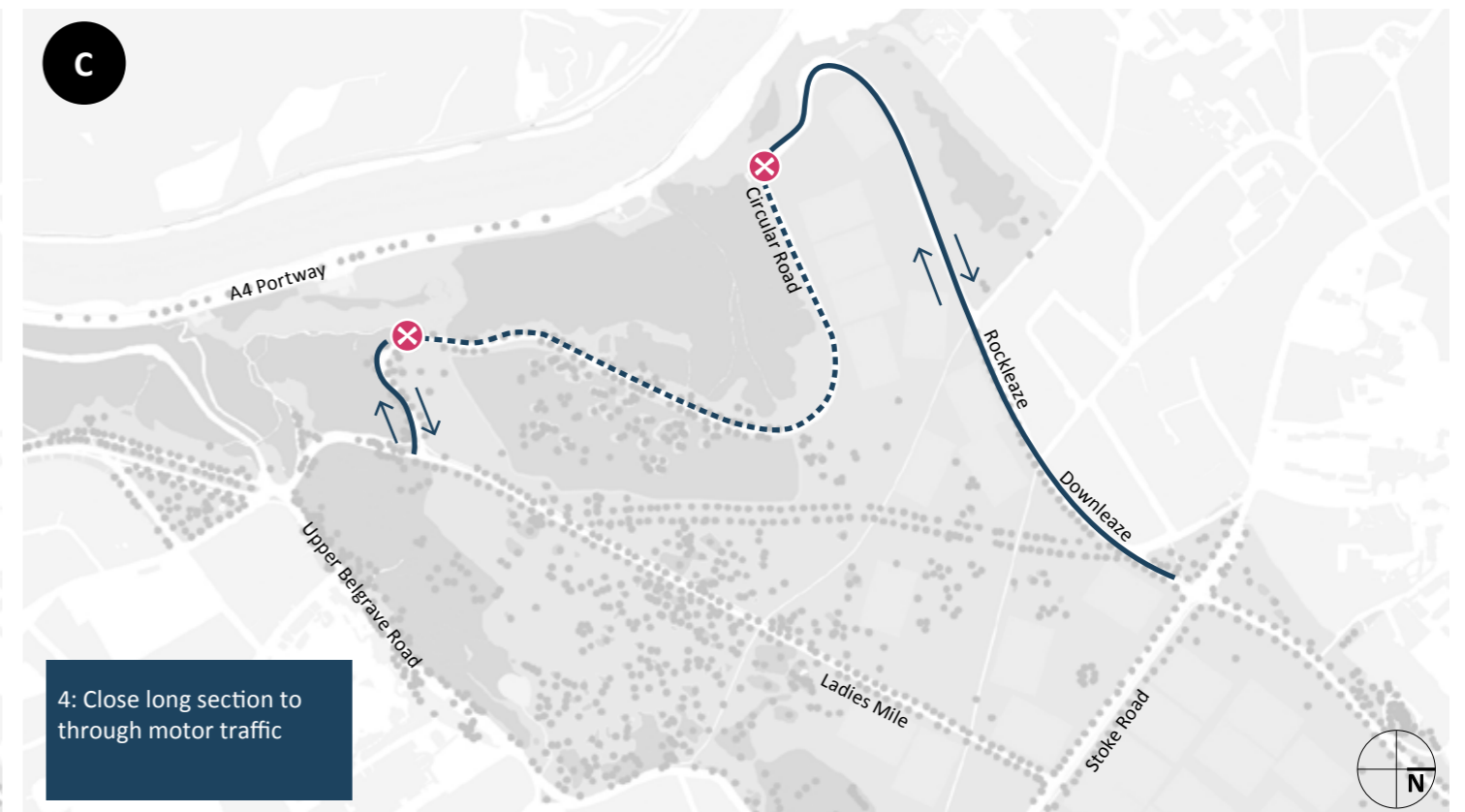
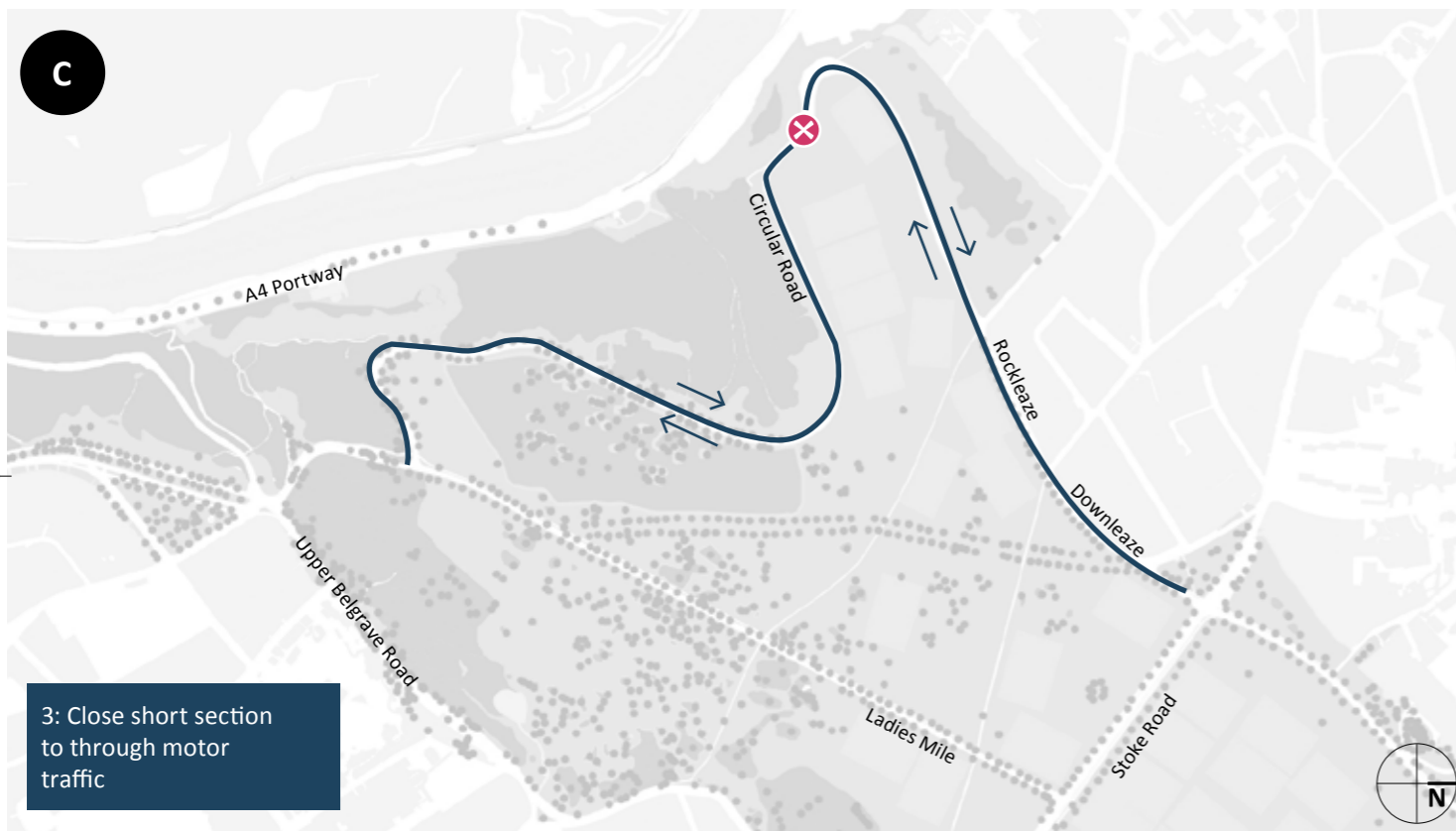
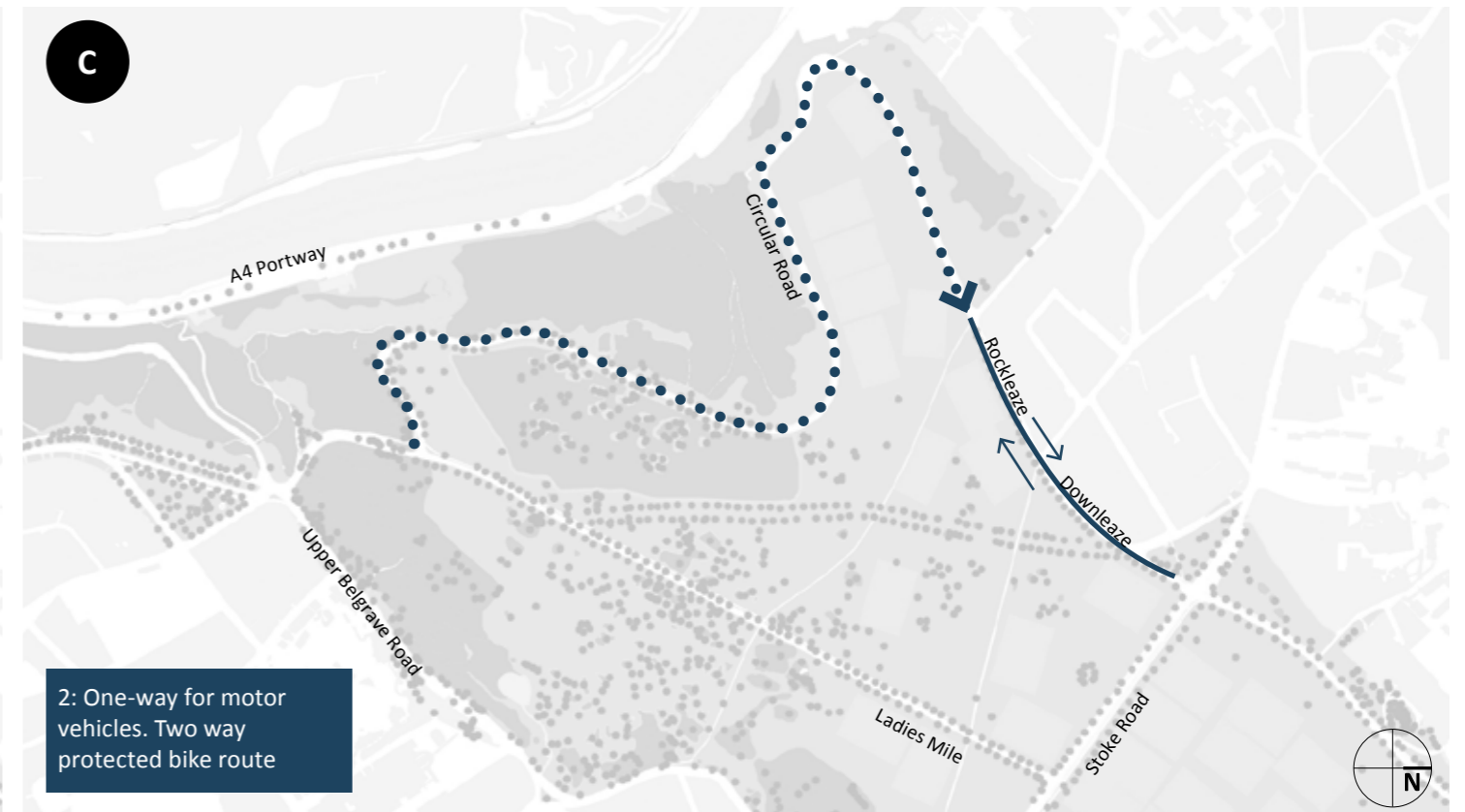
