

Bristol City Council Minutes of the Downs Committee

19 October 2022 at 2.00 pm



Members Present:-

Councillors: Jos Clark, Katy Grant, Christine Townsend, Kye Dudd, Jonathon Baker, Mike Bothamley, Mark Burchfield, Gillian Camm and Patrick Despard

1 Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and did a round of introductions.

2 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Peter Rilett and Councillor Philippa Hulme.

3 Declarations of interest

Jonathon Baker declared that he was a Member of the Friends of Downs & Avon Gorge.

4 Chair's Business

There was none.

5 Minutes of last meeting

Resolved; that the minutes of the previous meeting on 28th June 2022 be approved as a correct record.



6 Action Tracker

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

ACTION: Item on buildings and infrastructure to be added to the agenda for a future meeting.

7 Matters Arising From the Events and Finance Group

The Master of the Society of Merchant Venturers introduced the item and highlighted key points raised at the last Events & Finance Group Meetings, specifically discussions around the future of the North Car Park.

There was a conversation around possible options for the car park and it was noted that this needed to be discussed in more detail also, that other car parks in Bristol such as Ashton Court already operate pay and display, and this could be an option for the North Car Park.

ACTION: Explore the possibility of pay and display and conditions for the North Car Park and seek advice on legal position with regards to the Bristol Zoo Gardens license.

It was noted that the site permissions team were responsible for making decisions regarding the use of outdoor space but decisions regarding the Downs needed input from the Downs Committee. It was suggested that this be discussed at an upcoming Events & Finance Group meeting.

ACTION: Item on decisions for the use of outdoor space on the Downs/site permissions to be added to the agenda for an upcoming Event & Finance Group meeting.

8 Public Forum

The following Public Forum questions were received:

1. Mark Ashdown (in person)

The Chair provided verbal answers to the questions.

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

1. Chris Harries
2. Rob Acton-Campbell
3. Robert Westlake, Friends of Downs and Avon Gorge - (in person)
4. Owen Dow, Downs Football League



5. Susan Carter, Downs for People – (in person)

9 Governance Report

Gillian Camm introduced the report and highlighted key points:

- The Committee faced a number of issues, specifically around funding.
- The governance review started with consulting a number of stakeholder groups.
- The Committee developed two questionnaires and from this developed a set of draft principals and a draft work plan which were ratified at the Extraordinary Downs Committee meeting on 20th May 2022.
- The Work Plan sets out priorities for the Committee and will inform agendas for future meetings.
- There were issues around Committee turnover and continuity which the Committee would work to address with ensuring there are sufficient handovers to new members.
- There were lots of ideas for the Committee to generate income for the Downs with the suggestion of accessing grant funding and support from charities.
- There was a proposal for a Downs Coordinator role which would be self-funding to support the work of the Committee.
- The Public Forum function had been reviewed recently with the intention of opening up a dialogue and more involvement from Committee members.

The Committee ran through the recommendations in the report and discussion points are as follows:

- The Chief Executive had been briefed on the proposals.
- The Downs Coordinator role would work on generating funding for the Downs.
- It was noted that there were big risks associated with changing the Downs Act 1981 which would be time consuming and costly.
- A Member noted that costs were being incurred for legal advice as the Act requires certain changes to go to the Secretary of State which was costing the taxpayer.
- It was noted that the responsibility for the management of the Committees was with Bristol City Council.
- It was noted that Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge were already doing lots of the work that would be required from the TrustCo but this would not be exclusive as a Committee would work with a wide range of organisations and stakeholders.
- It was noted that the Events & Finance Sub Committee was seen to be making decisions not heard by the full Downs Committee in public and it was suggested that these items be ratified at the Downs Committee meetings to improve transparency.
- It was noted that the Committee were trialling a new Public Forum approach currently.
- It was noted that the Downs Coordinator role would be an internal secondment for 6 months. This would be a high level, part time role for 2 days a week.



