

BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL

DOWNS COMMITTEE
July 1st 2013

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:

That this Committee endorses the findings of the members who attended the June briefing to retain the services of Parsons Brinckerhoff in relation to rock falls at Seawalls and Bridge Road.

Summary

The significant issues in the report are:

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

This report reflects the objectives of the Downs Management Plan.

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.
Becky Coffin Conservation Officer
Richard Ennion, Horticultural Service Manager.
Peter Malarby, Senior Solicitor.

b) External

Mandy Leivers, Avon Gorge and Downs Biodiversity Education Officer.
Jack Penrose FOD+AG

3. Context

a) Enjoyment:

Following Funderworlds departure at Easter extensive repairs to the event site are complete. It should be noted that continued use of the site for a major event of this type and unfavourable weather conditions have left some sections of the ground in poor condition. Annual events of this scale will over time see a decline in the condition of the site.

Committee may wish to consider the long term effects to this part of the Downs and balance this against the positives which bring significant income and encourages visitors from areas of the City that may otherwise not come.

In May myself, Mandy Leivers and the Lord Mayor presented prizes to schools and pupils who had been successful in a FODAG organised art and literary competition. This was part of the 150 Years of the Downs celebrations.

Two display panels celebrating the schools work were unveiled by the Lord Mayor and have been installed near the water tower.

In May the Downs hosted a very successful 'Rainbow Run'. The event supports Children's Hospice South West and 1000 runners took part. Organisers are hoping to build on this success with a repeat in 2014.

The Community pay back team continue with internal improvements to the dressing rooms. The project is ongoing and members taking the tour this afternoon will have a chance to meet with the Probation Service supervisor. Additional payback teams provide regular litter patrols at various locations around the Downs.

I am in discussion with the Probation Service to provide further support with seat painting and goal post refurbishment.

Repairs to the Seawalls:

Following a road traffic incident repairs to the masonry have been undertaken.

The concession for ice cream sales at the Downs is due for renewal in 2014, I will shortly be in discussions with the Markets Manager to renegotiate the contract.

I seek Committee approval to investigate the feasibility of replacing one of the current ice cream units with a purpose built drop in unit to provide refreshments other than just ice cream sales. The unit in question is the one located at the junction of Suspension Bridge Road and Observatory Road and would specialise in high end produce rather than burgers and bacon rolls. This could prove to be very popular particularly with the anticipated increase in visitor activity that will undoubtedly follow the installation of the new play area.

The likelihood is that this type of facility will generate a significantly higher income than a single ice cream van.

b) Access:

Bristol Water update:

The complex scheme to install a new water supply is now close to conclusion, all installations across the Downs are complete and tested.

Final reinstatement is being undertaken by in-house landscapers. Work to restore the operational compound off Parry's Lane will be the final part of the project.

BCC landscape architects raised concerns that concrete bases used to accommodate valve covers along Westbury Road were obtrusive and not in keeping with the Downs landscape. Negotiations with Bristol Water to remedy the situation continue.

Members taking the tour this afternoon will have an opportunity to discuss the project with the site agent.

The in-house security team continue with patrols across the Downs. Summer hours are now in force. Since the last meeting Officers and Downs staff have ticketed or removed from the Downs 59 illegally parked cars.

BAS Parking Services continue to manage the clamping scheme.

Barbecues: The trial BBQ area off Circular Road is proving popular and is well used. However Security and the Downs team still deal with portable barbecues in unauthorised areas whenever the weather is fine.

Members agreed to extend the trial period for a further twelve months in 2012.

An update will be brought to Committee at a subsequent meeting.

c) Working Groups

1 Traffic Management Group:

At the April meeting of this Committee members accepted a Report of the Traffic Working Group.

Further meetings of the group have been arranged to consider the next stage of the project, this will include; assessing members feedback, agreeing a comprehensive list for consultation on the recommendations contained in the report and progressing formal presentation to Traffic Officers and Neighbourhood Partnerships for implementation.

2 Rock fall group:

At the last meeting I updated Committee on a serious rock fall at Seawalls that had occurred in January, this followed a smaller rock fall incident at Suspension Bridge Road.

