

BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL

**DOWNS COMMITTEE
November 19th 2012**

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

- 1) That the Committee agrees in principle to the request from Oxfam South West Campaigns to stage a photo shoot on the Downs on 4th December, subject to further consultation with the Downs Ranger and the events team.**
- 2) That the report be noted.**

Summary

The significant issues in the report are:

This report reflects the objectives of the Downs Management Plan, which is a five year work plan and has six key themes.

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

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.

Amanda Grubb, Events team.

Richard Ennion, Horticultural Service Manager.

Peter Malarby, Senior Solicitor.

Richard Stransom, Parks Operations Manager.

b) External

Mandy Leivers, Avon Gorge and Downs Biodiversity Education Officer.

Jack Penrose FOD+AG

3. Context

a) Enjoyment:

As anticipated Bristol achieved well deserved success in the Entente Florale competition. The judging panel highlighted the Downs as a fine example of nature conservation and the protection of biodiversity.

The Downs also played it's part in Bristol's success in the RHS South West in Bloom Awards with a joint overall gold award in the large city category.

The popular Moscow State Circus visited the Downs in October and despite the poor weather entertained reasonable numbers. The exit from site did cause some damage to this area of the Downs and works to reinstate the sward are underway. A sum will be retained to cover the reinstatement work. The football season is underway and despite the weather there have been no cancellations yet.

The Community pay back team have returned and continue with internal improvements to the dressing rooms.

b) Access:

Bristol Water update:

Pipeline works to several area's of the Downs are now underway. The site agent has been providing regular progress reports and the project is currently on programme. Works across the Granny Downs is substantially complete. To minimise traffic disruption work at Westbury Park was deferred until works at Etloe road were completed.

The archaeological pre-excavation on Durdham Down is complete and the topsoil stripping at Clifton Down is complete and archaeological works are underway.

The closure of Upper Belgrave Road is still in place but there have been no significant traffic issues.

Following completion of the Westbury Road crossing Bristol Water will complete the section along Westbury Park before pipe laying along Durdham Down and and up to the water tower.

A request has been received from Oxfam South West Campaigns to stage a photo shoot on the Downs in support of local Oxfam activists who are campaigning against large scale land acquisitions. You can find out more about Oxfam's Land Grabs campaign here - <http://tinyurl.com/8fav6pe>

The request for the photo shoot is for December 4th, and would involve approximately twenty people. Based on the initial brief discussion with the organisers I do not have any objection to the photo shoot going ahead, subject to receiving further detailed information.

The Committee is asked for approval in principle for the photo shoot to go ahead subject to further consultation with the Downs Ranger and events team.

c) Working Groups Traffic Management

The group has now met four times, advice has been sought from senior traffic officers and additional meetings arranged with Neighbourhood Partnership Traffic co-ordinator. The group intend to present a report with recommendations to Committee in April 2013.

I have received advice from Councillor Brenda Hugill that for personal reasons she is no longer able to sit on the traffic working group. The current members of the group have confirmed that they are able to continue the process without the need for a replacement. However I seek the views of the Committee who may wish to consider that for balance within the working group the services of a replacement Councillor should be sought.

Regular updates on progress will be brought to the Committee.

Inappropriate anti social behaviour

A second small working group to discuss inappropriate anti- social behaviour has also been formed. The group which comprises The Master, Councillor Davies, myself and Martin Collins (FoD+AG) met in October to consider how best to improve the way that this area is managed. The working groups initial thoughts are that we:

- 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. Additional resources may be required to achieve this outcome and I am in discussions with colleagues from within Parks to facilitate this. The ongoing clearance of scrub is in line

with the Downs Management Plan.

Some dangerous trees in this area have already been identified and felled.

- 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. This is an action that has now been done (see appendix 1) and a response has been received (appendix 2)

d) Landscapes:

To take advantage of the Portway road closures on the first three Sundays in October, the Downs team carried out essential maintenance to the rock faces at Bridge Valley Road. This included cutting back vegetation to expose the rock for inspection together with the removal of vegetation from the crib wall. The inspections were carried out by Parsons Brinckerhoff on the final Sunday and a report will be prepared for Committee.

