

THE DOWNS COMMITTEE

Clifton and Durdham Downs (Bristol) Act 1861

Reply to Oliver Harrison

To : Members of the
Downs Committee

E-mail oliver.harrison@bristol.gov.uk
Date Friday, 11 March 2022

The Lord Mayor and 6 City Councillors

The Rt. Hon. The Lord Mayor Councillor Steve Smith
Councillor Jos Clark Councillor Geoff Gollop
Councillor Paul Goggin Councillor Katy Grant
Councillor Philippa Hulme Councillor Paula O'Rourke

The Master and 6 Merchant Venturers

David Freed Master of the Society of Merchant Venturers
Jonathon Baker Mike Bothamley
Mark Burchfield Gillian Camm
Patrick Despard Peter Rillett

Dear Member,

You are invited to attend a meeting of the **Downs Committee** to be held at **2.00 pm on Monday, 21st March, 2022 at A Committee Room - City Hall, College Green, Bristol, BS1 5TR.**

The agenda for the meeting is set out overleaf and the supporting documents are attached.

Yours sincerely,

OH

Oliver Harrison

Democratic Services Section

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Agenda

1. Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information

2. Apologies for absence

3. Declarations of interest

To note and Declarations of Interest raised by Councillors.

4. Minutes of last meeting (Pages 4 - 10)

5. Action Tracker (Page 11)

6. Matters Arising From the Events and Finance Group (Pages 12 - 16)

7. Public Forum

To consider items of Public Forum sent to the Downs Committee. Interested parties can submit a written statement of approximately one side A4 to the Downs Committee by sending it to Democratic Services by no later than 12pm on Friday 18 March.

8. Strategy and Governance Engagement Update

A verbal update on recent strategy and governance engagement activity.

9. Downs Management Report (Page 17)

10. Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project Annual Report 2022 (Pages 18 - 24)

11. Events Report (Page 25)

12. Finance Update (Page 26)

13. Any Other Business

14. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled to be held on 27 June 2022 at Merchant's Hall.

Oliver Harrison, Democratic Services Officer

Email: oliver.harrison@bristol.gov.uk or democratic.services@bristol.gov.uk

Bristol City Council Minutes of the Downs Committee

24 January 2022 at 2.00 pm



Members Present:-

Councillors: Steve Smith (Chair), Jos Clark, Paul Goggin, Philippa Hulme, Paula O'Rourke, David Freed (Vice-Chair), Jonathon Baker and Gillian Camm

Officers in Attendance:-

Kevin Jay and Ben Skuse

1 Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information

The Lord Mayor led introductions and issued the safety information.

2 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from:

MV Mike Bothamley (MV Simon Cooper substitutes)

MV Mark Burchfield

MV Patrick Despard

MV Peter Rilett

Cllr Geoff Gollop (Cllr John Goulandris substitutes)

Cllr Katy Grant

Stefan Edwards (Events Officer)

3 Declarations of interest

None received.

4 Minutes of last meeting

RESOLVED: the minutes of the previous meeting 15 November 2021 are agreed as a correct record.



5 Action Tracker

Letters of thanks to previous members have been issued. There are two actions for the events officer who was unable to attend today's meeting. An update will be issued once he is available.

6 Matters Arising From the Events and Finance Group

A proposal for tree planting on the Downs to mark the diamond jubilee has been referred to the Downs Committee for approval. This involves planting a single oak next to the existing royal oaks near Bridge Valley Road and planting a circle of trees off Ladies' Mile. The cost estimate is around £1500, which is likely to be covered by donors but will be referred to committee if financing is required. It is also subject to archaeological survey.

RESOLVED: proposal is AGREED in principle subject to financing and archaeology report.

7 Public Forum

The following public forum statements were NOTED:

01. Andrew Lynch (appearing in person)
02. Susan Carter, Downs for People (appearing in person)
03. Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge
04. Councillor Christine Townsend (appearing in person)

In response to these public statements, the Master of the Society of Merchant Venturers made the following statement:

"A number of points have been raised by Downs for People and Cllr Christine Townsend as reported in the press on Friday and I would like to respond.

First, they say that the Society of Merchant Venturers should give Clifton Down to the city with a dowry to cover its future maintenance. Well, the fact is that the Merchants, under the terms of the Downs Act 1861, committed Clifton Down (which they owned) irrevocably to be kept as open space for the benefit of the people of Bristol – at a time when the others were making a fortune out of developing houses all around it. In fact, they bought the land specifically to stop that from happening and have sought throughout the history of the Downs to protect it. As a result of that commitment, any income derived from any activity on Clifton Down has always gone to the Downs Committee.

The Merchants put a great deal of time and effort into the Downs, care about it deeply and gain absolutely no benefit from their involvement. There is a very positive collaborative relationship with the Councillors on the Committee who I believe find our involvement very beneficial. The Councillors are incredibly busy with Council matters and constituency affairs so having help from people with useful skills



who are very focussed on looking after the Downs and at the same time trying to make it self-funding can surely only be a good thing.