It was agreed to form a small time bound working group to consider how best to manage the situation.

The group is composed of myself, Chris Booy (MV) and Andrew Gordon (BCC), Phil Lloyd (BCC Bridges and Structures) has been co-opted onto the group to provide technical expertise.

Members will have been circulated the initial recommendations of the working group which included an emergency briefing of members on the 7th June. Members attending were Francis Greenacre (MV) Anthony Brown (MV) Chris Booy (MV) Sir James Tidmarsh (MV) and Andrew Densham (MV)

After considering the Parsons Brinckerhoff reports members agreed that 'to do nothing' was not an option and strongly recommends that the services of P/B are retained to:

a) Bridge Road:

Undertake an assessment of the rock face and prepare an options report and to undertake a laser scanning of the rock face at Bridge Road.

The budget estimate for this is £4500.

b) Sea Walls:

Undertake a detailed design of the rock nail/tension option at Seawalls and obtain budget estimates for this work, assess the technical aspects of the tender returns and to supervise the project.

The budget estimate for this is £9400.

Members attending the June 7th briefing were advised that there is no recourse to Insurances Services to cover the anticipated cost of this project. The current financial advice is that the sum can be met from the Downs reserve.

(Supporting briefing paper appendix a)

d) Landscape

Following a site meeting with Anthony Brown (MV) two heavily wooded areas off The Promenade have been identified as prospects for the restoration of lost views. The proposed works fall within the remit of the Management Plan. I am in discussions with BCC colleagues and Natural England to consider how best to move this forward as part of our winter programme of works. Updates will be brought to Committee.

Part funding from the Basil Brown Charitable Trust are available to assist with progressing the project.

The Flower beds at St Thomas memorial and Blackboy Hill have been replanted with a summer bedding scheme. This is in support of Bristol's Britain in Bloom bid.

Gully Footpath:

Following the heavy rains at the end of 2012 significant washout occurred to the footpaths in the goat enclosure. Members may recall that I received estimates from a contractor frequently used by the Rights of Way team to repair the washed out steps (£15,000 – £18,000) and for reinstating the lower part of the path (£2,500 -£3,000)

The work to the lower section is complete and was funded by the Rights of Way team. Work to the upper section has been deferred to investigate how best to fund this piece of work.

Members may have noticed a protective fence around a large Ash tree along Ladies Mile. The tree has been identified as in a dangerous condition and felling is recommended by BCC tree experts. The tree contained a colony of Bats and measures have been taken to exclude them from the Ash and encourage colonisation of adjoining trees. This has been overseen by Natural England

At the end of this month, myself, the head gardener and an Officer from the tree section will carry out the six monthly tree health check. This will include a visual check for any evidence of Ash die back.

e) Wildlife:

Four peregrine chicks were successfully hatched this year and continue to thrive.

The Downs Education Officer Mandy Leivers has been involved in a comprehensive programme of events which have all been well attended. (appendix b)

Towards the end of winter FODAG members were involved in clearing rubbish, bramble and nettles from around the bases of a selected Hawthorn trees. The plan is to ensure that some of the more venerable trees can recover their old glory and to allow younger specimens to flourish.

Future works will be monitored and managed by the City Councils Conservation Officer and my-self.

FODAG continue to support the Ranger team with the management of the goat project and ongoing litter patrols.

Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project:

The steering group met twice last month to agree a programme of works and discuss funding options. Concerns were raised that current levels of funding from Natural England will not be as readily available in the future. The steering group discussed various options to raise alternative sources of income, including grant applications, an increase from Committee and the possibility of a concession based in the Great Quarry lay-by.

g) 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, the annual plan and the Avon Gorge Management Plan and in line with the Parks and Open Spaces Grounds Maintenance Specification.

Recruitment:

At the end of May one of the Downs team retired. Edward Gardener leaves us after many years of loyal service.

A skilled operative has been recruited to the workforce. Steve Harvey comes to the Downs from Parks Operations (East) and his experience will prove a valuable asset.

The Downs team is currently one down and I am actively seeking to recruit to fill this post.

One of the Downs team, Ben Skuse has recently qualified as a City & Guilds Trainer/Assessor.

