

# THE DOWNS COMMITTEE

Clifton and Durdham Downs (Bristol) Act 1861

To: Members of the  
Downs Committee

## **The Lord Mayor and 6 City Councillors**

The Rt. Hon. The Lord Mayor

Councillor Paul Goggin

Councillor Philippa Hulme

Councillor Kye Dudd

Councillor Steve Smith

Councillor Christine

Townsend

Councillor Paula O'Rourke

## **The Master and 6 Merchant Venturers**

Patrick Despard Master of the

Society of Merchant Venturer

Jonathon Baker David Freed

Mike Bothamley

Mark Burchfield

Bevis Watts

Robert Bourns

Dear Member,

You are invited to attend a meeting of the **Downs Committee** to be held at **2.00 pm on Monday, 18th September, 2023 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,

Steve Gregory

### **Democratic Services Section**

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Bristol BS1 9NE

### **Website**

[www.bristol.gov.uk](http://www.bristol.gov.uk)

## **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 - 8)**

**5. Action Tracker (Page 9)**

**6. Matters Arising From the Events and Finance Group (Pages 10 - 12)**

**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 15 September 2023.
- 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 12 September 2023.
- 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](mailto: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. Downs Advisory Panel - Update (Pages 13 - 17)**
- 9. Downs Management report (Page 18)**
- 10. Downs Events Report (Page 19)**
- 11. Downs Finance Report (Pages 20 - 21)**
- 12. Downs Community Engagement Report (Pages 22 - 26)**
- 13. Parking - Task and Finish Group - verbal update**
- 14. Spoil Heap on Observatory Road - verbal update**
- 15. Any Other Business**
- 16. Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting is scheduled to be held at 2pm on 13 November 2023

Steve Gregory, Democratic Services Officer  
Email: [democratic.services@bristol.gov.uk](mailto:democratic.services@bristol.gov.uk)

# THE DOWNS COMMITTEE

## Clifton and Durdham Downs (Bristol) Act 1861

### **DRAFT Minutes of the Downs Committee – 12 June 2023**

**Members present:** Cllr Paul Goggin (Chair), Cllr Kye Dudd, Councillor Philippa Hulme, Cllr Steve Smith, Cllr Christine Townsend, Patrick Despard (Vice-Chair), Jonathan Baker, Mike Bothamley, Robert Bourns, David Freed, Bevis Watts

**Officers present:** Ben Skuse (Area Parks supervisor), Kevin Jay (Principal Accountant), Steve Hunt (Events Officer), Stefan Edwards (Senior Events Officer), Anna Stevens (Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project Manager), Steve Gregory (Democratic Services)

#### **1. Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

#### **2. Apologies for Absence**

- a) Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Jos Clark, Cllr Katy Grant, Cllr Paula O'Rourke, Mark Burchfield.
- b) The Committee was advised that Councillors Jos Clark and Katy Grant would be standing down as members of the Downs Committee in accordance with current membership protocols.

#### **3. Declarations of Interest**

None declared.

#### **4. Minutes of the Last Meeting**

**Resolved - That the minutes of the previous meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2023 be approved as a correct record.**

#### **5. Action Tracker**

The Chair ran through actions from the previous meeting. Further updates were included arising from issues raised during discussion at the meeting.

#### **6. Matters Arising from the Events and Finance Group**

The Minutes of the meeting were noted.

## **7. Downs Advisory Panel**

The Committee was advised that the first meeting of the Downs Advisory Panel (DAP) had met on 9 June 2023. DAP was fully committed to assisting the Downs Committee by working in close partnership around all the many issues that required solutions.

Issues that were most pressing included –

- a) Anti-social behaviour on the Downs and the frequent disregard of bye laws, this could possibly be mitigated by ‘out of hours’ patrols, Downs Committee assist with funding.
- b) Van dwellers on the Downs and the risk factors associated with gas bottles, litter, and waste.
- c) Completion of a Downs Management Plan.

The Chair thanked the DAP representative for the update and added that it was important to include all age ranges for support of the Downs and signposted the Youth Parliament as one potential mechanism for inclusion. In addition, a serving police officer on DAP would be particularly helpful, it was noted that currently a retired police officer was already a member of DAP.

The Chair said that, as a member of Avon Fire Authority, he would approach Fire Officers for their opinion regarding the risk faced by gas bottles on the Downs. Another member felt that the risk of fire from barbeques posed a greater risk of fire on the Downs, and this should be given priority.

Members noted that attempts by FODAG to restrict the sale of mobile barbeques had been made in the past with limited impact but might be worth trying again given the current heatwave being experienced.

## **8. Public Forum**

Public forum questions were received as set out below, the questions would be replied to after the meeting as soon as possible or an update would be provided at the next Downs Committee meeting as applicable.

### **Questions were received from:**

Robert Przemioslo – Questions 1 and 2

David Redgewell – Questions 1 and 2

Gordon Richardson – Questions 1 and 2

Regarding DR (Q1) about facilities on the Downs, changing rooms/toilets, members were advised of the substantial costs associated with any upgrade of approximately £1.5m and this had delayed ambitions to commence work despite a significant contribution from the Football Association. It was noted raising funds was a key role of the proposed Downs Coordinator. There were also significant barriers to achieve improvements because the Downs Act prohibited building on the Downs.

A supplementary question was asked regarding Q1 by DR about the outcome of a meeting with the previous LM and representatives of the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The government was keen to support the changes to the facilities on the Downs, but the meeting failed to garner any progress.

The following public forum statements were received and noted by the Committee.

**Statements received from:**

Statement Number 1: Robert Westlake – Friends of Downs and Avon Gorge

Statement Number 2: Susan Carter – Downs for People

Statement Number 3: David Redgewell (Disability Equalities Forum Trustee + South West Transport Network) and Gordon Richardson (Bristol Disability Equalities Forum).