Turning now to the recent court case. The North Carpark has been in use since 1922 and the Lady's Mile since the 1960's. Nevertheless, and despite the considerable loss of income to the Downs, it was made clear to DfP that following the relocation of the Zoo, there was no intention for continued use of these areas for parking for off Downs activities. DfP were not concerned about the future of the Zoo nor of the many visitors including people with small children and the disabled who needed to park close by. Frankly, I am at a loss as to why DfP continued with their litigation which simply drove up the costs needlessly. As a group I am puzzled why they feel that they are entitled to demand meetings and should receive preferential treatment ahead of other stakeholders - the Downs are for everyone.

It is in fact an exciting time for the Downs. As a result of the pandemic, the people of Bristol are aware of its immense benefit to the city. It was really good news that 11 different groups attended the recent public meeting, with FODAG amongst others coming forward with a number of suggestions and doing a great job with programmes on conservation, restoration and education. All the members of the Downs Committee are determined to take advantage of this positive input which is what, at the end of the day, is going to keep the Downs as a wonderful open space which we can all be proud of. I can give an absolute assurance that the Society is committed to collaborating with all interested groups who want to move forward constructively.

Finally, the Merchants have and will continue to operate on the Downs Committee in line with the Nolan Principles alongside the Councillors on the Committee."

Discussion notes:

- The Lord Mayor emphasised the value of the Society of Merchant Venturers' contribution to the Committee. They bring important skills, knowledge and connections and are not paid for their time. The committee would be more difficult to run without their help.
- On the governance review, the committee ran a stakeholder engagement event in October, which resulted in very helpful input from 11 different stakeholder groups. There has been work carried out in the meantime by task and finish groups, which has resulted in draft consultation documents that will be considered by the committee today.
- These draft documents have not been published for this committee as they will be the basis for an open public consultation. It will take some time for officers to make them ready for the public.
- The committee is aware that governance can be improved, which is why this consultation is happening. We would encourage everyone to engage positively with the consultation when it is published.
- The Downs Act 1861 imposes legal requirements on the structure and operation of the Downs Committee, which could only be removed by passing new legislation.
- This is a particular issue when it comes to membership, which results in a new Chair every year and the annual replacement of 4 committee members. The lack of continuity and corporate memory makes long term planning difficult.



- Repealing or amending the Act requires an Act of Parliament and is likely to take several years and cost up to £500,000. It was agreed that changing the act could be included as an option within the consultation, along with other governance models that were possible within the Act as it currently stands.
- It could be helpful to have an item on the next agenda in public session that outlines the governance issues presented by the act to give additional context ahead of the consultation.

After this meeting there was a closed session of the Downs Committee so members could discuss the draft documents and approach to the consultation. At the end of that session, it was RESOLVED:

1. That the draft documents be submitted to BCC officers for development into formal consultation documents.
2. That the Strategy and Governance Task and Finish group work with BCC officers on this development and once the consultation is ready, it be published as soon as possible.
3. That the responses to the consultation be referred to the Downs Committee, which may need to hold a specific meeting for this purpose.
4. That committee request BCC legal officers to produce a report outlining the governance issues caused by the Downs Act.

8 Downs Management Report

The Parks Supervisor introduced the report and highlighted the following points:

- The team is still busy with litter collection as vehicle dwellers are using bins on the Downs for waste disposal.
- Football is being played on the Downs twice weekly on Saturday and Wednesday. The amount of maintenance required is heavily weather dependent.
- During January to March 4 to 5 new benches will be installed. Every Wednesday a community payback crew helps with maintenance on the Downs including bench repair.
- FODAG have been very helpful recently with scrub clearing, using it to replace hedges on circular road to direct runners away from flower meadows. It takes a lot of effort to keep these hedges in good condition.
- There have been issues with waste transfer at the observatory, with heavy vehicles damaging the ground. BS is in regular contact with the owner and working on solutions, which he has volunteered to pay for. There is a danger of exposing tree roots, damaging the plants and creating trip hazards. There is previous permission for a drop bollard from this committee, which the observatory will instal to limit access.

Discussion notes:

- The team thanked BS, his team and FODAG for their continuing good work.
- Some members thought that the observatory was only licensed to have vehicle access to the site twice a day.



ACTION BS to discuss situation with observatory and check terms with BCC licensing.

9 Downs Education Report

The Avon Gorge & Downs Biodiversity Education Manager introduced the report and highlighted the following points:

- January would normally be the annual review for the Wildlife Project, however due to staff illness it was not possible to complete the report. This will be presented at the March committee instead.
- The Spring events programme has been finalised in electronic and hard copy. There has been lots of publicity for this and programmes have been distributed to 2,200 people so far. The events are already booking well.
- A recent session for a Higher Education group on bird ringing received very positive feedback.
- The 'Bridge to Nature' project that was postponed due to Covid will be starting up again this year. The project aims to improve the mental health of young people by increasing their contact with the natural world and is supported by Off the Record and FODAG.
- When Bristol Zoo completes its move from Clifton to the Wild Place near Cribbs Causeway, the gatehouse building will remain and is to be converted to an education hub. There is lots of planning taking place around this and the team is confident it will be an excellent base for engagement activities.
- Mandy is currently recruiting for an engagement officer, who will work from March to October. The Wildlife Project only has 2 staff but is supported by a valuable group of volunteers.

