

THE DOWNS COMMITTEE

Clifton and Durdham Downs (Bristol) Act 1861

Reply to Amy Rodwell

To : Members of the
Downs Committee

E-mail Amy.rodwell@bristol.gov.uk
Date Monday, 20 February 2023

The Lord Mayor and 6 City Councillors

The Rt. Hon. The Lord Mayor Councillor Paula O'Rourke
Councillor Steve Smith Councillor Jos Clark
Councillor Katy Grant Councillor Philippa Hulme
Councillor Christine Councillor Kye Dudd
Townsend

The Master and 6 Merchant Venturers

Patrick Despard Master of the Society of Merchant Ventures
Jonathon Baker David Freed
Mark Burchfield Mike Bothamley
Robert Bourns Bevis Watts

Dear Member,

You are invited to attend a meeting of the **Downs Committee** to be held at **2.00 pm on Tuesday, 28th February, 2023 at City Hall, College Green, Bristol, BS1 5TR.**

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

Yours sincerely,

AR

Amy Rodwell

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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 5 - 9)

5. Action Tracker (Page 10)

6. Matters Arising From the Events and Finance Group

7. Public Forum

Up to 30 Minutes is permitted for this item.

To consider items of Public Forum sent to the Downs Committee.
Interested parties can submit:

- A written statement of approximately one side A4 no later than 12pm on Monday 27th February.
- A maximum of 2 written questions (which will be answered verbally at the meeting) must be received 3 clear working days prior to the meeting. For this meeting, it means that your question(s) must be received no later than 5pm on Wednesday 22nd February.
- You will have the opportunity to ask one supplementary question arising directly out of each of the original questions or replies.

Please send submissions to Democratic Services at democratic.services@bristol.gov.uk.

Please note that your statements and questions will be sent to Committee Members and published on Council's website prior to meeting.

- 8. Report of the Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge (Pages 11 - 14)**
- 9. Protocols**

To follow
- 10. Downs Management Report (Pages 15 - 16)**
- 11. Clifton Down Wildflower Meadow (Pages 17 - 21)**
- 12. Downs Education Report (Pages 22 - 27)**
- 13. Events Report (Page 28)**
- 14. Finance Report (Pages 29 - 31)**
- 15. Task and Finish Group - Buildings, Assets and Infrastructure**
- 16. Verbal Updates - Secretary of State's ruling re Café and Downs Manager Post**
- 17. Any Other Business**
- 18. Date of Next Meeting**

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

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 _____



Agenda Item 5

ACTION TRACKER – FOR DOWNS COMMITTEE 16 January 2022

Date of Meeting	Action Description	Holding Action	Deadline for Completion	Action Taken
28 Jun	Investigate the issue around a resident installing a private driveway that is thought to be on Downs Committee owned land and provide an update at the next Committee meeting.	SS	28 Feb 2023	This issue is currently with the Parks Team and Legal Services. Verbal update to be provided at the Committee meeting on 28 th February.
19 Oct	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.	POR	June 2023	<p>The Parking T&F group met and are considering the following recommendations which need to input from BCC officer Patsy Mellor.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce P&D on the roads on the Downs - limited to 2 hours with a half-hour free option. • <i>Explore opening the North Carpark as a long-stay car park for users of the Downs.</i> • <i>Invite Patsy Mellor to attend the Downs meeting in April to fully discuss the options.</i>
14 Nov	Request a briefing from Bristol Zoo Gardens colleagues on planning application development proposals.	POR/AR	28 Feb 2023	Briefing delivered on 12 th January 2023.
14 Nov	Update Downs web page overview section to include a map of the Downs.	BS	28 Feb 2023	Update to be provided at the meeting on 28 Feb.
14 Nov	Circulate the Downs Wildlife Project Education Programme's Development Plan and provide list of schools who engage.	AR	28 Feb 2023	Complete.
14 Nov	Provide a further briefing for Committee Members on the gas pipeline works at the next Committee meeting.	BS	28 Feb 2023	Update to be provided at the meeting on 28 Feb.

Downs Committee (DC) and Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge (FODAG)

Memorandum of Understanding

Background

Downs Vision: An open downland that is protected forever for the wellbeing and enjoyment of the people of Bristol.

Downs History: The Downs consists of 412 acres of common land in north Bristol. It is governed by an act of Parliament dating from 1861 (the Clifton & Durdham Downs (Bristol) Act 1861 (“Downs Act”)) when the two landowners (Bristol Corporation and the Society of Merchant Venturers) combined their land to create an open space for the people of Bristol. The Act established the DC to manage and maintain the Downs. The DC is made up of equal numbers of representatives from both landowners, chaired by the Lord Mayor of Bristol. The DC is an independent body, not part of the Council or of the Merchant Venturers.

Downs Principles:

The DC has adopted the following six principles to guide it in the discharge of its powers and responsibilities under the Downs Act.

Principle 1 – Space for recreation: Under the Downs Act the Downs is a “place of public resort and recreation” for all of the people of Bristol. This includes exercise, social activities and use for health and wellbeing. The DC will always give great weight to this fundamental role in its decision making.