The Chair suggested that the Committee approve the recommendations as set out in the report and put the decision to a vote which found that all Members present, were in support of the decision to approve.

RESOLVED; That the Committee approve the recommendations as set out in the report.

The Chair thanked Gillian Camm and acknowledged her hard work on this report.

10 Downs Management Report

The Area Parks Supervisor introduced the Downs Management Report and briefly highlighted key points. Members asked about the recent fires on the Downs and were advised that it was difficult to know the real cause, but it could be down to the periods of drought and BBQs in the summer. The team were worried about the meadows so would be looking at that in future.

11 Events Report

The Events Officer introduced the report and gave a brief update. Discussion points were as follows:

- It was noted that the Student Union event was run well and that there was better traffic management in place this year. There were complaints but nothing additional since the event took place.
- It was noted that the number of noise complaints for music festivals depended on the wind direction on the day of the event.
- Members noted that there were cars parked on the grass on Ladies Mile during the event and it was confirmed that this was a designated taxi pick up area.
- Members raised the issue around parking on the grass generally and noted that once the financial position changes, the Committee could look at employing someone to enforce restrictions.

12 Finance Report

The Finance Officer introduced the report and gave an update on the Committee's finances up to period of July. Discussion points are as follows:

- Members asked if staffing costs were listed in the budget and were advised that this couldn't be broken down as lots of teams provide services to the Downs.
- It was noted that the Committee had previously used the council's reserve funds when the budget was in deficit but hoped that income generated from various events would bridge the gap in future



13 Zoo Gardens Planning Application (Downs Response) - Verbal Update

The Chair introduced the item and gave a brief overview. Key points as follows:

- The Chair had attended a briefing with the planning lead officer ahead of the Downs Committee meeting who advised on the current situation with the Bristol Zoo Gardens planning application.
- It was noted that the planning application was currently being reviewed but once the updated plans were available, the Downs Committee would like to submit a response to the application.
- It was noted that if any Downs Committee Members also sat on Development Control Committees, then they would have to remove themselves from any discussions but there were no planning members on the Committee at present.
- It was noted that Committee would like an update on the planning application once new plans had been submitted.

ACTION: Request an update to the Downs Committee on Bristol Zoo Gardens planning application when the new plans are revealed.

14 Parking: Enforcement of Bylaws and Future of Parking on and Around the Downs; Future of North Car Park - Verbal Update

The Master of the Society of Merchant Ventures introduced the item and noted that parking issues had been raised within other agenda items.

- The Chair suggested that a Task & Finish Group be established to progress discussions around parking issues on the Downs.
- Members noted the issues around finances which made it difficult to enforce any parking regulations on the Downs.
- There was a suggestion around putting stickers on people's windows who have parked badly.
- It was noted that the Downs Act had powers to make byelaws which could introduce enforcement by Fixed Penalty Notices which would generate income, but this would need to be funded initially.
- Members noted that officer support was needed in order to progress on these issues.

ACTION: Establish a Task & Finish Group to focus on parking enforcement and wider parking issues on the Downs.

15 Clifton Down Wildflower Meadow Proposal

Councillor Katy Grant introduced the proposal and shared images of potential areas for the meadow.

- It was noted that the meadow would be planted in 2022 costing around £700.



- It was suggested the school children could be involved in the planting for educational purposes and this could form part of the Zoo's education programme.
- It was noted that a meadow might discourage drivers from parking on the grass.
- The Area Parks Supervisor raised the issue around budget cuts in the parks service.
- Committee Members liked the idea and suggested plans for the meadow go ahead.

16 Downs Education Report - To note

The Lord Mayor noted that the Avon Gorge & Downs Biodiversity Education Manager had resigned and introduced the Learning Engagement Officer who was stepping in until a replacement was found.

- A Member asked how the education report reflects the priorities for the city and it was noted that the work of the Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project with schools is free of charge and schools across the city are invited to engage.

17 Any Other Business

There was none.

18 Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on Monday 14th November at City Hall.

Meeting ended at 4:20pm

CHAIR _____