Discussion notes:

- The committee thanked Mandy and the team for their continuing high-quality engagement and education work.
- There was a discussion about the Bristol Zoo gatehouse conversion.

1 Events Report

0

In the absence of the Events Officer, this report was NOTED. Committee members were invited to email any queries.

Discussion notes:

- There is a full noise report included in the papers for the Love Saves the Day concert.
- The concert was discussed in detail at the Events & Finance Sub-Group. Several committee members have been involved in residents' engagement events so are aware of their concerns.
- The music selection at the concert was unsuitable due to the heavy base and future events will be a different genre.
- While Sea Walls is the obvious site to hold, other locations on the Downs are being investigated for suitability.



- At the October listening event, there was a discussion of other possible events that could be held. These have been captured and included in the consultation documents. One of the questions is a general principle that events should be broad to reflect the needs of diverse users.
- It should be noted that the Downs Committee does not create events of its own volition. The onus is on organisations to approach BCC officers and the committee with their proposed events.
- Covid has a huge impact on the hospitality sector, which badly affected income for the committee. Event management will be critical in future. The committee is aware there is a balancing act between events income and public use of the land.

1 Finance Update

1

The Finance Officer introduced the report and highlighted the following points:

- The report shows the forecast for this year along with the budget for 2022/23.
- The 2021/22 deficit is driven by the costs of legal action, loss of events income and additional Covid-related cleaning and maintenance.
- The budget for 2022/23 is set against the anticipated income of a full events programme. This will need close monitoring to ensure delivery.

Discussion notes:

- There was a discussion about the terms used when referring to 'legal action' versus 'judicial review'. It was clarified that a judicial review formed part of the legal action against the Downs Committee, but that it was settled out of court before a judicial determination was made, meaning the judicial review was not completed.

1 Any Other Business

2

None received.

1 Date of Next Meeting

3

The next Downs Committee meeting is on Monday 21st March 2022 at City Hall.

Meeting ended at 3.00 pm



CHAIR _____



Agenda Item 5

ACTION TRACKER – FOR DOWNS COMMITTEE 21 MARCH 2022

Date of Meeting	Action Description	Holding Action	Deadline for Completion	Action Taken
15 Nov	Upload events schedule to BCC Downs website	SE	24 Jan	Now available
24 Jan	BS to discuss waste transfer situation with observatory and check their access terms with BCC licensing	BS	21 Mar	In maintenance report

Downs Committee Notes of Events & Finance Sub-Group Meeting 12 January 2021

Members:

David Freed (Master and Chair)
MV Jonathon Baker
Councillor Jos Clark
MV Patrick Despard
Councillor Paul Goggin
Councillor Geoff Gollop
MV Peter Rilett

Bristol City Council Officers:

Kevin Jay – Finance Officer
Stefan Edwards – Events Officer
Ben Skuse – Grounds Supervisor
Oliver Harrision – Democratic Services

Apologies:

Councillor Paula O'Rourke – Councillor Kay Grant substitutes

1. Minutes of Previous Meeting

Make the following amendments on the minutes of 22 November 2021:

- On item 2 'Finance Update' the first bullet should read 'total overspend £273k' change Judicial Review costs to £140k.

After these amendments, it was RESOLVED that the minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as a correct record.

It was noted that the outstanding actions on business rates and the Team Love contract would be discussed in today's meeting.

2. Finance Update

The Finance Officer presented their report and highlighted the following points:

- The grey box on the right side of p.6 shows the forecast position for 2021/22. We expect income of £317k and expenditure of £579k. The underlying deficit is £262k, which is reduced to £164k after reserves are drawn on.
- There has been income lost this year on events. Increased costs include an additional gardener post (up to 5 from 4) and additional building, repairs, and cleaning due to Covid.
- The educational post was furloughed last year. The zoo kept the Covid grant for that at the time, so we will not be paying for the post next year.

- Re: Business Rates, Kevin has contacted the officer that notified him about potential charges to request a permanent solution. It was noted by members that it was the usual position of BCC to not charge, so this represents a change in policy that needs an explanation.
- This is an optimistic budget based on events team estimates. We need to generate more income or make some reductions. BCC is doing this at the moment as they have a significant budget gap. It is a similar story for the Downs. Starting from events income informs how much we can spend.

Discussion Notes:

- We should hopefully be able to go back to a normal cleaning regime in the new financial year. The assumption is that BCC parks will do the same at this point, but this needs to be clarified.
- Invoices from events come into the system and are logged in the accounts, but this does not necessarily mean the monies are in hand.
- There was a discussion on the drop in income. This is mainly due to the loss of the zoo parking. There has also been a drop in event income.