Principle 2 – Space for nature conservation: The Downs also has a critical role as an open green space for nature conservation, clean air and education in the context of declared climate and ecological emergencies. The DC will always give great weight to this role in decision making.

Principle 3 – Funding: The Downs Act places on Bristol City Council (“BCC”) the responsibility to provide funding for the maintenance of the Downs and the Council accepts this role within reasonable limits. However, the ambition of the DC is to support BCC in saving public money by raising revenue to fund the maintenance of the Downs. BCC may act as custodian of Downs funds, but these will always be ring-fenced under the management of the DC (the DC should make detailed arrangements with the Council regarding the management of Downs funds). The DC will seek to raise funds from as many diverse sources as possible which are compatible with these principles and will engage with stakeholders in developing new income sources.

Principle 4 – Events: Events held on the Downs are an important part of its fundamental recreational purpose as well as a way of generating funds. The DC will organise an annual programme of events which fulfils these aims and which provides for as wide an audience as possible, including small and culturally diverse events. This must always be balanced with the other fundamental purpose of conservation. It must also recognise that temporarily restricting access to parts of the Downs for events has an impact upon other recreational uses. Events can also cause disruption to neighbours and other users of the space. The DC will always be mindful of these impacts when arranging the events programme, and in particular must ensure that the significant majority of the Downs remains fully accessible to the public for a significant majority of the time.

The DC works with BCC's licencing and site permissions teams to manage the process of authorising events on the Downs.

Principle 5 – Buildings and infrastructure: The DC will not sanction any development which fundamentally alters the character of the Downs as an open green space, or which harms the fundamental objectives described in these principles. The Downs is protected from development under the Downs Act and general planning law and nothing in this document changes or outweighs those statutory protections.

Public highways on the Downs are the responsibility of the Highways Authority (BCC). The DC has no jurisdiction over them.

There are existing buildings and other infrastructure (paths, sports and play equipment etc) on the Downs, and developments will focus primarily on repairing, updating or where necessary replacing these existing items in a way which is compatible with these principles. Any proposal will be resisted unless there is a strong case that it supports these principles.

Principle 6 – Openness and involvement: the management of the Downs should be as open and transparent as possible. Under the Downs Act the responsibility and authority for decision-making rests ultimately with the DC. The DC will keep its practices and structures under review to ensure that those who live, work, or operate on and around the Downs and the wider public have the best opportunities to understand, contribute to and challenge the decision-making process. Decisions will be taken in public unless there are legal or commercial reasons for information to be withheld.

FODAG Aims:

- monitor, work with and influence the DC, BCC and all those involved in the management, maintenance and improvement of the Downs and the Gorge
- protect and enhance the Downs and the Gorge for the benefit of both all its legitimate users and its wildlife
- consult with, and represent, the views and aspirations of all legitimate users.

FODAG Activities: restoration projects, conservation and education; a programme of talks, walks and events; volunteer programmes such as wildlife monitoring and deep litter clean-ups; publication of quarterly newsletter including reports on activities, articles to inform, provoke and entertain and views from members.

Operative Provisions

DC will

- exercise its powers and carry out its statutory duties under the Clifton & Durdham Downs (Bristol) Act 1861 for the management of the Downs and subject thereto will
- recognise FODAG as the key/principal community liaison group for the Downs, bearing in mind FODAG's commitment to the DC's Downs Principles, large and settled membership, history of voluntary work on the Downs and long and productive relationship with DC
- meet FODAG to consider issues and concerns raised by FODAG and the wider stakeholder community at least twice a year and until such arrangements are changed four times a year through the medium of the new Advisory Committee¹ (see attached organogram and calendar)²
- seek the support of FODAG in any consultation exercise that is required with local groups and stakeholders
- develop a five-year Strategy for the Downs following consultation with FODAG and, through FODAG, all other major stakeholders
- periodically review the Downs Management Plan, in consultation with FODAG (and AGDLWWP) and, through FODAG, all other major stakeholders
- develop a three-year Programme of Works for the delivery by Bristol City Council (BCC) of the five-year Strategy, including capital works and major outreach programmes, informed by FODAG's consultation responses and what is in the best interests of the Downs, and set out the levels of funding that may be required to deliver each
- adopt annual business plans for the delivery by BCC of the five-year Strategy and three-year Programme of Works for the Downs, in accordance with the Downs Management Plan, BCC being responsible for:
 - maintenance of the Downs
 - organising/licensing events on the Downs
 - setting tariffs for use of the Downs by third parties
 - production of annual budget for approval of DC
 - implementation of budget, informing DC of variations
 - regular reporting to DC on how the implementation of strategy is progressing
 - provision of staff function for the running of the Downs (e.g., legal and secretariat)
 - settling any annual shortfall in the costs of running the Downs.

FODAG will

- be the principal liaison group for all those local parties with a legitimate interest in the Downs, for the benefit of the Downs (this will be in addition to the formal consultations run by DC from time to time)
- establish a mechanism for consulting with all local residents' groups, and other interested stakeholders
- provide comments on the 5-year Strategy, 3-year Programme of Works and Downs Management Plan, having consulted with all stakeholders
- comment on the business plan for the following year and raise issues or areas of concern in good time

¹ Name of Advisory Committee is under review

² To follow

- provide volunteers to support the maintenance and improvements on the Downs.

