

DISCLAIMER

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BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
DOWNS COMMITTEE
HELD ON 28TH JANUARY 2013 AT 4.30 P.M.**

- P The Rt. Hon. The Lord Mayor
Councillor Peter Main (Chair)
- P Councillor Davies)
P Councillor Goulandris)
A Councillor Hugill) City Councillors
P Councillor Janke)
P Councillor Khan)
P Councillor Morgan)
- P Peter Rilett (Master)
- A Chris Booy
P Anthony Brown)
P Francis Greenacre)
P Tom Hood) Merchant Venturers
P Andrew Densham)
P Sir James Tidmarsh)

DWN

16.1/13

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND INTRODUCTIONS

Apologies were received from Cllr Hugill, Chris Booy and Tony Whitlock.

The Committee asked the Clerk to pass on their best wishes to Cllr Hugill who was currently convalescing following an operation.

DWN

17.1/13

**MINUTES – ANNUAL MEETING OF DOWNS COMMITTEE –
19TH NOVEMBER 2012**

- RESOLVED - that the minutes of the Annual meeting
of the Downs Committee held on 19th
November 2012 be confirmed as a**

correct record and signed by the Master.

DWN

18.1/13 PUBLIC FORUM

None received.

The Chair indicated that before the start of the meeting he had agreed with Susan Carter (representing the Ramblers) that at the appropriate time on the agenda she could say a few words relating to item 4 Ladies Mile – Bristol Zoo Car Park.

DWN

19.1/13 LADIES MILE – BRISTOL ZOO CAR PARK

The Committee considered a report of Tim Wilson, Director of Estates, Bristol Zoo Gardens (agenda item no. 4) relating to the renewal of the seasonal licence for temporary parking on the Downs off Ladies Mile (60 days per calendar year).

At the invitation of the Chair, Susan Carter drew to the attention of the Committee the following issues:-

- A number of local environmental groups including the Ramblers were against the use of this area as a car park. It interfered with people's enjoyment of the Downs, had damaged the grassland, and caused traffic problems, especially when Downs parking was unavailable because of previous poor weather. If the Committee took the decision today it would be without consultation with relevant stakeholders.
- In November 2009, the Committee agreed that the Zoo could continue to use the area off Ladies Mile for temporary parking for 5 years, therefore why was the report coming back to the Committee when the licence was not due for renewal until November 2014. In view of this Susan Carter asked that the decision be deferred by the Committee until after the planning application had been determined. It would then be able to take account of the extensive consultation that would take place in relation to that application.

Tim Wilson provided the following responses:-

- Annual ecological monitoring is undertaken by the Wessex Ecological Consultancy which confirms that there is no

evidence of decline in plant diversity of the unimproved grassland in the parking area. The car-park is used only when it is necessary and not opened when it is wet weather. There is minimal damage to the area which is re-instated at the end of the Summer as part of the terms and management of the licence. As before, extensive consultation will take place with all stakeholders before submission of the application for renewal of the temporary planning consent to Bristol City Council.

- the existing planning permission to use Ladies Mile for car parking on a temporary basis ends on 20th May 2013. Under the circumstances, the Zoo wanted the support of the Downs Committee as landowner to strengthen their application to the Planning Authority which had the ultimate power to determine the outcome. The Zoo will be seeking 5 year planning consent so wanted the seasonal licence to coincide with this time frame to provide BZG with greater business certainty whilst continuing to promote a range of sustainable transport initiatives through its comprehensive Travel Plan which had been circulated to Members for information).

The following main issues were noted during the discussion that took place:-

- A number of Members on the Committee, the Downs Ranger and a member of his team verified that the damage to the area was minimal.
- Cllr Janke indicated that she was disappointed that the Committee would consider taking a decision before receiving the results of the consultation with the local amenity groups. This being the case she would be unable to support the recommendation. She was also concerned that giving permission to the Zoo would set a precedent for other local traders to park on the Downs.
- Anthony Brown explained that this issue had been discussed in considerable detail the last time it had come to the Committee in November 2009. As one of the City's premier visitor attractions, bringing in significant revenue to boost the economy in Bristol, the Committee has been keen over the years to support the Zoo, which was a well run and responsible organisation. He felt that there was a balance to be struck, the Committee would continue to closely monitor any damage to the grassland in the

parking area and the Zoo's progress towards sustainable transport. He therefore did not want the Committee to be unduly obstructive, particularly in view of the good partnership working with the Zoo on the biodiversity/educational aspect of the Downs.