3. Events Report Update

The Events officer presented their report and highlighted the following points:

- The report shows the expected event list for the upcoming year.
- Committee guidance is requested on setting site fees for events that have previously been granted a reduced rate due to Covid. BCC is granting reductions until the end of the financial year and will set regular fees after that. The committee can choose to use reduced, standard or increased fees.
- There is a summary of complaints re: Love Saves the Day along with the noise report. This confirms that the event did not breach licensed noise levels. The report will be included in the full committee papers. The number of complaints received is low considering the size and impact of the event.

Discussion Notes:

- If this is going to be the major annual event for the Downs, it needs to be managed carefully. There was a residents' meeting attended by JB where concerns were raised.
- Team Love have acknowledged that the music genre was not suitable for the location and will not do it again.
- It is preferable to have one major event over a weekend rather than multiple smaller events in terms of disruption for residents.
- Regarding site fees more generally, the financial outturn is based upon fees returning to a standard pre-covid level. The committee agreed to return to a pre-Covid level. Any increase beyond that could result in events being non-viable.
- There was a discussion about the University Freshers Fair event. This does substantial damage to the ground due to high footfall on soft ground.
- Members asked SE to investigate with BCC film officers whether there was any filming happening on the Downs that could be charged or encouraged.

4. Any Other Business

- The Sea Walls Café planning permission extension has been reapplied for.
- The Deputy Lord Lieutenant has requested that the Downs Committee contributes to the Queen's Diamond Jubilee via the Green Canopy Project. JB has worked with Francis Greenacre and BS on a suitable location on the Downs to plant trees. There are two proposed projects: planting of five native tree species in a circle off Ladies Mile and a single oak next to the existing Golden Jubilee oak at the top of Bridge Valley Road.
- The estimated cost is around £1500 and a sponsor has been approached to cover some of this. Members discussed the possibility of Crowdfunding the project as the trees will not be planted until November.

The proposal was AGREED and will be referred to the full Downs Committee for approval.

Downs Committee
Notes of Events & Finance Sub-Group Meeting
9th March 2022

Members:

David Freed (Master and Chair)
MV Jonathon Baker
Councillor Jos Clark
MV Patrick Despard
Councillor Paula O'Rourke
MV Peter Rilett

Bristol City Council Officers:

Kevin Jay – Finance Officer
Stefan Edwards – Events Officer
Ben Skuse – Grounds Supervisor
Sue Long – Planning and Development Adviser (Parks)
Jeremy Livitt – Democratic Services

Apologies:

Councillor Paul Goggin
Councillor Geoff Gollop

1. Minutes of Previous Meeting held on 12th January 2022

Make the following amendment on the minutes – Agenda Item 4 Any Other Business “The Sea Walls Café planning permission extension has been granted” should be altered to read “The Sea Walls Care planning permission extension had been re-applied for”

After this amendment, it was

RESOLVED that the minutes of the previous meeting on 12th January 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

There was discussion concerning the following pieces of action which would not be dealt with under other items on the agenda:

Agenda Item 2 – Finance Update

Business Rates – The Finance Adviser advised that officers were still pursuing this action for changes by the Downs Committee to the current charging system.

Cleaning Regime – The Finance Manager advised that he had spoken to the Parks Services Manager who had confirmed that all cleaning regimes were being reviewed.

2. Parks Communications Update

The Parks Planning and Development Adviser provided a verbal update on proposals for the introduction of a licence scheme for activities on the Downs.

It was noted that whilst a licence scheme was being investigated, there were currently no proposals for either a charge or administrative fee for any licences granted.

It was agreed that officers should investigate holding an event to discuss the issuing of chargeable licences for organisations who use the Downs.

3. Finance Update

The Finance Adviser advised that the income for 2021/22 was forecast at £270,000 with expenditure at £390,000. The net deficit would be met from reserves. He set out detail of the pressures concerned. The Sub-Group was also advised of the forecasts for 2022/23 and details of the pressures for this period.

4. Events Report Update

The Events Officer explained the situation concerning events to be held on the Downs in 2022. It was noted that there had been no events since the last meeting.

5. Any Other Business

Illegal Parking of Vans – Further work was being carried out to resolve this long-standing problem.

Curation of Events – The Sub-Group could consider curating an events programme as part of a greater focus on cultural/social issues and encourage people to come to events on the Downs

6 Date of Next Meetings

The following future meetings were noted:

Downs Committee – 2pm on Monday 21st March 2022

Events and Finance Sub-Group – 2pm on Wednesday 8th June 2022

The meeting ended at 3.07pm

Downs Management Report 24 January 2022

Ben Skuse: Area Parks Supervisor

In the short gap between the last report and this one we have had a relatively quiet and productive time.

Benefitting from predominantly dry conditions lots of football has been played with hardly any cancellations. 30 tonnes of soil has gone onto the water tower site. The next step if conditions are favourable will be to drag a chain mat over the areas surface, then spike the ground to promote drying out, roll the surface to flatten it and finally add grass seed. Admittedly this grass seed will barely get a chance to germinate before Funderworld's arrival to begin build on March 28th. However if it is in the ground then the exposed bits can get going with the rest germinating as soon as it is uncovered from whatever fairground ride is on top of it.