Joint Agreements

1. The operation of this MOU will be reviewed by the parties after two years of operation.
2. Agreed copies of the five-year Strategy, three-year Programme of Works and Downs Management Plan will be signed by the parties to evidence that they are the current up to date versions.
3. The Advisory Committee will be clerked by BCC.
4. The parties will develop systems for the mutual flow of information relating to all aspects of Downs management.

Downs Management Report – Downs Committee, 28th Feb 2023

So, with the delay to this meeting from January, here we are at Springtime now !

Summing up the winter scrub works, the projects carried out this winter were as follows,

CLIFTON OBSERVATORY HILL

Small compartment of self-seeded Ash and Sycamore growing out of a large patch of Bramble. Causing us increasing nuisance pruning issues plus acting as a litter trap. Also growing out and over the existing cliff top hedge line causing a tunnel effect. Removed in November, reinstatement back to grass ongoing, wide ranging views of the Avon Gorge and bridge restored.

DURDHAM DOWNS TREE AVENUE

Members will be aware of the avenue of Beech trees that stretch across Durdham Down from Ladies Mile to Sneyd Park. Over a number of years scrub ground cover has started to build up beneath the canopies where mowing has been infrequent. Unchecked this scrub has begun to grow together into bigger compartments, and we are losing the visual effect and historic landscape characteristic of the avenue feature. Across this Winter we have removed all the scrub and small self-seeded trees to restore the far reaching sight lines and thus the important landscape feature of this part of the Downs.

CLIFTON DOWNS, BRIDGE RD

Self-seeded Field Maple and Sycamore growing on top of the rock face approaching Clifton Suspension Bridge on Bridge Rd. Removed in January, preventing a maintenance issue for the pedestrian footpath below getting worse and opened up superb views of the bridge on the Clifton side that had been lost.

BRIDGE VALLEY RD

The annual de vegetation of the rock slopes above the highway took place again this Winter. As usual across 3 consecutive Sundays in January and February. In addition to this, the road being closed allowed us the time and space to carry out some Evergreen Oak removal from an important patch of rock face housing a group of rare Whitebeams identified by resident Avon Gorge botanist Libby Houston.

TREE PLANTING

In addition to the new trees planted into the spaces on the Downs where trees have died or have had to be taken down due to safety issues, my team carried out the planting requests from the Downs Committee that were suggested last year. A ring of 5 Field Maples have been planted at the end of the lead workings area of Clifton Down and a single English Oak has been planted on the Promenade in line with the other 2 commemorative Oaks in this area.

4 new memorial benches have been sold and installed this winter generating income.

Around December/January time Downs football suffered from a few cancellations due to waterlogging and frozen ground. We incorporated sand into the ground allied with chaining and spiking and with help from improved weather we seem to have got back on track now. Bristol University Intramural have returned in late January, so we'll work hard to provide pitches twice a week from here to the end of the season.

Preparations have been ongoing and are still ongoing up until the arrival of Funderworld onto the water tower site in March. Members will be well aware of the difficulties in getting this heavily damaged site fit for events. But due to our work I am happy to say that it's in a decent state and ready for events this year.

Ongoing daily duties around litter, Goats, locking and unlocking facilities etc carries on apace. My thanks to FODAG volunteers for Downs deep litter clearance sessions, dead hedge restorations and extra Goat monitoring provision over the Christmas period.

As we move into Spring and early Summer now, with the associated 5 ! BANK HOLIDAYS !! let's see what 2023 brings.

Proposal to the Downs Committee – update February 2023

Hay meadow creation on Clifton Downs/ restoration of former Zoo car park beside the Ladies Mile Road

Site overview (0.58 hectares)



Current status

The former zoo car-parking area is a flat area adjacent to and southeast of the Ladies Mile Road on the Downs. (What3Words: <https://w3w.co/diner.boats.rated> - Google- <https://www.google.com/maps/dir/?api=1&destination=51.465246,-2.625585>)

The area under discussion is an uneven sward with frequent upright brome and less frequent perennial ryegrass and red fescue interspersed with smaller patches of lower grassland. There is compaction and some bare patches caused by the several years of parking cars, and possibly also by several incidents of illegal car rally behaviour on summer evenings during 2021, involving multiple vehicles racing and turning at speed on the area.

A vegetation monitoring survey (attached) indicates that the grassland in the area continues to be a nature conservation value due to the presence of several plant species characteristic of limestone grassland. The grassland in the area has stabilised, retaining ecological interest but showing some evidence of damage.

