

**BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL**

**DOWNS COMMITTEE**

**July 4<sup>th</sup> 2011**

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

**Title:** Downs Rangers Report

**Ward:** Stoke Bishop.

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

**Contact Telephone Number:** 0117 9736210

**RECOMMENDATION**

That the Report be noted

**Summary**

The significant issues in the report are:

The 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**

Frances Horner, Senior Solicitor  
Helen Hall Conservation Officer  
John Knowlson, Play Officer,  
Richard Bevan, Joint Manager, Crematoria & Cemeteries, NH Parks & Estates  
Amy Auton Smith, Principal Solicitor  
Tony Whitlock, Principal Accountant.  
Matt Bennett, Tree Officer  
Alan Berridge, Traffic Management

### **External**

Chris J Westcott, Natural England  
Neil Sapsworth, Director of Student Residences Bristol University  
Mandy Leivers, Avon Gorge and Downs Biodiversity Education Officer  
Paul White, Avon and Somerset Police

## **Context**

### **3. Enjoyment:**

On May the 22<sup>nd</sup> the Victorian picnic to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Downs Act took place. The day was adjudged a great success. Many family groups in Victorian costume attended and had a very pleasant afternoon despite the strong winds prevailing across the Downs.

Thanks to all the participants, FODAG, Bristol Rotarians and the volunteers who gave freely of their time to make the day memorable.

The Downs League concluded another successful season in May, cumulating with a veterans match at the 150 Celebration Day. Ex Bristol City players participated and commemorative medals were presented to both teams at the end of the match.

The Education Officer has organised numerous and wide ranging walks and talks across the Downs particularly school groups.

The popular bird trail leaflet has been relaunched with a fresh new look and the inclusion of full colour illustrations.

Three further memorial benches have been installed since our last meeting.

### **Access:**

I am looking at the feasibility of reinstating the redundant cab mans stand at the junction of Observatory Hill Road and Gloucester Row, [next to the area reserved for the ice cream van] This is currently used for informal parking for local residents.

Following public enquiries regarding the damage to grass areas at the Saville Road bus stop and at the recommendation of this Committee I have contacted the Universities Director of Student Residencies and he has agreed to accept the costs of reinstatement. Work has been completed and the University invoiced.

In line with the aspirations of the Management Plan I have asked Traffic Officers to consider parking bays for the disabled at key locations. I am advised in order to introduce disabled parking bays on the highway a Traffic Regulation Order [TRO] will be required. A TRO is the legal enactment that defines the nature and extent of the restriction and creates the legal basis for enforcement. The process that must be followed to establish the TRO can take some time to complete, and involves design, and consultation, the statutory advertisement of the proposal and the resolving of any objections.

Estimated costs of undertaking the TRO, installing the road markings and traffic signs will be in the region of £5,000 depending on the number of locations and number of bays required and the Traffic Management team could undertake the implementation of the scheme.

### **Wildlife:**

Unusually warm weather in April brought good numbers of Butterflies to the Downs. Conditions in May were perfect for spectacular displays of Hawthorn blossom. The hay meadows this Spring were especially rich with wild flowers.

One of last years juvenile Peregrine Falcons was spotted in the Malvern Hills and identified by it's unique leg ring. This years brood of chicks were ringed in May. Ringing allows scientists to obtain vital conservation information about movements, populations and survival. Bristol Ornithological Club ran two weekend workshops enabling visitors to learn more about the Falcons.

Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project: Six feral Billy goats from the Great Orme in North Wales were successfully transported back to Bristol and safely installed into the Avon Gorge. Two members of the Downs team and the Conservation Officer Helen Hall travelled to the Great Orme to assist with the roundup and to oversee the transfer. The project will be closely monitored to measure the effectiveness of the goats in controlling the scrub in the Gully.

FODAG continue with Butterfly monitoring in the Gorge.