Tree works identified during the summer have been completed or are underway, this includes tree lifting along the Promenade and the felling of dangerous trees hanging up in Fairyland. The pollarding of a large Ash tree located near the Zoo overspill car park has been deferred due to the discovery of a bat colony.

Additional tree lifting works and copse clearance to assist mowing and for Health and Safety reasons will be completed over the coming weeks.

The Downs Ranger team have undertaken scrub clearance work and the removal of dead and leaning trees from the zig-zag path.

Welding work to repair damaged railings has been identified for action in the New Year. Parsons Brinckerhoff will also be inspecting this area as well as the rock faces near the children's play ground and the suspension bridge.

e) Wildlife:

Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project:

The Steering group met in September and again earlier this month.

Following a site visit to look at the cliff edge and the gorge a programme of vegetation clearance has been agreed.

Since our last meeting the Downs Biodiversity Education Officer has organised classes about galls growing on plants on the Downs and an autumn tree walk. As with the three other 'Meet the goat keeper' walks, the November event, (led by one of the Downs team Ben Skuse was fully booked) A talk about Ravens, an autumn silk painting course, a children's event about Owls and two fungi identification courses proved very popular.

I have provisionally agreed the locating of an interpretation panel describing the Bristol Dinosaur Project. The panel will be located close to where the dinosaur fossils were first found The project is being organised by Ed Drewitt

from the Bristol Dinosaur Project and will be HLF funded.

60 children from Westbury Park school came to the Downs for an Autumn Art session. 58 children from Parsons Street in Bedminster also came to the Downs for Mapstick and migration and Mammal detective sessions. Classes from Torwood House came to learn about the goats.

In line with the Gorge and Downs Management Plans the Education Officer carried out an audit of the interpretation materials on the Downs. Work is underway to re-design and reprint the nine wildlife panels. A travelling display that explains the importance of the Gorge and the Downs and the work of the Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project is also being updated. This work is being funded by Natural England through the Higher Level Stewardship Fund.

FODAG continue to support the Ranger team with the management of the goat project.

f) Anti Social Behaviour:

The in-house security team continue with patrols across the Downs. Reduced winter hours are now in force. Since the last meeting Officers and Downs staff have ticketed or removed from the Downs 11 illegally parked cars.

BAS Parking Services continue to manage the clamping scheme and I have responded to one claim against the penalty.

I have received several complaints about cycling on the Downs footpaths. In one instance a pedestrian was in collision with a cyclist who failed to stop. No serious injuries were sustained. I have notified the Police who have offered the services of a Community Support Officer to deter errant cyclists. I have also asked the in-house security officers to target cycling on the Downs.

In addition I am considering the repainting of the current warning signs on the tarmac.

I would also seek the Committees views on installing some extra temporary signs to be installed at each end of the footpaths that are most frequented by cyclists.

FODAG once again organised a working party for deep litter clearance in October. The work party numbered a very creditable 23 plus the very welcome attendance of the Lord Mayor.

g) Management and Resources:

The Downs team continue with the Autumn/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.

Works include:

General Maintenance:

Minor tree works around the Downs, planting and maintaining winter bedding, managing the goats, leaf collection, sports pitch marking, harrowing and spiking, dressing room cleaning, seat repair, and installation, inspection and

maintenance of play equipment, clearing litter and emptying litter and dog bins, replacing worn out dog bins and refurbishing others, cleaning signs and shelters, graffiti removal, and retaining scrub areas previously cleared. This year the Downs team took on the responsibility for grass cutting at Cote House and to support colleagues within Estates assisted with grass cutting at Blaise Estate and Kingsweston House.