The Bristol City Council team (Becky Belfin, Ben Skuse, Rosie Jackson) and WBCA ecologists visited the site in late 2022. It was agreed that restoration would be valuable in this area, for several outcomes:

- 1) To strengthen the biodiversity and ecological value of the site after several years of being used as a temporary car park
- 2) To provide WBCA volunteers the opportunity to mobilise and learn about this special environment
- 3) To provide a number of school children with the opportunity to learn about grass meadows and their creation/maintenance
- 4) To decrease the likelihood of repeated car rally activities on the spot, as the area will be less inviting if covered in relatively long hay meadow grass

Progress so far

Avon Wildlife Trust specialists have selected a seed mix (St Catherine Mixture EM18) which is approved by the Council team and entirely consistent with the native flora in the Avon Gorge and on the Downs. This has been chilled for five weeks, a pre-requisite for germination. Ben Skuse has organised for the council to break up/de-compact the ground with machinery in the last two weeks of February. On Friday 3rd March at 11 a.m., Dan Geerah from WBCA is leading a group of 20 volunteers from Stride Treglown <http://stridetreglown.com> for a morning of work on the site, scarifying and raking by hand. This will ready the area for seeds.

In the early afternoon of the same day, two school groups of 10 pupils each (20 in total), organised by Katy Grant, will come to the site to learn about the purpose and outcomes of a hay meadow/wildflower meadow, and how sowing appropriate seeds will lead to a restored habitat on the Downs, supportive of pollinators and other small wildlife. Dan Geerah and Katy Grant have done the Council Health and Safety training and are able to manage these groups, alongside teachers from the schools.

Thereafter, during the summer of 2023, seed could be collected by hand for growing plug plants which could be planted out the following year by volunteers/school children. There will be a cost for someone to oversee this and look after the developing plants. We propose to do this in collaboration with the University of Bristol Botanical Garden, who are a partner in the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project, or with Grow Wilder, or through the BCC plant nursery.

Sponsorship has been provided by the Clifton Business Improvement District (BID) and by Stride Treglown.

Asks of the Downs Committee:

- 1) WBCA would like to put up temporary signs while the volunteers are working on 3rd March, explaining what is happening and for what purpose. We would want Downs Committee permission for this. The temporary signs would be small and very short-term:

Work is in progress to establish a wildflower meadow here. Want to get involved?

QR CODE (sign) / QR CODE (Donate)

Logos: WBCA, Stride Treglown, The Clifton Business Improvement District (BID), Bristol City Council, Downs Committee

- 2) Thereafter they would like approval for longer-term signs explaining for all Downs users what is happening and what the advantages of the meadow will be. We would want Downs Committee permission for this, as well as any guidance on branding and style.

The sign would be A2 in size, and have the following information on it:

Welcome to the Downs Wildflower Meadow

This site used to be used as the overflow car park for Bristol Zoo, but since its closure in late 2022, Bristol City Council and The Downs Committee both saw an exciting opportunity to restore the area into a wildflower meadow; benefiting pollinators important to our eco-structure, such as bees and butterflies, as well as visitors to the Downs.

From February 2023, a group of volunteers from West Bristol Climate Action (WBCA) are working closely with the Downs Committee and the Council - Interested in joining in?

QR CODE (sign) / QR CODE (Donate)

It is a process that will take several years, yet the local wildlife will start to benefit almost immediately.

This site is the third in a series of wildflower meadows that West Bristol Climate Action have created, with the others to be found on Clifton Hill Bank (outside the Nuffield Hospital), and the banks opposite the Old Zoo entrance.

{INSERT MAP}

A special site

This site is within 500 metres of the Avon Gorge, a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and therefore the seeds that we chose had to be native and local (this reduces the risk of “invasive” species accessing the gorge to threaten existing flora). The seeds here are from a limestone grassland near Bath, and Grow Wilder (Avon Wildlife Trust).

[more info needed on the downs?]

What will happen on the site

To give the wildflowers a helping hand to get started on this site, the site will only be cut once or twice a year, and the grass cuttings will be removed so that they don't re-fertilise the soil. A less fertile soil favours wildflowers to grow instead of the coarse grass you are familiar with seeing here.

Over time, you'll begin to notice different species of flowers come and go at different times of the year. We've sown over 80 species of native flowers so far, and each prefers different times of year to bloom and takes different amounts of time to establish.

Do you want more wildflowers?

Do you own a garden, or want to help a local area get a meadow? If so, we hope you'll copy what you see and help turn Bristol into a giant mosaic nature reserve. More information – including how to make a meadow or floral lawn in your garden, and how to volunteer to help – can be found on our website at www.tinyurl.com/cliftonmeadowinfo.



Logos to include:

West Bristol Climate Action, Stride Treglown, Business Improvement District (Clifton), Bristol City Council, Avon Wildlife Trust Logos, Downs Committee

CCA orange: RGB 242/101/34 or hex #F26522

Typefaces: Lato, Permanent Marker

WBCA green: RGB 108/184/58 or hex #6cb83a

Typeface: Lato

Zoo Banks - grassland restoration – February 2023 update

Site overview (Size: ~0.12 ha)



Progress to date

This is an area of grassy open land between the road and the trees, on the edge of the Downs, opposite the main entrance to the former Bristol Zoo Gardens site. The main areas of the banks are sunny, and free-draining, and a quick survey shows that the bank is already fairly species-rich (with indicators of chalk soils such as ladies' bedstraw, salad burnet and kidney vetch). There is already a good population of yellow rattle. Other species seen; ribwort plantain, ragwort, birdsfoot trefoil.