To ensure that the Downs football trailer meets current legislation and to address manual handling health and safety concerns I have arranged for the trailer to be upgraded and refurbished.

Ongoing general maintenance which includes:

Maintaining summer bedding, managing the goats. Inspection and maintenance of play equipment, reinstating football pitches, clearing litter and emptying litter and dog bins, grass cutting, repairing worn out dog bins and refurbishing litter bins, cleaning signs and shelters, graffiti removal, and retaining scrub areas previously cleared.

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:

£13,900 for initial works to manage rock falls at Suspension Bridge Road and Sea Wall.

(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: Appendix A & B

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

Background Papers: None

Downs Committee Working Group

Report of a meeting of the working group which took place on the 15th May 2013

Working Group:

Chris Booy (MV) Andrew Gordon (BCC) Phil Lloyd (BCC) Robert Westlake (BCC)

Background.

Committee were advised at the April meeting that critical consideration was required to deal with rock face failures at two locations in the ownership of Bristol City Council Downs Committee.

Committee agreed to form a time bound working group to consider further actions following rock falls at Seawalls Road and Bridge Road and to report back to Committee as a matter of urgency.

The working Group were tasked to study two reports prepared by structural consultants Parsons Brinckerhoff Ltd (PB) and to advise Committee on the recommendations contained within the reports.

The reports were requested following a small scale failure of the rock face at Bridge Road on the 3rd January 2013 and a further more significant failure (50 to 100 tonnes) at Seawalls Road on the 24th January 2013.

Initial works to permit detailed inspection at both locations has been completed.

To ensure the working group was best advised structural engineer Phil Lloyd (BCC) was co-opted onto the working group.

Location 1: Bridge Road, Clifton.

Proposal

The working group recommends that Parsons Brinckerhoff are retained to undertake an assessment of the rock face and prepare an options report detailing the advantages and disadvantages of the various rock fall protection systems available. In addition the working group recommends the undertaking of a laser scanning survey of the rock face.

The budget estimate for the options report is £3,150

The budget estimate for the laser scanning is £1,350

NB: The proposal does not cover detailed design of the preferred option or the preparation of a detailed specification.

Location 2:

Seawalls, Clifton Down.

Proposal

The working group recommends that Parsons Brinckerhoff are retained to:-

(a) Undertake a detailed design of the rock nail/tension mesh option as outlined in the options report and obtain budget cost estimates for the work from a specialist Geotechnical Contractor.

(b) Parsons Brinckerhoff are retained to assess technical aspects of tender returns.

(c) Parsons Brinckerhoff are retained to supervise the project on behalf of the City Council Downs Committee.

Budget ceiling for detailed design, drawings and specifications and site supervision will be £9,400.

Supporting Notes

The initial conclusion of the working group is that to do nothing is not an option.

The Seawalls rock fall area is divided into three areas, identified in the P/B report as A B and C.

A is in private ownership, (Seawalls Lodge, a private residential block) B and C is in the ownership of Bristol City Council Downs Committee.

The working group recommends that a similar design is adopted across all three areas and costs for sector A (estimated at 25%) are recovered from the owners of Seawalls Lodge. (Early indications are that this would be an acceptable arrangement but would need to be formalised within a legal framework) Negotiations are ongoing.

Following meetings with BCC Insurance Services it is confirmed that costs are not recoverable from the City Councils Insurers.

A claim for 'loss of use' of the private gardens below the rock fall site has been discontinued.

Given previous press interest the working group recommends that a statement is prepared and issued via the City Councils Press Office.

The working group recommends that partner organisations, ie Natural England, the rock climbing fraternity etc. are kept informed of progress.

The working group considered the problem of the fallen rock which is now below the rock face on land which is in private ownership. The group recommends that further investigation to determine ownership and liability should take place.

To resolve both problem areas it is likely that significant funding will be required, the working group recommends that a quorum of the Downs Committee meet ahead of the next full meeting (July 1st) to consider the financial implications.

Appendix B

The Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Education Programme:
It's been a busy five and a half months; the following is a summary of the key achievements.

