

Bristol City Council

Minutes of the Downs Committee

14 November 2022 at 2.00 pm



Members Present:-

Councillors: Paula O'Rourke (Chair), Steve Smith, Jos Clark, Katy Grant, Philippa Hulme, Christine Townsend, Kye Dudd, David Freed (Vice-Chair), Jonathon Baker, Mike Bothamley, Mark Burchfield, Patrick Despard, Robert Bourns and Bevis Watts

1 Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted that there were some items of Chair's Business to cover.

- Unfortunately, there was no further update on the governance arrangements, specifically in relation to the Downs Coordinator secondment role.
- There had been lots of work going on behind the scenes since the last meeting including a site visit to the Downs changing rooms, and setting up two Task & Finish Groups, one on parking and another on buildings assets and infrastructure.

2 Apologies for absence

There was none.

3 Declarations of interest

There was none.

4 Memberships for 2022/2023

It was noted that a mistake had been made on the initial report, but this had since been updated and a supplementary report was published online with meeting papers.



It was noted that Jonathon Baker had served on the Committee for 7 years. As per the new Governance arrangements approved at the Committee meeting on 19th October 2022, it states that Members would typically not serve more than six years but on an exceptional basis (and subject to agreement from the whole committee) an individual could serve up to nine years. The Committee voted as to whether Jonathon Baker should continue to serve the Committee for another year which was APPROVED (13 For, 1 Against).

RESOLVED: that the Downs Committee membership for 2022/23 be noted.

5 Chairing Arrangements

RESOLVED: that the appointment of Patrick Despard as Master of the Society of Merchant Ventures and Vice-Chair of the Downs Committee be noted.

6 Retiring Members

RESOLVED: that the retirement of members of the Downs Committee be noted and a letter thanking them for their past service be sent by the Clerk to the Committee.

7 Delegations

RESOLVED: That;
The Committee re-established the Events & Finance Sub-Group;
The Committee established a Buildings, Assets and Infrastructure Task & Finish Group;
The Committee established a Parking Task & Finish Group;
The Committee sets up Task and Finish Groups as necessary for other areas of work.

8 Dates and Times of Future Meetings

RESOLVED: that Downs Committee meeting dates for 2022/23 be noted.

9 Minutes of last meeting

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the last Downs Committee meeting on 19th October be noted.



10 Action Tracker

The Chair ran through actions from the previous meeting and updates were provided.

ACTION: Request a briefing from Bristol Zoo Gardens colleagues on planning application development proposals.

11 Matters Arising From the Events and Finance Group

David Freed noted an amendment to the Events & Finance Sub-Group minutes on 1st November; Item 1, bullet point 2 – the last sentence to be removed as it was incorrect.

12 Public Forum

The following Public Forum questions were received:

1. Robert Westlake (in person)
2. Susan Cater (in person)

The Chair provided verbal answers to the questions.

The following Public Forum statements were received and noted by the Committee:

1. Mark Ashdown (in person)
2. Susan Carter (in person)
3. Robert Westlake (in person)

ACTION: Area Parks Supervisor to update Downs web page overview section to include a map of the Downs.

13 Downs Management Report

The Area Parks Supervisor introduced the Downs Management Report and highlighted key points:

- This was the last report of a very busy year for the team.
- The team contended with weather warnings over the summer for storms and extreme heat. The high temperatures meant a high risk of fires on the Downs.
- There were 2 confirmed fires on the Downs, but no one was harmed.
- A prolonged warm wet period in the Autumn meant that the grass was growing for longer than usual.
- An update on winter activity for the team was provided.



- The Chair asked if the impact of Covid-19 lockdowns were still affecting the usage of the Downs and was advised that usage seemed to be back to normal, although, more people who may have found the space during the lockdowns may be continuing to visit.

14 Downs Education Report

The Learning & Engagement Officer for the Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project introduced the report. Discussion points are as follows:

- The number of events had been reduced since the Biodiversity Education Manager had resigned but various activities were still taking place such as guided walks and wonder talks.
- The Learning & Engagement Officer's contract was due to end when the Education Programme finished in October 2022 but as the Biodiversity Education Manager had resigned, the contract was extended until December 2022.
- A Member suggested that the programme engages with disadvantaged children and care leavers in the city. It was noted that as part of the programme, they were already trying to target deprived areas of the city and offering free transport to the Downs, although this was only an option for a limited number of schools due to lack of funding.

ACTION: Learning & Engagement Officer to circulate the Education Programme's Development Plan and provide list of schools who engage.

The Committee thanked the Learning & Engagement Officer for their hard work on continuing the Education Programme.

15 Events Report

It was noted that the Events Officer could not attend the meeting to present the events report, but the Area Parks Supervisor provided a brief update.

The team were looking at finding replacements for gaps in the event schedule for 2023 and that they were trying to come up with a system to progress smaller events on the Downs.

The Chair asked Committee members to raise any ideas for events on the Downs ahead of the next meeting in January where this would be discussed in more detail.

16 Finance Report

It was noted that the Finance Officer could not attend the meeting to present the finance report.



The Chair noted that there was a £76k deficit which the Committee needed to work on reducing over the coming years.

17 Any Other Business

The Area Parks Supervisor noted that there had been a request for further gas pipeline works to take place on the Downs which required the Committee's approval. Maps showing the location were shared on screen and it was noted that this would be charged at a further £17k and contractors would be responsible for reinstating the ground once the work was complete. The work requires installing a two story structure and would be in place from May 2023-December 2024.

Members raised concerns around installing gas pipelines in a climate emergency, but the Area Parks Supervisor advised that this was to replace old infrastructure.

Members were cautious about an increased compound size and asked that a further briefing be brought to the next meeting in January.

ACTION: Area Parks Manager to provide a further briefing for Committee Members on the gas pipeline works at the next Committee meeting.

Meeting ended at 15:27

CHAIR _____