- If the seasonal licence is not agreed, the surrounding streets do not have the capacity to accommodate demand for parking spaces on peak visitor days and could encourage illegal parking on the Downs. The Downs Committee would also lose the income from the rent paid (£8300) which is re-invested into the day to day management of the Downs for the benefit of all users.
- Francis Greenacre referred to the BZGs comprehensive 5 year Travel Plan and indicated that the Zoo appeared to be doing everything it could to reduce travel related carbon emissions and promote sustainable travel. A number of options had been explored fully, however the only option currently available to meet the seasonal demand was the continued use of Ladies Mile.
- The Chair pointed out that the conclusions of the 2010-13 Staff Travel Plan indicated that staff commuting in a car alone increased by 6% when the target had been a 6% decrease. He commented that staff parking was within the control of BZG and like many other employers the Zoo should be prepared to lead by example and consider abolishing the provision of staff parking, as it was not normally part of the terms and conditions of employment. In response Tim Wilson indicated that this option was being considered amongst other initiatives to improve this indicator.
- On behalf of Friends of Downs and Avon Gorge, the Chairman indicated that their position on this issue was that there should be no parking on any grassed areas of the Downs as it was not compatible with the natural environment.
- It was clarified that should the renewal be agreed by the Committee, the seasonal licence will be for 5 years until January 2018.

Upon a vote being taken it was:-

RESOLVED - that the renewal of the seasonal licence for the zoo car park for five years is agreed in principle, subject to the

**annual ecological and user monitoring
for the car park.**

(Voting: For 10, Against 1, Abstention 1)

Cllr Janke requested that her dissent be recorded.

**DWN
20.1/13**

REPORT OF THE DOWNS RANGER

The Committee considered a report of the Downs Ranger (agenda item no. 5) updating on works and developments carried out since the last meeting:-

The following main issues were noted during the discussion that took place:-

- Since the report had been written, the Downs Ranger had received a request from the BBC programme Country File to do some filming on the Downs. This was supported by the Committee.
- It was confirmed that discussions were taking place with the Probation Service about the possibility of extending the range of activities that could be carried out by offenders on Community Payback schemes. The Downs Ranger was also talking to the Prisoners' Education Trust Blue Sky which operated a similar scheme involving ex-offenders.
- Inappropriate anti social behaviour working group. The group had recommended 5 actions to improve the way that the area known as Fairyland was managed which had been discussed with the Terrence Higgins Trust and the Police and no objections had been raised. The Committee supported the 5 actions as listed in the report.
- Since the report had been written, the Downs Ranger indicated that there had been a significant rock fall from the cliff edge at the Sea Walls. Parsons Brinckerhoff have been engaged to carry out a full safety inspection of the rock face. In the meantime, the immediate area has been made safe. It was anticipated that some considerable work would need to be done.
- In response to a question relating to the replacement of redundant wooden football posts, the Downs Ranger confirmed that there were approximately 31 sets in total and a third were in need of upgrading to aluminium. The Downs Ranger indicated that he was in discussion with the Downs League Secretary to seek grant funding from the GFA and the FA to pay for future replacements. It was noted that the

Downs Football League and other users provided an income to the Downs Committee of around £50K per annum.

RESOLVED - (1) that the Committee agrees to the actions detailed in the report to improve the management of an area of the Downs known as Fairyland.

(2) that the report be noted.

**DWN
21.1/13**

**ANNUAL REVIEW OF DOWNS AND AVON GORGE
MANAGEMENT PLAN**

The Committee considered a report of the Service Director, Environment and Leisure (agenda item no. 6) relating to the annual review of the Downs and Avon Gorge Management Plan.

It was noted that the initial enquiries with UWE re improvements to the changing facility for sport with provision for both genders had unfortunately progressed no further as the student who was the sports officer had now left the University. A new contact would now have to be identified.

RESOLVED - that the Management Plan be noted.

**DWN
22.1/13**

**DELEGATED AND UPCOMING EVENTS PROPOSED ON THE
DOWNS**

The Committee considered a report of the Service Director, Communication and Marketing (agenda item no. 7) -

- (1) noting the events and filming that have taken place between committee meetings under Delegated Powers; and
- (2) noting proposed future events between committee meetings.