### **Landscape:**

The six monthly health check for the trees on the Downs is programmed for next week. Actions will be agreed with the Tree Officer and works programmed.

Detailed negotiations with Bristol Water and Council Officers continue. This is to ensure that the interests of the Downs are adequately represented.

Reinstatement to the Downs football pitches has been completed and the area occupied by Funderworld over seeded. Monies to cover the cost were retained from the bond.

The hay cutting of the Conservation area's will begin later this month.

The Downs Green Flag accreditation will be assessed this year by 'mystery shopper' rather than a full inspection. The outcome will be reported at the next meeting.

### **Anti Social Behaviour:**

The City Council is currently out to tender for the procurement of a city wide wheel clamping and tow away service. This will include a service to the Downs. The outcome of the tender process is to be announced shortly and until it is in place I have asked Officers from Legal to extend the current arrangement with Bristol Security Group.

Members should be aware that any change in supplier will require the amendment of all the current warning signs located around the clamping zone. The scheme continues to support efforts to keep cars off the grass and apart from occasional peaks should be deemed a success. I have received no complaints about the operation of the scheme.

During the unusually warm spell of weather in late April I authorised the siting of additional temporary litter bins at weekends and Bank Holidays. The Downs along with most of Bristol's Parks were inundated with many thousands of visitors. A combination of the fine weather, school holidays, Bank Holidays and students still in Halls saw the Downs at peak usage.

As a direct result of the warm weather there was a noticeable spike in complaints about barbecue use. The Downs Security team were flat out keeping the situation under control, but the trend still indicates an overall reduction in barbecue use and subsequent complaints.

I have started some early research into how other organisations manage barbecue use in a similar environment and a recommendation will be brought to Committee at a later date. I am advised by Legal Officers that a modification to the bye-law to permit barbecues in designated area's is feasible should the Committee wish to pursue this option.

I received complaints that visitors to Bristol Zoo were parking on the grass verge opposite the main car park in Clifton Down Road. The Zoo agreed to install wooden stakes along the Highway to prohibit cars from accessing this

area.

In the next few weeks I intend to continue with initiatives started last year to raise awareness of the bye-laws. Downs staff will accompany security personnel to distribute information leaflets to visitors. This will take place on three selected Sundays. I will also invite our local PCSO to attend on at least one of the Sundays.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> June our local Beat Manager Paul White conducted a Crime Reduction Road Show. Part of the initiative was to raise awareness of the Downs bye laws. Leaflets detailing the bye laws were handed out to visitors on the day.

The persistent parking on the footpath of a van with an advertising hoarding near the Blackboy roundabout was resolved with the help of local Police.

### **Management and Resources:**

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

Works include:

Grass cutting, summer bedding schemes, managing the goats, sports pitch reinstatement, inspection and maintenance of play equipment, clearing litter and emptying litter and dog bins, cleaning signs and shelters, graffiti removal, tree feathering, repainting the White Tree, preparations for Green Flag judging and Bristol in Bloom. Areas of recently recovered scrub land have been mown to ensure that regrowth is eliminated.

FODAG have agreed to assist with the management of the goat herd and will support the activities of the two regular goat herders.

All Downs personnel have received their annual PMDS appraisals and new projects and challenges for the coming year agreed.

The Probation team continue with the repainting of the Downs dressing rooms one day a week.

**Proposal;** Not Applicable.

### **Other Options Considered**

4.No other options considered

## **Risk Assessment**

5.No risk assessment has been carried out.

## **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.

## **Legal and Resource Implications**

### **Legal**

None directly arising from the report.

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.

(Legal advice provided by Frances Horner, Principal Solicitor.

**Financial**

**(a) Revenue**

Not applicable

**(b) Capital**

Not applicable

[Financial advice provided by Tony Whitlock, Principal Accountant]

**Land**

The land is under the control of the Downs Committee.

**Personnel**

Not applicable

**Appendices:**

None

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

**Background Papers:** None