However, where the banks become steep and fall away to the road, the BCC cut and collect machinery are unable to get in, and as a result, the arisings are usually left on site. This has meant an increase in nutrient level, and a reduction in the grass/flora diversity of the site. In September 2022, the Downs Committee gave permission for improvement of these sites, and some seeding of native wildflower species in the area.

During November and December, volunteers spent three days raking off thatch and arisings left from earlier mowing, and removed these. Avon Wildlife Trust supported with suitable seed mix, and in December, these were scattered. Currently the site is not roped off or signed, but WBCA would like to put up a sign here to indicate to visitors what is going on at the site. Costs for the signage will be covered by WBCA and its sponsors.

Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project Annual Report 2022

Officers Presenting Report: Rosie Jackson Nature Conservation Officer and Vanessa Adnitt, Avon Gorge and Downs learning and engagement officer.

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, 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 (FOD+AG).

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 will continue to focus on the removal of scrub and invasive species. These works are essential in order to protect and restore the areas of species-rich grassland and the rare species found on the rocky limestone outcrops. A drone survey is planned to be carried out by the Council this winter. The footage will provide views of the important habitats and will also help us to monitor changes in scrub levels and inform future management.

Works are scheduled in January/February 2023 to remove ash trees infected with ash dieback disease, which pose a heightened risk to highway users along Bridge Valley Road. The working area has been reviewed with no rare habitats or species to be impacted by these works. The removed trees will be replaced by natural regeneration from surrounding mixed species broadleaf woodland.



In the Gully, the herd of four Bagot and four Kashmir goats are keeping the scrub regrowth under control, with continued monitoring from the Council's Downs' team and the Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge (FOD+AG). The University of Bristol Botanic Garden will be carrying out planting of honewort in the Gully this winter. The plants have been grown from seed collected from the existing Gully population. Honewort is a nationally rare plant, and the Avon Gorge is the northernmost place it grows. This plant requires open limestone sites and will therefore benefit from the goat grazing.

On the Downs, implementation of the Scrub Management Plan has continued for its eighth year and is contributing to the ongoing restoration of the wildflower meadows. Councillor Katy Grant has been working with the Council, the West Bristol Climate Action Group and Avon Wildlife Trust to enhance areas of grassland on 'Zoo Banks' and the former Bristol Zoo overflow car park. They are planning to enhance these areas using wildflower seed of local provenance. Volunteers will help to prepare the ground and rake off arisings when the site is cut.

A student from the University of Bristol has now completed their research on the autumn lady's-tresses and bee orchid populations within an area of calcareous grassland on the

Downs. These species were found to have clustered distributions and showed spatial segregation, which allows these species to co-exist. The study highlights the symbiotic relationship between orchids and mycorrhizal fungi, which could act as a limiter to their local distribution along with other habitat and soil characteristics. The researcher also recorded human disturbance on the grassland and suggested increasing the height of the dead-wood barriers.

Silky Wave Moth Survey

The Avon Gorge is the only English site for the silky wave moth. Since 2011, Bristol Zoological Society has carried out annual surveys throughout the moth's flight season. This year, the presence of silky wave moths was confirmed at 12 out of the 13 sites surveyed. The total peak count was 202 moths, which was lower than the 2021 count and considerably lower than the high counts in 2019 and 2020 and therefore more in line with counts from 2013-18. Silky wave numbers this year indicate that the current habitat management regime for this species may need to be reviewed given the recent moth declines; however, it should be noted that moth populations can experience cyclical changes, which may be affected by other environmental factors, such as weather patterns.

The Education and Community Engagement Programme

Overall 3,254 people took part in one of our events, activities or educational visits in 2022.

Events Programme

We ran a larger number of events in 2022 following a couple of years with a much diminished programme due to Covid. **147 people** attended **eight walks** including, 'Gorge-ous spring plants', 'Owl prowls on the Downs', 'Spiders of the Avon Gorge'; a bat and moth night and 'Trees in winter on the Downs'.

We also ran **three talks** attended by **116 people** entitled, 'A year in the life of birdsong' (based on recordings made on the Downs by Timothy Dowling during lock-down), 'Butterfly Britain' and 'Eight-legged wonders' (about spiders).

40 people took part in **four courses**: 'Learning birdsong on the Downs', 'Spring on the Downs in batik', 'Writing the Downs', and 'Identifying birds on the Downs in autumn'.



"Absolutely superb day in every way! Thank you so much to Ed and all of you who made it such a lovely experience. I genuinely feel I'll be out & about with different ears (& knowledge) now, especially listening out for those magical little goldcrests! It was a great group too, really enjoyed being able to share with fellow aspiring bird nerds. Fingers crossed for a Spring reunion!"
Identifying birds on the Downs in autumn.

We held **three children's and family** events attended by **68 children and adults** including a **Gorge-ous goats family** walk. Unfortunately, our spring half term children's event was cancelled due to a lack of bookings, but the 'Awesome owls' half term event was fully booked.