So we begin to look at the summer mowing regime from this point onwards. A significant amount of tree canopy lifting has taken place to make sure we can get good access to areas underneath trees and that the footpaths are free from overhanging branches before they get heavy with new leaves. Bench repair and maintenance continues as we look ahead to another busy Easter/May bank holiday period. It will be interesting to note what the impact of being entirely free from C-19 restrictions will have on Downs life this Spring/Summer. The huge crowds of the last 2 Covid years will be a thing of the past I hope.

After the last meeting I met with Ian Johnson at the Clifton Observatory. I made it clear to him that the grounds damage attributed to the waste transfer vehicles that his building requires could not continue. He was well aware of his limits on vehicle movements from BCC licencing and assured me that they stick to this except in exceptional circumstances. We agreed that the size of the vehicles going up there is the problem. He is going to go back to his provider to see what other options may be possible. But more importantly a bollard has finally been installed. This takes control of the vehicle movements for the first time so is a big step in the right direction. The Observatory have also paid to have significant ground re-instatement works carried out to prevent further damage. Most importantly of all the exposed tree roots of the mature Sycamore in the area in question have been covered over with soil taking away the threat to the trees' future health.

So yes, everything has been running to plan since the last report, that is of course until 3 named storms in a row blew in, the 3rd week of February. Considering the red weather warning for wind the Downs got away relatively lightly in terms of fallen trees. A large Holm Oak which was inside the water tower site but fell out onto the Downs being the most significant loss. All were cleared quickly by a combination of my team and the citywide tree contractors. Plenty of woodchip was created which we put to good use throughout the year around the site.

I continue to engage with the preparatory process for our 2022 event programme. Meetings with both organisers and Bristol City Council's site permissions and events team are ongoing as we move forward through the programme for 22.

Ben Skuse
Bristol City Council Parks
Area Parks supervisor, Downs, Blaise and Kingsweston Estates

Agenda item:

Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project Annual Report 2022

Officers Presenting Report: Becky Belfin Nature Conservation Officer and Mandy Leivers, Avon Gorge and Downs Biodiversity Education Manager

Context

The Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project was launched on 23rd October 1999. It is a partnership of Bristol City Council, the Downs Committee, Merchant Venturers, Bristol Zoo Gardens, Natural England, the University of Bristol, Bristol Zoological Society, the National Trust and Forestry England. We also work in partnership with the Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge.

The aim of the project is 'to secure the future of the outstanding wildlife interest of the Avon Gorge, Clifton Down, Durdham Down and Leigh Woods, as well as raising awareness and understanding of this unique location and its importance for people and wildlife'.

Annual Review

This report provides a review of progress and key achievements of the Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project between January and December 2022.

Habitat Management Works Throughout the Avon Gorge and Downs

The winter conservation works on the Bristol side of the Gorge continued to focus on the removal of scrub and invasive plants to restore the species-rich grassland on the rocky limestone outcrops. These are the features that are of particular interest with regards to the SSSI designation on the Bristol side of the Gorge. This work is primarily carried out by specialist rope access contractors, due to the tricky terrain.

In March last year four bagot goats joined the remaining two Kashmir goats to graze the scrub in the Gully. A few months later, in July, we were also able to introduce a further four Kashmirs which the Downs team had helped round up and collect from the Great Orme. With the grazing herd back up to full strength we are now getting the scrub regrowth back under control again.

The regular monitoring of the goats by the Council's Downs' team and the Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge (FOD+AG) is continuing to ensure that they are well looked after.

On the Downs, implementation of the Scrub Management Plan has continued for its seventh year and is contributing to the ongoing restoration of the wildflower meadow. These wildflower meadows also continue to be managed on a hay cut which is important to maintain their value. FOD+AG has helped to protect these meadows through the annual

construction/maintenance of a series of dead-hedge structures adjacent to part of Circular Road, to encourage runners and walkers to stick to the path around the edge, rather than cutting across.

The increase in people using the Downs in 2020 due to covid, also meant an increase in people walking across the vulnerable meadow areas, especially during winter when the grass is shorter. Concerns over the impact of this, particularly on the orchid species, resulted in further temporary measures being put in place at the beginning of this winter. A student from the University of Bristol is now carrying out some research on the orchid population on the Downs, and we look forward to finding out more when they've completed their study.



The Education and Community Engagement Programme

Coronavirus Pandemic

Due to the coronavirus pandemic the Avon Gorge and Downs Biodiversity Education Manager was on furlough until April and the seasonal Avon Gorge & Downs Learning and Engagement Officer did not start until the end of May (normally that role begins in early March). Most of the focus in April and May was about restarting the programme including setting up events, contacting schools and booking in educational visits, as well as rebuilding the volunteer team. As a result of the pandemic the number of people we engaged with during the year was well below normal. Overall, **825** people took part in one of our events, activities or educational visits during 2022.

