

Bristol City Council

Minutes of the Downs Committee

28 February 2023 at 2.00 pm



Members Present:-

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

1 Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Philippa Hulme and David Freed.

3 Declarations of interest

There was none.

4 Minutes of last meeting

Resolved; That the minutes of the previous meeting on 11th November 2022 be approved as a correct record.

5 Action Tracker

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



There was a discussion around the introduction of pay and display parking at the North Car Park and it was suggested that the relevant officers attend an upcoming meeting to brief the Committee on the Council's view. **ACTION: Transport and Parks Officers to attend a future meeting to brief the Committee on Pay and Display parking.**

6 Matters Arising From the Events and Finance Group

Patrick Despard gave a brief update on the last sub-group meeting highlighting the pressure on the Committee's finances. It was noted that there was a pressure on the Parks service citywide which would have an impact on the Downs Committee.

7 Public Forum

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

1. Susan Carter (In person)

8 Report of the Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge

The Chair noted that as part of the recent governance review, the Downs Committee were looking for an 'ally' organisation to support their work. It had been proposed that the existing organisation, Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge (FODAG), undertake the role as they already work closely with the Committee on preserving and maintaining the Downs.

Michael Bothamley had led on this piece of work alongside FODAG to produce a Memorandum of Understanding which established the aims of the partnership. They would like to have strategic and operational plans and will look to review the existing management plan that was produced in 2006, updated in 2012.

The Chair advised that FODAG were not comfortable with the fundraising and grants element of the partnership at present, but the Committee would like this to be a possibility for the future and will build on their relationship with FODAG.

It was noted that the Memorandum of Understanding would be a working document.

Upon being put to the vote, it was

RESOLVED; That the Committee adopt the Downs Committee (DC) and Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge (FODAG) Memorandum of Understanding (which was unanimous).



9 Protocols

The Chair asked the Legal Services Officer to introduce the report. Key points were as follows.

It was noted that the Downs Act contained stipulations to the Committee but there were also lots of areas of uncertainty. Therefore, it would be beneficial to the Committee to have greater clarity around Governance Arrangements.

The legal team had been working with the Chair on producing the Downs Protocols document which was almost complete. It was noted that there were other documents in the pipeline also, such as finance and budget process protocols, operations protocols, and service level agreements but these were not available yet.

There was one query to raise with the Committee specifically around emergency decision making. It was suggested that where an emergency decision be required outside of Committee meetings, the Chair (Lord Mayor) takes the decision in consultation with the Vice Chair (Master of Society of Merchant Ventures) on behalf of the Committee.

Upon being put to the vote, it was

RESOLVED; That the Committee adopt the Downs Committee Rules of Procedure (which was unanimous).

10 Downs Management Report

The Parks Supervisor briefly introduced the Downs Management Report and key points were as follows:

- Trees had been planted for Queens Jubilee.
- Clear up sessions had been taking place on Saturdays.
- The team had been monitoring one of the goats who had recently been unwell, but it had now received the appropriate treatment.
- There were five bank holidays approaching which could result in busy weekends for the clean-up team.
- There would be unicorn trails over the summer holiday period, similar to the previous Gromit trail.

11 Clifton Down Wildflower Meadow

Councillor Katy Grant provided a brief update on the Clifton Down wildflower meadow and it was noted that lots of work had taken place since the Committee approved the project in October 2022. There had



been support from Community groups and volunteers, and school children had been involved in spreading seed for the meadow.

It had been suggested that a sign is created to inform people on what is going on with the meadow and colleagues wanted to seek permission from the Committee to proceed with this proposal. It was suggested that the sign is educational with wildlife information, and it could also display information from Bristol West Climate Action, perhaps with a link to their website.

The Committee discussed the proposal and agreed that a temporary sign would be useful to inform people of the meadow, but a more permanent interpretation board would need to be discussed further. Members noted the importance of consistency with the other interpretation boards in the area and suggested that it could include link to the Downs Committee, perhaps with a QR code to the Downs Committee website.

The Chair thanked Councillor Grant for her work on the project.

12 Downs Education Report

The Chair introduced Anna Stevens, the new Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project Manager to the Committee. The Learning & Engagement Officer for the project and the Council's Nature Conservation Officer presented the report and briefly highlighted key points. Discussion points were as follows:

- Avon Gorge conservation works had been carried out over the winter removing native plants from the gorge. Some trees had to be removed due to ash dieback disease.
- The University botanical gardens had planted a rare species which is found naturally in the Gorge.
- There was an ambition to expand the education programme to bring in different age ranges.
- Councillor Townsend asked about the Education and Engagement Strategy and was advised that this would be updated in due course.
- Members would like to see engagement with disadvantaged children and children in care included in the strategy and CT suggested that AS meets with education colleagues at the Council.

ACTION: CT and AS to discuss engagement with disadvantaged children for the Education and Engagement Strategy.

13 Events Report

It was noted that the Events Officer has given apologies for this meeting, so the Site Permissions Officer gave a brief events update.

- It was noted that Forwards Festival had adjusted the event dates from Saturday 2nd and Sunday 3rd September to Friday 1st and Saturday 2nd September.



- There would be a total of three unicorns on the Downs for the unicorn trail.
- The team were working to bring more events to the Downs, but nothing had coming through at present.

14 Finance Report

The Finance Officer introduced the report and highlighted that there was a budget pressure of £103k which was a concern. Maintenance costs remained high which needed to be reviewed and income could be lower due to the reduced number of events in 2023.

Members raised concerns around the impact of cuts to services in the parks department which could happen as a result of reviewing the maintenance costs.

Members were unclear on the budget expectations for the Committee and how much of the costs would be covered by the Council's Parks department. The Chair suggested that this be discussed with the new Chief Executive to get a better understanding of the expectations.

ACTION: POR to meet with the Chief Executive and Cabinet Member for Finance, Governance & Performance to discuss budget expectations for the Downs Committee and bring an update to the next meeting.

15 Task and Finish Group - Buildings, Assets and Infrastructure

The Chair provided a brief update on the Buildings, Assets, and Infrastructure Task & Finish group.

The group were looking at the condition of changing rooms on the Downs and David Freed was leading on this piece of work to try and understand the options for the building as without this, it would be difficult to look for funding. It was suggested that there be an architect's competition or that the Committee seek advice from developers on potential options. The group aims to report back to the Committee meeting in June with some proposals.

16 Verbal Updates - Secretary of State's ruling re Café and Downs Manager Post

The Chair asked the Legal services Officer to provide an update on the Sea Walls Café.

Colleagues had met with the Government Department for Homes and Communities to discuss options but were advised that due to the restrictions of the Downs Act, the local authority would have to ask for a Localism Act to delegate from the Downs Act in order to proceed. The Committee would have to seek



permission from Parliament, and it would have to be debated in both the House of Commons and House of Lords which would cost a huge amount of time and money.

The Chair noted that this was an ongoing issue and would like this to be fed into the Committee's work plan for next year.

17 Any Other Business

There was none.

18 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled to be held on Tuesday 25th April, 2pm.

Meeting ended at 3:40pm

CHAIR _____