Formal Education Sessions

Primary schools

In 2022 we taught **1,422 primary school pupils** in **63 education** sessions. Fair Furlong Primary School visited for the first time, as did Kingsweston Special School (the group consisted of 16 children and teenagers with autism). Katie Atkins (who runs Bristol's Nordic4 groups on the Downs), came with six children with autism who Nordic walked their way across the Downs from Stoke Bishop Primary School to take part in a 'Peregrine Falcons and Food Chains' session.



"... I was impressed with how you interacted with the children including those with extra learning needs. There was a really good balance of input and interactive learning and the children really enjoyed the session."

Fair Furlong Primary School

"The highly informed teaching and resources delivered in an energised way, [were] pitched perfectly for Y5 - the children became more engrossed as the session went on."

"Two parents have written emails of effusive thanks and the children loved their time."

Nordic Walking Group Leader, Stoke Bishop Primary

As part of the Downs Commoners' Sheep Grazing event, we delivered a modified version of our 'Hairy Conservationists' session to classes from three schools from different areas of Bristol (including Kingfisher school from Brislington who were visiting the Downs for the first time). During the sessions we talked about the special wildlife of the Avon Gorge and Downs, how the landscape has changed over time, how sheep grazing influenced this, and the conservation role of the goats in the Gully.



Through our evaluation process, we asked the leader of each school group to fill in an education session feedback form. The overall average score for content, presentation, length and level of the sessions was 9.52 out of 10 with 95% of teachers saying that 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 delighted and encouraged by the positive and enthusiastic feedback we received.

Higher education

A group of **11 final year students from South Gloucestershire and Stroud College**, completing their BSc in Zoo Management and Conservation, attended a bird ringing demonstration on the Downs with licensed bird ringer Ed Drewitt. The learning and engagement officer spoke about the wildlife importance of the Avon Gorge and Downs as well as volunteering opportunities.

We led two walks on the Downs with **39 first year undergraduates from the University of the West of England** studying for their BSc Wildlife Ecology and Conservation Science. The module was entitled 'Wildlife and Society'. The learning and engagement officer gave an introductory talk about the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project before taking the students out onto the Downs for a walk to consider the balance between people and recreation, and wildlife conservation.



"Seeing how the Downs have evolved over time brought the area to life and made me hopeful for its future. I can't wait to witness the wildflowers in season! Thank you so much for a fun and informative tour of Bristol's inconspicuous gem." Student on 'Wildlife and Society' walk.

Playschemes and uniformed groups



273 children took part in our playscheme and uniformed group sessions this year including two guide and cub units that visited for the first time. Numbers have increased from 2021 as many of our regular summer playschemes returned after Covid had restricted their willingness to go on trips and limited their transport options. Southmead Development Trust visited twice bringing a different group of young people each time. They were able to fund the transport for one of their trips through a grant from the Commoners of Durdham Down and Durdham Downs Charity. This grant was also used to pay for public transport to allow Totterdown Children's Community Workshop to attend.

"The girls all really enjoyed it and we've had lots of parents email us to let us know how much their daughter enjoyed the session. It was a big hit!"
40th and 44th Bristol Guides

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

Your Downs

As part of the Your Downs partnership with FOD+AG, the Downs supervisor and Walking for Health, we continued our activities designed to widen the range of people who visit the site. As well as the Bridge to Nature project, we co-led two guided walks around the Granny Downs Tree Trail for members of the Long Ashton Horticultural Society and for 'Man Alive!' (a group from Knowle West that supports men suffering from depression or at risk of isolation). Our 'Christmas star party on the Downs' had a high number of bookings and was due to take place at the end of November but was cancelled due to cloud cover.

Bridge to Nature

The Bridge to Nature project was a nature connection, art and wellbeing project for young people (aged 18 – 25) that the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project co-designed and delivered in partnership with Off The Record (OTR), FOD+AG, the National Trust and Forestry England. It was funded by the Co-op Community Fund, the Commoners of Durdham Down and Durdham Downs Charity and a private donor.

The project was relaunched in the spring of 2022 after setbacks in 2020 and 2021 caused by the pandemic. Over eight sessions, the group explored the Avon Gorge, Downs and Leigh Woods through a series of guided walks and nature connection activities. During this time they learnt all about the fascinating wildlife that lives there and gathered ideas for a collaborative piece of street art. The young people took photos and recorded their thoughts and impressions in their sketchbooks using a range of materials and techniques. Using these as inspiration, the young people came up with a design for a mural under the guidance of street artist Damien Jeffery.

Over the course of a weekend at the end of May, the young people painted their stunning mural at the Upfest street art festival. The occasion provided a great opportunity for the AG&D WP staff to talk to members of the public about the special wildlife found in the Avon Gorge and on the Downs, reaching an audience that might not necessarily come into contact with the project otherwise. Festival visitors enjoyed spotting the plants and animals in the mural that were featured on a poster that we



produced to enable them to learn more about the wildlife.

During the weekend we interacted with 853 visitors, but many more would have seen the mural and read the information when we were not present in the evenings. After the event, the mural was transported back to the Zoo where it was included in the 'Zoo and You Legacy Art exhibition' over the summer as part of the Zoo's final farewell activities.



"Bridge to Nature has been a great experience. A chance to connect with our surroundings, and be part of a safe space. I have made friendships and felt inspired. It's made me realise how much I need to be in nature to help my mental health."