Due to covid restrictions we ran a very reduced events programme and restricted the number of people attending each event. We also didn't hold any of our usual large events such as talks. As we had to implement enhanced cleaning regimes for our school session resources we had to spread out our school visits and we had lower uptake for our playscheme sessions than usual. Our planned Bridge 2 Nature community project had to be postponed due to covid and none of the large-scale events such as the Bristol Festival of Nature happened in 2021.

On a positive note, the people who did attend our events, school and playscheme sessions were extremely appreciative and glad to be outside, learning about nature again on the Downs.

Events Programme

Due to the pandemic, our 2020 events were cancelled but two of the courses 'Birdsong on the Downs' and 'Spring on the Downs in batik' were re-scheduled for spring 2021. Part one of the Birdsong identification course took place, via Zoom, on 9th April and the second part happened, on the Downs, on 23rd May.

The batik workshop was re-scheduled to 26th June but as it was taking place indoors, and there was going to be a delay in lifting the restrictions, we took the decision to cancel the event until restrictions were fully lifted.

During the year we ran **3 courses**, including the 'Birdsong on the Downs', 'Identifying birds on the Downs in Autumn' and 'Willow reindeer'.

We also ran **3 walks**, titled 'Postcard and poetry promenade', 'Meet the Avon Gorge goat keeper' and 'Owl prowl on the Downs'. The Postcard and poetry promenade was part of the Wastes and Strays project.

We organised a children's event for the October half-term but when three of the children dropped out, it had to be cancelled due to insufficient bookings (cases of covid were rising at the time).



"Many thanks to you, John and Francis for a wonderful event. My mother and I had a super time, learning more about Clifton and the Downs, its history and plants, and loved the creative approach."
Postcard and poetry promenade

Formal Education Sessions

Primary schools

In April, the Avon Gorge & Downs Biodiversity Education Manager returned from furlough to lots of emails from schools, eager to book education sessions with us. In 2021 we taught **529 school pupils** in **27 education sessions**.

This is a lot less than we would normally teach but we spaced out groups to allow us to follow covid precaution protocols. This included giving extra time for cleaning and disinfecting equipment between school visits.



© Jonathan Duckworth

One of the schools who visited was Andalusia Academy who brought the whole school over two days. Coming from a school located within the heart of Bristol without any grounds and the majority of children living in high-rise flats, this was an exciting experience for all, especially after a year of lockdown.

We gave an education session feedback form to the leader of each school group. All groups said they were 'very likely' to book sessions with us in the future. The form gives the opportunity for comments and views on the sessions, and we were thrilled to receive positive and enthusiastic feedback from many teachers. Comments included:



"Observing the goats was the highlight for children and staff! The session was brilliantly run by the team. Parents who came on the trip were very impressed with the content and how engaged the children were. Thank you so much! A really fantastic session – well resourced and delivered. We had a great time!" Hotwells Primary School

"Thank you for such a great day. The children loved learning about the Downs and the butterflies. The activities were engaging and pitched at a great level that meant all children could access the sessions. It was the right level of listening and activities. We will definitely recommend you to others!"
Andalusia Academy

Higher education

Nine final year South Gloucestershire and Stroud College students, on the BSc Zoological Management and Conservation course, came to the Downs for a session on bird ringing. The Education Manager supported licensed bird ringer, Ed Drewitt, as he taught the session which was part of the students' module on Management of Birds for Conservation. The Education Manager gave a talk about the wildlife importance of the Avon Gorge, Downs and Leigh Woods, and the work of the project.



"The session with Ed and Mandy on the Downs was such a valuable opportunity to see first-hand the vitally important conservation work that goes on right on our doorstep here in Bristol". Students' tutor

Playschemes and uniformed groups

65 children took part in our playscheme sessions. This included a group from Lawrence Weston who visited us for the first time and the 57th Bristol Brownies.

Compared to 2019, we were dramatically down on the number of sessions we ran. The Avon Gorge & Downs Learning and Engagement Officer contacted as many playschemes in the area as possible to encourage bookings. Unfortunately, some of the groups that had booked regularly in the past had closed down (after a difficult year, last year) and some were not offering trips due to covid. We also had a couple of groups who were initially keen to book sessions but then decided they couldn't come after all, or cancelled due to covid-related staffing issues.



" Thank you so, so much! We really appreciate all you did for us and for the Downs in general. The level of preparation was exceptional and we will never look at the Downs as 'the boring green space' again".
57th Bristol Brownies

Audience Development Plan (ADP) and Your Downs Activities – Widening the Audience

Bridge 2 Nature

The 'Bridge 2 Nature' project is a nature connection, art and wellbeing project for young people (aged 18 – 25) that we are running in partnership with Off The Record (OTR) and Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge (FOD+AG).

Through a series of guided walks and nature connection activities the group will explore the fascinating wildlife the Avon Gorge, Downs and Leigh Woods and gather inspiration for a collaborative piece of art.

The pandemic made this a tricky project to run. Initially it was due to take place in 2020 and the plan was to work towards creating a mural for the Upfest Street Festival that year. Then covid hit. In April 2021, we resumed planning and OTR began recruiting participants.