Following a City Council procurement process the replacement tractor drawn mower has been purchased and will be available next year. I am in negotiation with colleagues from the wider Parks management team who are considering retaining the mower within the wider Parks fleet. Members of the Committee may now be aware of a of serious threat to the nations Ash trees. Reports of infected stock in other parts of the country have been received. The threat is from a highly destructive fungus known as *Chalara fraxinea*. At present younger trees seem to be more susceptible but we are carefully monitoring the Downs tree stock. At present there is no apparent outbreak on the Downs.

4. 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.

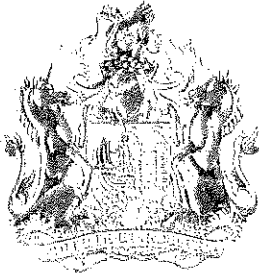
9. Personnel

Not applicable

Appendices: *Appendices 1 & 2*

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

Background Papers: *None*



**THE MANSION HOUSE
CLIFTON DOWN
BRISTOL BS8 3LJ**

2012– 2013 The Rt. Hon. THE LORD MAYOR, COUNCILLOR PETER MAIN

Chief Inspector Walker
Southmead Police Station
151 Southmead Road
BS10 5DW

2nd October 2012

Dear Chief Inspector Walker

As Chairman, I am writing on behalf of the Downs Committee which is made up of Councillors and Merchant Venturers and has a supervisory role over Clifton Downs. The Committee has received a formal letter of complaint from a member of the public about sex litter and overt sexual activities in an area of the Downs known as Fairyland. It seems that members of the public, some with children regularly see sexual acts during the daytime and the resultant inappropriate litter. This as you can imagine can spoil a day out for a whole family, and rather destroys the point of what is a natural adventure playground for children.

The Committee is aware that this has come up in the past and died down, only to become a real nuisance again. I know that the police do run occasional patrols at night, and that there has been occasional contact with you about what if anything can be done about this. We accept that it is very difficult.

We are hoping that an ongoing process of clearing scrub and thickets on the fringes of the Downs can be accelerated, but that, while making the area safer, this is not going to solve the problem entirely. We also hope that we can organise more frequent litter collections. A small working group has been formed to look specifically at this issue and will report back to the Downs Committee in due course.

To assist the working group we would be grateful for any advice you can give on how best to proceed in dealing with this problem. We would be glad to talk to you and any other partner organisations you feel may be able to contribute.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter Main" with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Cllr Peter Main (LM of Bristol)
Chair of Downs Committee

RECORDED

15 OCT 2012



Mark Runacres,
Neighbourhood Inspector for North Bristol
Southmead police station,
Southmead Road, Bristol, BS10 5DW
Email - mark.runacres@avonandsomerset.police.uk

Tessa - please
can you send a
copy to both
Kerrick for
info.
R.

The Rt. Hon. The Lord Mayor, Councillor Peter Main,
The Mansion House,
Clifton Down,
Bristol,
BS8 3LJ

October 12th 2012

Dear Lord Mayor,

Thank you for your letter to Chief Inspector Sonny Walker dated October 2nd which I am replying to on his behalf.

I am the Neighbourhood Inspector for North Bristol so have responsibility for the Neighbourhood Policing of the Downs area. I was disappointed to hear of the recent reports regarding overt sexual activity and inappropriate litter in the area and I am keen to deliver an appropriate response to address the issue.

The local Beat Manager is PC Paul White and he has a well rehearsed plan that we have implemented to good effect when such issues have been reported to us on previous occasions. This includes increasing visible police patrols and raising awareness with those who may visit the area to engage in the activity that has caused understandable concern. We achieve this through working in partnership with organisations including the Terrence Higgins Trust.

I have discussed the recent reports with PC White and he will now coordinate the necessary response that I hope will tackle the issue. I will also ask PC White to make direct contact with the Downs Committee so that we can contribute to the longer term 'problem-solving' plan.

I hope these proposals are satisfactory to you.

Yours sincerely,

Mark Runacres,
Neighbourhood Inspector.