Avon Gorge and Downs Seasonal Education Officer

This year's Avon Gorge and Downs Seasonal Education Officer, Joss Smithson, started in post on the 11th March and will be with us until the 31st October. (The Seasonal Education Officer post is funded by Downs Committee).

Events and educational activities

In the first five and a half months of the year **1,156** people have taken part in our activities. This breaks down as follows:

- 449 people have been on one of our walk, talks, courses, children's or family events.
- 488 school children have been taught so far. 41 further education sessions are booked to take place before the end of the school year, in July (approximately 750 children).
- 39 play scheme children have visited the Downs for a session (the majority of these sessions take place during the summer holidays).
- We took our new travelling display to the first Bristol Walking Festival and talked to 83 festival visitors about the Avon Gorge and Downs.
- On the 7th and 8th June we teamed up with FODAG and local naturalists to run 'Bristol99 days on the Downs'. (Bristol99 was a citywide programme of wildlife events celebrating the tenth anniversary of the Bristol Festival of Nature). On the 7th June, **15** lower 6th students from Clifton College carried out a wildflower survey in the main meadow. And, on the 8th over **75** people from the Family centre (deaf children), Khass (a playscheme for disabled children and their siblings) and Young Carers came to the Downs to take part in bug hunts, ladybird and butterfly walks. Tree and butterfly identification walks, lead by members of FODAG, were also attended by **30** members of the public.
- 60 Year 4 children from Westbury Park School visited the Downs to study the invertebrates. Back at school they worked with Zoo artist, Su Lees, to create beautiful minibeast batiks. They will be displayed at the Bristol Festival of Nature.
- **??** people visited our tent and took part in our activities at the Bristol Festival of Nature.

Interpretive materials

- Both the regular and large print versions of the 'Discover the Wildlife of the Avon Gorge and Downs' leaflet were restyled. 60,000 copies of the regular and 1,000 copies of the large print versions were printed. The leaflets have been widely distributed and there has been very positive feedback about their new look.
- All nine wildlife interpretation panels on the Downs were replaced with freshly printed new ones. Feedback has been excellent from the public.

- A travelling display promoting the wildlife of the Avon Gorge and Downs, and the work of the Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project, was produced. It has already been taken to community events such as: the Avon Invasive Weeds Forum event, the Bristol Walking Festival, the Bristol99 day on the Downs and the Bristol Festival of Nature.
- The Peregrines of the Avon Gorge leaflet was edited, refreshed in terms of its design and reprinted.

Publicity and promotion

- On the 24th February, the Avon Gorge and Downs featured on BBC One's Countryfile programme. Chris Westcott (Natural England), Ben Skuse (Bristol City Council / Goat keeper), Angus Tillotson (specialist conservation contractor) and Mandy Leivers (Avon Gorge & Downs Biodiversity Education Officer) were all interviewed. We talked about why the gorge is a special place for wildlife and our conservation work, including our goat herd. Almost seven million people watch the programme – it's the highest viewed factual programme in the UK.
- Throughout the period a range of methods have been used to promote activities on the Downs including: BBC radio interviews, press releases, articles in magazines, the production of posters and good use of the Project's Facebook page, our website and the use of other organisation's websites (such as the City Council and Visit Bristol).

Near endangered exhibition

- The special wildlife of the Avon Gorge and Downs was featured in a very successful art exhibition call 'Near Endangered'. It ran from 3rd – 12th May as part of the North Somerset Arts trail and was attended by 633 people.
- The exhibition included Bristol whitebeam metalwork sculptures, glass vessels inspired by the patterns of butterflies found on the Downs, fused glass images of the gorge and Downs, a papier mache meadow scene and a painting and glasswork Bristol onions. Each piece was supported by a factfile explaining the conservation story behind the artwork.
- The exhibition was the brainchild of the graphic designer who produces the Downs' nature trail leaflet. She got together with a four other artists to create artwork inspired by conservation projects that the Zoo supports, including the Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project.

Widening the audience

- A small group consisting of the Downs Ranger, the Avon Gorge & Downs Biodiversity Education Officer and four members of FODAG was set up to look at how we could work together to make the Downs more inclusive. We aim to widen the range of people who visit, learn about and enjoy the site and a progressing a number of projects.