In June, we heard that Upfest was cancelled due to covid. Luckily, the Friends of the Rainbow Bridge in Montpelier had recently approached the OTR art therapist about a project to re-paint the bridge and we all agreed that this local landmark would make a great canvas for the group's mural.

So, in July we were all set to begin the programme. Despite the OTR staff working really hard to recruit and support the 16 young people who had signed up to the project, eight of them dropped out in the week before we started, only one young person was able to make the first session and no one could make it to the walks in early August. At the time, covid numbers were increasing dramatically, young people were unvaccinated and there was a lot of covid-related anxiety.

We did consider whether we could run the project in the autumn but in September, we heard that the two co-ordinators for the Friends of the Rainbow Bridge were moving away. We therefore took the decision to re-launch the project in spring 2022, by which time the young people would have had both vaccinations and covid pressures and anxieties would hopefully have lessened. We're also reverting to the original idea of creating artwork for Upfest which is due to take place in May 2022.

This project is being funded by the Co-op Community Fund and the Commoners of Durdham Down and Durdham Downs Charity.



Your Downs

In June we co-lead a guided walk with FOD+AG, for **18 members** of the Long Ashton Horticultural Society.

"We all had a wonderful time and a big thank you to Robin, Vanessa and yourself for putting on such a well organised and fascinating guided walk. One thing I took away from Sunday was to slow down and take a proper look at what is around you as you risk missing out of some wonderful wildlife".



Wastes and Strays

The Downs were chosen as one of four 'Urban Commons' that are being studied as part of Wastes and Strays, a project coordinated by Newcastle, Exeter, Sheffield and Brighton Universities. The project involves:

- Researching their history and contemporary perceptions of biodiversity and use
- Trialing new methods of engaging communities
- Working with stakeholders to generate ideas for the future

In May, a research associate at Newcastle University began gathering oral histories. The Education Manager, FOD+AG members and Ben Skuse (the Downs Supervisor) were amongst those interviewed.

Dr. John Wedgwood Clarke (from Exeter University) was 'Poet in Residence', on the Downs. As part of our school education sessions, John ran workshops with two classes from Westbury Park School, creating poetry about the wildflowers in the meadows on the Downs.

John also co-lead the 'Postcard and poetry promenade' with Francis Greenacre, as part of the public Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife events programme. The guided walk looked at the history of the site and this informed the creative writing aspect of the event.

We also took part in assignments for the In-Common Sites / Urban Commons Futures creative mapping part of project. Through a series of tasks, participants are asked to explore the Downs, map areas that are special to them and think about areas that could be improved. At the end of the project, everyone's contributions will be drawn together to create an exhibition and will be used for generating ideas for the future.

Further activities for this project are planned for 2022.

Community Events and Activities

The Downs Festival

At the beginning of September we attended the Idles Downs Festival. We took along our display and range of leaflets and talked to festival-goers about the wildlife of the Avon Gorge and Downs and the work of the project.

University of Bristol Welcome Fair on the Downs

At the end of September, the University of Bristol Students' Union invited us to bring a stall to their 'Welcome Fair' on the Downs. Two of our volunteers, who are current Bristol University students, joined us to share their experiences of volunteering with their fellow students. During the day we engaged with **111 students** and 75 expressed interest in volunteering with us.

Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project Website R

When we launched the project website www.avongorge.org.uk in 2019, we ran out of time to develop four of the 'Activity of the month' resources for the Kids Zone section. For each activity, children can find out about wildlife highlights for that month and download instructions to enable them to make something that helps them discover and learn about nature. During November,

*"I wanted you to know how much I enjoyed the walk with you, John and Francis on Sunday.
Francis' depth of knowledge about our route is amazing! I was riveted by all the fascinating information he shared with us.
John's contribution really enhanced the walk, I felt. The meditative, mindful approach he offered was, to me, so original."*



the AGD Learning & Engagement Officer completed the set as follows: February - Make a birdfeeder from recycled bottles; March - Make a bird id dial and sound map; April - Make a butterfly wand; May - Make a goat Gully diorama.

Publicity

Publicity about the new goats

At the end of March, four rare breed Bagot goats joined our two Kashmir goats in the Gully. After they had had a month to settle in, we issued a press release which resulted in Ben Skuse (the Downs Supervisor), Carol Laslett (Bristol Street Goat) and the Education Manager being interviewed for a piece on the ITV teatime news.

In July, Ben Skuse collected four young Kashmir goats from the Great Orme and brought them back to the Gully. On the day that they arrived, the Bristol Zoological Society (BZS) PR & Communications Manager and our one of our volunteers were on-hand to film and photograph the BZS Vet Team carrying out the health checks and the goats being released into the Gully. The BZS PR and Marketing team created and issued a press release to explain their conservation role and re-inforce messages about how visitors to the site could help keep the herd safe.

Posts about the goats on our Project Facebook page www.facebook.com/avongorge were very popular; one reached 1,897 people.