Young person from Off the Record

"These walks are the highlight of my week! I'm going to continue walking in nature each week when we're done."

Young person from Off the Record

Community Events and Activities

University of Bristol Welcome Fair on the Downs

In September, our learning and engagement officer ran a stand at the University of Bristol Students' Union Welcome Fair on the Downs. She spoke with 152 students about the wildlife project, events on the Downs and volunteering opportunities, many of whom signed up to find out more.



Publicity and Interpretation

Bridge to Nature

Just before Easter, the education manager and a representative from OTR were interviewed by the BBC online team about the Bridge to Nature project for an online article.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-61111015>

Interpretation Panel Revamp

The majority of our interpretation panels on the Downs were delaminating and in a very poor state of repair, so nine of them were replaced in early September. The panel revamp has been generously funded by the Commoners of Durdham Down and Durdham Downs Charity and by two private donors.



The Brunel Garden

The worn identification labels in the Brunel Garden have been replaced and a new sign support has been installed to replace one that had been broken off. A volunteer has joined the gardener from Bristol Zoological Society to help maintain this garden.

Partnerships

Natural England Walk

Dave Collingbourne (Natural England) and AG&DWP's biodiversity education manager gave a guided walk and talk to 12 staff from Defra's 'Access, Landscapes, Peatland and Soils' team. Dave talked about the wildlife, designations and management of the Avon Gorge and Leigh Woods and the education manager talked about our education and community engagement programme.

"I just wanted to say thank you so much for taking time out to speak to us on Wednesday, we all learned a great deal...especially those of us who live in Bristol! It was amazing to hear how many diverse groups of people have been given access to green space and learned about the area and its wildlife as a result of the Gorge and Downs Project, which has clearly been a fantastic opportunity for people in Bristol."

Email from one of Defra's Senior Policy Advisors

Clifton Suspension Bridge engagement team training

We gave an illustrated lecture, about the wildlife of the Avon Gorge and Downs and the work of the project, to five members of the Clifton Suspension Bridge engagement team. They will share this knowledge with groups visiting the bridge on school trips and guided tours.

Volunteer Support

This year, **33 volunteers** gave **505 hours** of their time over the year for which we are very grateful as we would not be able to operate without their support. New volunteers were recruited who joined our regular volunteers from previous years, including some Bristol Zoo volunteers (who didn't want to transfer across to the Wild Place Project).

New Biodiversity, Engagement and Learning Manager

After 21 years in post, Mandy Leivers left the Avon Gorge and Downs biodiversity education manager role. The learning and engagement officer's contract was extended until the end of the year to provide cover whilst a new manager was being appointed. Under the slightly altered title of Biodiversity Engagement and Learning Manager, Anna Stevens joined the project at the end of December and Vanessa has stayed on as learning and engagement officer to provide continuity.



Funding

We are grateful to the private individuals who made donations during the year and to the following organisations for funding the education programme during 2022: Bristol Zoological Society, Downs Committee, Natural England, the Commoners of Durdham Down and Durdham Downs Charity and the Co-op Community Fund.

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.

Downs Committee - 28th February 2023

Events Update

1. Events that have taken place since last Downs Committee

The only event to have taken place since the last update was the Circus. Ticket sales were challenging due to the cost-of-living crisis. A number of free tickets were given to NHS staff and local residents. Schools and community groups were allowed to use the big top for rehearsals. Feedback from audiences was largely positive and the site permissions team had no serious concerns.

2. Confirmed events 2023

The following events are currently booked for The Downs in 2023, subject to site permissions

March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October
Funderworld Water Tower 31/03/23 - 01/05/23							
			Race for Life Circular Road 25/06/23				
				Bristol Pride Parrys Lane 08/07/23			
						Forwards Festival Circular Road 2/9/23 - 3/9/23	
						Bristol Uni Fayre Parrys Lane 22/09/23	
						Circus Showground 25/09/23 - 15/10/23	

3. Complaints relating to events on the downs

There have been no new complaints through the official council complaints system relating to events on the downs since my last report.



Downs Committee Financial Report

1. Forecast Report for 2022-23 and budget for 2023-24

- 1.1 The report provides a forecast of the financial performance of the Downs for the period 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023.
- 1.2 The budgeted and actual income and expenditure up to period 9, April to mid-January 2023, has been analysed and projections have been made resulting in some potential variances.
- 1.3 A summary of the forecast income and expenditure for 2022-23, prior year comparators and the budget for 2023-24, can be seen in Table 1.
- 1.4 The budget for 2023-24 has remained unchanged from prior years.
- 1.5 The current expectation is that income for 2023-24 will be lower than this financial year, due to changes to a several income generating events. The events team are working with current and new providers to improve the situation.
- 1.6 Expenditure for 2023-24 is expected to be similar to the current financial year, so a review will be required, which will form part of the continuing wider review of Parks Services.