The following issues were noted during the discussion that took place:-

- Rainbow Run. It was confirmed that following approval from the Downs Committee the event would have to be approved by the Safety Advisory Group before it could go ahead. The

Committee were happy to support the pilot for the current year only.

- Funderworld 2013. It was noted that there was a proposal to add a petting zoo to the offer. Members of the Committee were concerned about the spread of diseases and the health and safety of children. The Committee requested that the organisers of the Royal Bath & West Show be contacted to find out what measures are put in place to supervise handwashing etc as this was a regular attraction at the show. The Committee requested a full report at the next meeting, however it was pointed out that this would be after the Funderworld event. The Committee agreed that the event could go ahead without the petting zoo and that a report come back to the Committee toward the end of the year if it was to be included in the offer for 2014. **Action: Peter Watts.**
- British Military Fitness. It was drawn to the attention of the Committee that BMF have not paid the £1000 invoice raised in September for the use of the Downs for 'bootcamps'. The legal position regarding enforcement was currently 'a grey area' and the council's solicitors were looking in to the matter. The administration for personal training licences was shortly transferring from the Events Team to Park Estates and Sports. It was suggested that the legal department be asked to check trading within the Downs Act 1861. **Action Richard Bevan.** It was also suggested that officers speak to BANES council as it was understood that Victoria Park was also used by BMF and possibly other councils were experiencing the same problem – so it might be possible to join forces to resolve the issue. **Action: Peter Watts**

- RESOLVED -**
- (1) **that the events and filming activity that has taken place on the Downs under delegated powers be noted; and**
 - (2) **that the proposed future events to take place on the Downs between Committee meetings be noted.**
 - (3) **that the Committee approves the Rainbow Run pilot event for 2013.**
 - (4) **that the Committee approves the Funderworld Event 2013, without**

the inclusion of a petting zoo. A further more detailed report to be submitted towards the end of the year if it was to be included in the offer for 2014.

**DWN
23.1/13**

AVON GORGE AND DOWNS WILDLIFE PROJECT ANNUAL REVIEW

The Committee considered a report from Andrew Gordon, Estates Management Team Leader (agenda item no. 8) which provided an update on the Avon Gorge and the Downs Wildlife Project. The report of the activities of the Avon Gorge and Downs Seasonal Education Officer during 2012 was also appended to the report.

The Committee was very impressed with the progress and achievements of the AGDWP and congratulated all concerned.

RESOLVED - that the report be noted.

**DWN
24.1/13**

FINANCE REPORT 2012/13

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Corporate Services (agenda item no. 9) which informed Members of the estimated outturn and potential use of the reserves for 2012/13.

It was noted that there was currently a projected underspend of £36,554 largely resulting from unbudgeted income received from Bristol Water in connection with their installation of a new water main across the Downs and increased events income of £15,350.

The Committee considered a list of potential projects which could be funded from the surplus and had been drawn up by the Downs Ranger.

Following discussion, it was agreed that in view of the unknown costs associated with significant rock fall from the cliff edge at the Sea Walls referred to earlier in the agenda, the surplus would be used for this purpose and any balance transferred to the Reserves.

The Committee requested that the projects listed be brought back to the Committee in more detail (breakdown of costs etc) to be funded from the Reserves, if agreed.

- RESOLVED -**
- (1) that the estimated outturn be noted and that the current underspend be used to offset the costs associated with the rock fall at Sea Walls.**
 - (2) that any underspend at the end of the financial year be transferred to Reserves.**

INFORMATION ITEMS

DWN

25.1/13 UPDATE FROM FRIENDS OF DOWNS AND AVON GORGE

A briefing note had been circulated to the Committee to update Members on the following issues:-

- Your Downs Your Day. FODAG are continuing to work with officers to seek effective ways of increasing the access opportunities for the less fortunate in Bristol society.
- Bridge over Bridge Valley Road. A concept design is well underway and will be presented at the next Downs Committee.

The update was noted.

DWN

26.1/13 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Following discussion around the timing of the meeting, it was agreed that the Clerk would contact all Members of the Committee and supporting officers to invite views on moving the start time to 4.00 pm for future meetings. **Action: Ruth Quantock**

RESOLVED - that the next meeting of the Downs Committee be held on 22nd April 2013 at City Hall [formerly known as the Council House] – time to be confirmed.

(The meeting ended at 6.10 pm)

CHAIR