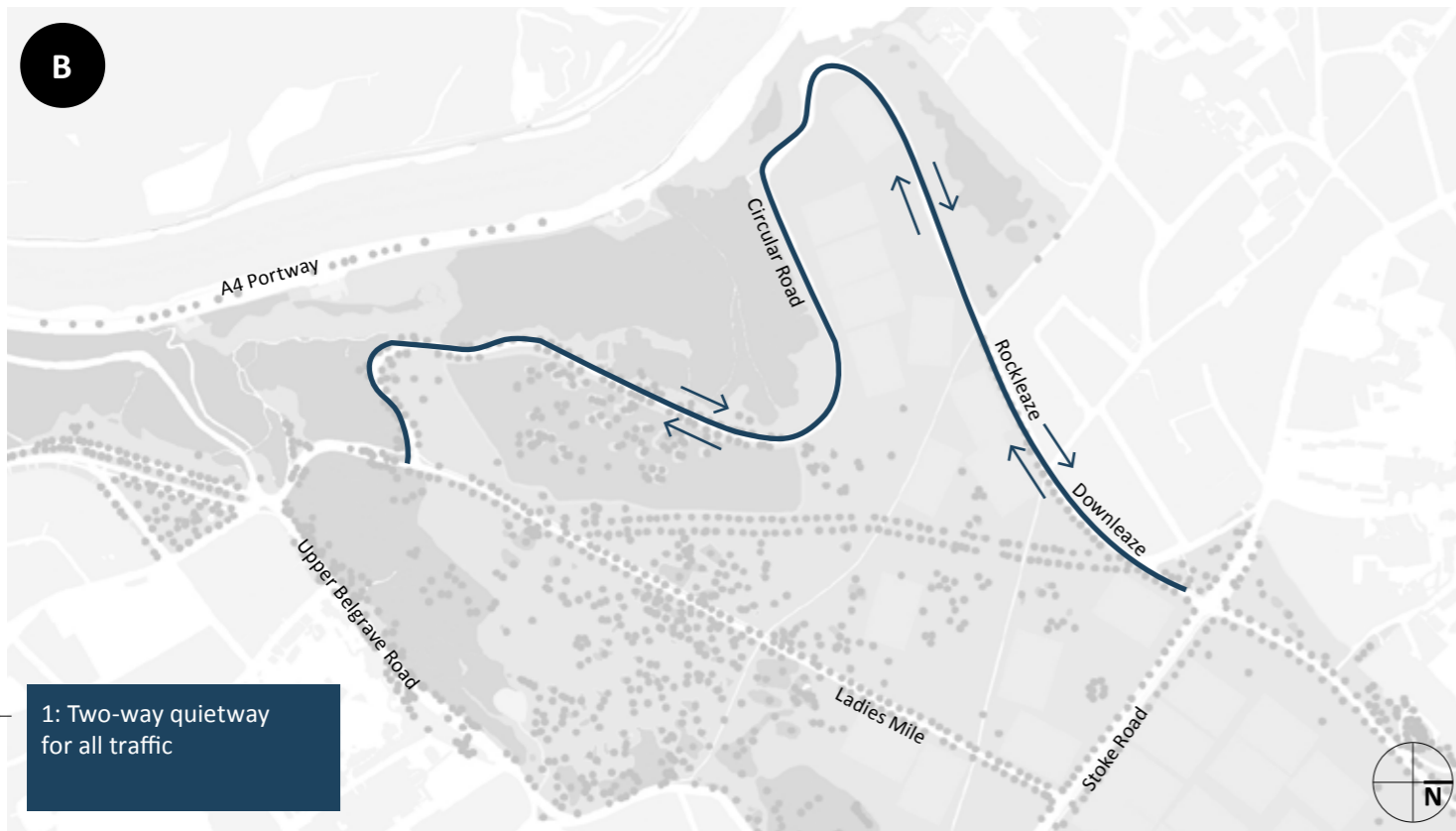
Downs Place and Movement Framework



City Design Group



4. Ladies Mile options