Volunteer Support

Our volunteers are vital in helping us to deliver the education programme so it was important to spend time re-building the volunteer team in May. The Education Manager spoke to all of our pre-lockdown team to find out who was still able to volunteer with us, and thanking those that had moved on. With support from the BZS Volunteer Services Manager we began recruiting and training new volunteers. We ran a successful 'Volunteer welcome evening', via Zoom, and ended up with a great team made up of returning Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project volunteers, newly recruited volunteers, and BZS volunteers who switched roles (whilst their previous or current volunteer roles were limited due to covid). We're thankful to the **13 people** who gave **208 hours** of their time over the year.

Clifton Conservation Hub

When Bristol Zoological Society closes Bristol Zoo and relocates to Wild Place, it is proposed that the main entrance building will become the Clifton Conservation Hub. It is intended that the Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project education team will be based there, along with a café and an exhibition about the history of the Zoo. We have participated in a number of meetings with the Transformation team, the Business Development Manager and the architects, to plan the refurbishment of the building.

The Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project is working to secure the outstanding wildlife interest of the Avon Gorge, Clifton Down, Durdham Down and Leigh Woods, as well as raising awareness and understanding of this unique location and its importance for people and wildlife.

www.avongorge.org.uk www.facebook.com/avongorge

Summary of activities of the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project education and community engagement programme

Officer Presenting Report: Mandy Leivers, Avon Gorge and Downs Biodiversity Education Manager

Avon Gorge and Downs Learning and Engagement Officer

Interviews for the Avon Gorge and Downs Learning and Engagement Officer took place at the beginning of February; Vanessa Adnitt was appointed and is due to start on the 7th March. Vanessa returns to this role for the second year running.

Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project events programme

The spring 2022 events programme is very popular with six of the events fully booked. During March, we have three events:

- Meet the Avon Gorge goat keeper walk
- A year in the life of birdsong talk
- Learning birdsong on the Downs course

Schools education sessions

We've been busy handling school education session bookings for the spring and summer terms.

Your Downs activities

Bridge 2 Nature

We re-launched our 'Bridge 2 Nature' project - a nature connection, art and wellbeing project for young people (aged 18 to 25) that we are running in partnership with Off The Record (OTR) and Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge (FOD+AG). 12 young people have signed up and our first guided session on the Downs is at the end of March.

Walks and talks

At the beginning of March, Ben Skuse and I led a guided walk for older Nordic walkers about the rare plants of the Avon Gorge and our goatherd. I also gave a talk about the wildlife of the Avon Gorge and Downs, and the work of the Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project, to Stapleton Probus Club.

Downs Commoners' sheep grazing ceremony

I have attended a couple of planning meetings for the Downs Commoners' grazing event that will take place in May. We will be delivering education sessions for school groups visiting the event, in conjunction with the shepherdess.

Filming projects

Ben and I were interviewed for a film made by the Bristol University Wildlife Film Society. They are helping us create a new film about the special wildlife of the site and our goats for the project website. It will replace the old, out of date one filmed in 2011. I have also had a meeting with a documentary filmmaker who is going to create a short film about botanist Libby Houston and the rare flora of the Avon Gorge. We also hope to put this film on our website.

Downs Committee - 21st March 2022

Events Update

Events that have taken place since last Downs Committee

No events have taken place since the last committee meeting.

Upcoming Events - 2022

The following events have expressed their intension to return to the Downs in 2022 (subject to site permissions). Note: these are the dates the events are 'live' there will be build and break period either side of each event. The organiser of Cycle Sunday has informed us that they are unable to run the event this year.

April	May	June	July	August	September	October
Funderworld 1 st April – 2 nd May						
	Foodies Fest 20 th –22 nd May					
		Jubilee Beacon 2 nd June				
		Comedy Garden 15 th -19 th June				
		Race for Life 25 th -26 th June				
			Pride 9 th July			
				Adventure Cinema 5 th -7 th August		
					Forwards (formerly Downs Concerts) 2 nd -4 th September	
					Student Union event 23 rd - 24 th September	
					Circus 27 th September – 16 th October	

Complaints relating to events on the downs

Since the last meeting, no new complaints have been received via the official council complaints system. We continue to be mindful of resident feedback when planning events on the downs.



The Downs

Forecast 2021-22

The latest forecast for 2021-22 is as follows:

TABLE 1 - Overall Income and Expenditure Summary

	2021/22 Full Year Budget £	2021/22 Forecast Outturn (as at 2.3.22) £	2021/22 Variance £	Notes - 2021-22 Forecast
<u>Income</u>				
Total Income	350,260	272,704	(77,556)	Deficit
<u>Expenditure</u>				
Total Expenditure	(350,260)	(590,758)	(240,498)	Overspend
<u>Transfer from Reserves</u>	0	97,680	97,680	All reserve funding now exhausted
FINAL NET OUTTURN	0	(220,374)	(220,374)	Representing Downs generated net surplus/(deficit)

The forecast for 2021-22 is a deficit mainly driven from the final legal costs associated with defencing a legal case and some ongoing Covid-19 related expenditure, such as additional cleaning and maintenance. Prior year underspends can assist the deficit to some degree; however, they are limited.