TABLE 1 - Overall Income and Expenditure Summary

	Full Year Budget £	2022/23 Forecast Outturn (P9 - Dec22) £	Variance £	Notes	2023/24 Full Year GROSS Budget £	2021/22 Outturn £	2020/21 Outturn £
Income							
Gross Income	394,750	397,940	3,190	Surplus	394,750	332,600	227,613
Expenditure							
Total Expenditure	(394,750)	(501,565)	(106,815)	Overspend	(394,750)	(637,576)	(465,603)
Transfer from Reserves	0	0	0	Reserves are exhausted	0	97,680	237,990
NET OUTTURN	0	(103,625)	(103,625)	Representing Downs generated net surplus / (deficit)	0	(207,296)	0

- 1.7 Gross income for 2022-23 is currently forecast to be slightly in surplus by £3k, expenditure is forecast to overspend by (£106k), resulting in a net deficit of (£103k). This is very similar to the previous forecast, that reported a net deficit of (£106k). Reserve funding has been exhausted.

- 1.8 The forecast deficit has occurred from the increased demand placed on the Downs from users, requiring out of hours working, a pay award and higher premises related costs – including, buildings R&M, cleaning, and energy costs.
- 1.9 Consideration is required regarding controlling measures to be implemented, to mitigate the pressures and reduce the deficit.
- 1.10 Further information and explanations can be seen in Table 2.



TABLE 2 - Income and Expenditure Analysis

	Full Year Budget £	2022/23 Forecast Outturn (P9 - Dec22) £	Variance £	Notes	2023/24 Full Year GROSS Budget £	2021/22 Outturn £	2020/21 Outturn £
Income							
Fees - Events	285,000	285,190	190	Surplus	310,750	237,214	58,926
Fees - Licensing & Rents	104,750	104,750	0		79,000	82,060	145,891
Fees- Other	5,000	8,000	3,000	Surplus	5,000	13,327	22,796
GROSS Income	394,750	397,940	3,190	Surplus	394,750	332,600	227,613
Expenditure							
Employees	(205,060)	(269,903)	(64,843)	Additional Gardner post, pay award and higher overtime	(205,060)	(258,171)	(197,642)
Premises	(31,240)	(66,684)	(35,444)		(31,240)	(62,798)	(54,460)
* Planned R&M	(2,400)	(2,400)	0	Rock face Inspection	(2,400)	(2,321)	0
* Buildings R&M	(11,300)	(26,283)	(14,983)	Downs compound, toilets and changing rooms	(11,300)	(17,515)	(21,030)
* Grounds Maintenance	0	(703)	(703)		0	0	(1,665)
* Fuel costs	0	(2,500)	(2,500)		0	(1,873)	(797)
* Cleaning Contract	(17,040)	(34,298)	(17,258)	Strict cleaning regime and locking up of toilets with continuing contractor	(17,040)	(40,737)	(29,555)
* Waste Management	(500)	(500)	0	Septic tank	(500)	(352)	(1,412)
Transport	(500)	(500)	0		(500)	(466)	(293)
Supplies and Services	(39,750)	(42,250)	(2,500)		(39,750)	(199,423)	(122,562)
* Equipment & Materials	(11,750)	(14,250)	(2,500)	Seed, soil, uniforms, hire of mobile work platform	(11,750)	(34,335)	(17,402)
* Contribution to Educational trusts	(28,000)	(28,000)	0		(28,000)	0	(27,000)
* Fees & Charges - Legal	0	0	0		0	(160,294)	(62,798)
* Traveller eviction costs	0	0	0		0	(4,794)	(14,545)
* Security Costs	0	0	0		0	0	(818)
Third Party Payments	(5,000)	(5,000)	0	Annual contribution towards managing the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project	(5,000)	(5,000)	(5,440)
Total Expenditure	(281,550)	(384,336)	(102,786)	Overspend	(281,550)	(525,858)	(380,398)
Net Total before Support Services	113,200	13,604	(99,596)		113,200	(193,258)	(152,784)
Support Services	(113,200)	(117,228)	(4,028)		(113,200)	(111,718)	(85,205)
* Events Team	(34,350)	(34,379)	(29)	15% of gross income from event fees (excluding football fees)	(34,350)	(25,580)	(9,575)
* Human Resources	(250)	(250)	0		(250)	(26)	(40)
* ICT	0	0	0		0	(62)	0
* Finance	(4,300)	(4,300)	0		(4,300)	(4,200)	(4,200)
* Democratic Services	(6,000)	(6,000)	0		(6,000)	(5,900)	(5,900)
* Parks Management	(12,700)	(12,700)	0		(12,700)	(12,700)	(12,700)
* Transport	(26,100)	(26,100)	0	Vehicle R&M, fuel, contract hire	(26,100)	(24,859)	(18,583)
* Utility Costs	(2,500)	(6,500)	(4,000)	Electricity, water and sewerage	(2,500)	(5,289)	(2,341)
* Other	(27,000)	(27,000)	0	Parks technical support, asset management and advice	(27,000)	(33,102)	(31,866)
Net Position	0	(103,625)	(103,625)	Overspend	0	(304,976)	(237,990)
Transfer from Reserves	0	0	0	Reserves exhausted	0	97,680	237,990
Net Outturn	0	(103,625)	(103,625)	Net surplus/(deficit)	0	(207,296)	0