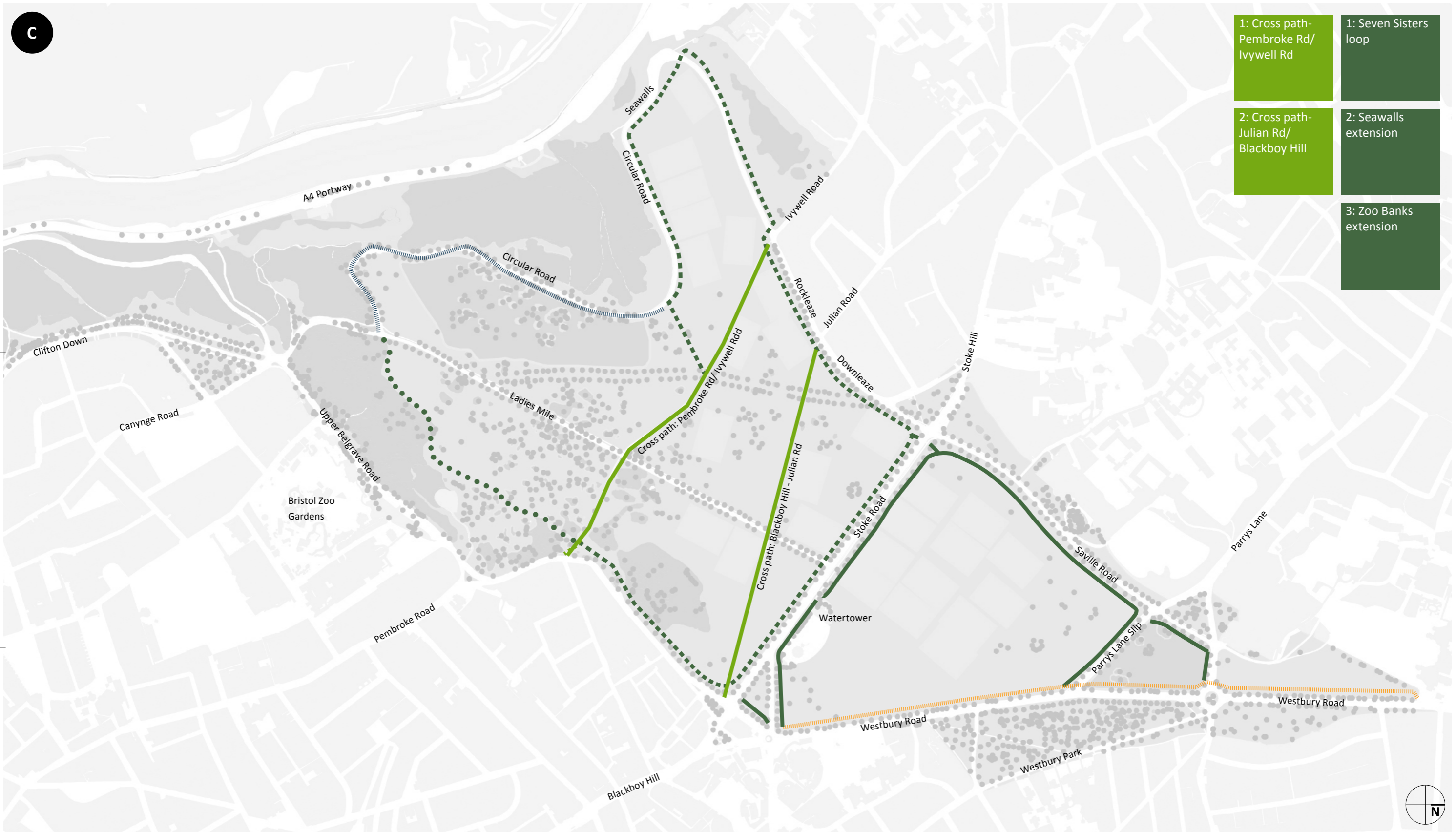


5. Circular Road, Rockleaze, Downleaze options

Downs Place and
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- Seven Sisters loop
- Seawalls extension
- Zoo Banks extension
- Circular Road link (refer to pg 6 above)
- Westbury Road link (refer to pg 3 above)

6. The Cross Paths and the Durdham Trail

Downs Place and Movement Framework



City Design Group