Regarding Statement No.3 and WECA as Transport Authority not assisting with funding of cycle tracks, the Chair advised that it would be helpful to engage with WECA to progress this.

## **9. Downs Management Report**

The Area Parks Supervisor summarised his report drawing members attention to the key points in particular -

- i. Alternative sites would be considered for the Funder World event as the Water Tower site was left in a poor state after this year's event. Noted that the organisers had contributed towards soil repair costs.
- ii. Works to improve the drainage situation at the Clifton playground had taken place and it was hoped that this would see an improvement in the usual muddy conditions that the playground suffered from across winter.

**RESOLVED – that the Downs Management report be noted.**

## **10. Downs Education Report - Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project**

The Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project Manager gave a detailed summary of the report.

Members welcomed the work that had been done to date in particular the work with children/schools regarding litter.

Members also supported the principle of extending the Project Officer, subject to funding, at a cost of £6,346 from September to December 2023. Discussion took place as to how this might be funded, ideas included approaching Natural England for a grant, or perhaps Forestry England or National Trust. Consideration also be given to approaching Bristol University for student volunteers to support the work of the project.

Work to engage outside cities with the project work would need to be given further consideration regarding funding.

**RESOLVED – That the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project Downs Education report be noted.**

### **11. Events Report**

The Events Officers introduced the report and drew members attention to the confirmed events for 2023 as set out in paragraph 2 of the report.

**RESOLVED – That the Events report be noted.**

### **12. Finance Outturn Report for 2022-23 and 2023-24**

The Finance Officer gave a detailed summary of the report highlighting in particular the £75k deficit that had accrued during 2022/23.

Reasons for the deficit included –

- i. Charges for support services from Bristol City Council, including, employees regarding an agreed pay award and overtime, and higher premises costs relating to buildings repairs & maintenance, cleaning, and energy.
- ii. Loss of two events to be held on the Downs.
- iii. The Finance Officer also gave a detailed summary of the forecast report for 2023-24 highlighting a potential £145k deficit, occurring from out of hours working; pay awards and higher premises costs including, buildings R&M, cleaning, and energy costs. There was also an income pressure from changes to several income generating events and lower parking income.

Members considered options to mitigate financial losses, and these included –

- iv. Looking at the potential to access CIL/S106 money, currently allocated for 'Destination Parks' via BCC Area Committees.
- v. Adopting a more proactive approach to encourage more events on the Downs whilst being mindful of the hidden costs that more events could lead to more reparation work of the grounds. Noted that this would be a significant part of the Downs Coordinator role.
- vi. Work with DAP to consider wider partnerships with other organisations eg insurance companies to generate income streams.

**RESOLVED – That the Finance Outturn Report for 2022-23 and 2023-24 be noted.**

### **13. Any other business**

A suggestion was made to perhaps avoid repetition in public forum statements/Q by providing a FAQ option for particularly significant issues on the Downs, eg the café

development. The Chair pointed out that remit of Dap was one of greater transparency so this might also mitigate duplication.

**14. Date of next meeting**

Monday 18th September, 2pm at City Hall.

**CHAIR**

Meeting ended at 12.40 pm



# Agenda Item 5

## ACTION TRACKER – FOR DOWNS COMMITTEE 12 June 2023

<b>Date of Meeting</b>	<b>Action Description</b>	<b>Holding Action</b>	<b>Deadline for Completion</b>	<b>Action Taken</b>
28 Jun 2022	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	Ongoing and currently with the Parks Team and Legal Services.
28 Feb 2023	Transport and Parks Officers to attend a future meeting to brief the Committee on Pay and Display parking.	POR	25 April 2023	Ongoing
28 Feb 2023	Discuss engagement with disadvantaged children for the Education and Engagement Strategy.	CT/AS	25 April 2023	Ongoing. Chair to provide information on charities that could assist. Schools in deprived neighbourhoods to be contacted.
25 Apr 2023	Share the job description for the Downs Manager with the Committee.	POR	12 June 2023	Ongoing. Final draft done, it was hoped that this would be completed in next two days

**Downs Committee  
Events & Finance Sub-Group Meeting Minutes  
30 August 2023 @ 2pm**

**Members:**

Patrick Despard (Chair)  
Jonathon Baker  
Mike Bothamley  
David Freed  
Councillor Kye Dudd  
Councillor Paula O'Rourke  
Councillor Steve Smith

**Officers:**

Harriet Shannon (City Events & Festivals Manager)  
Steve Hunt (Events Officer)  
Ben Skuse (Parks Supervisor)  
Steve Gregory (Democratic Services Officer)

**Apologies:**

Kevin Jay (Finance Officer)

**1. Minutes of the Previous Meeting on 25 May 2023**

**Resolved – That the Minutes of the meeting held on 25 May 2023 be approved as a correct record.**

Matters arising

Downs North car Park

- i. Noted that Bristol City Council had instructed a KC to give legal advice, but none had been received to date.
- ii. It was suggested that the car park continue in use for contractors to park there as it brought in an important source of income of around £40k pa.
- iii. There was concern that remaining open would be a breach of contract however this would only apply if there was disagreement between the parties.

**It was agreed -**

- 1) That Counsel's advice be sought as soon as possible.**

- 2) That in the meantime Councillor O'Rourke and Michael Bottomley liaise with Downs for People to ensure full inclusivity with the proposal to remain open.  
Action POR/MB
- 3) That an update be provided to the Downs Committee on 18 September 2023.

## 2. Finance Update

Members noted the key points in the financial update paper.

- i. The 2023-24 income budget was currently £49k less than last financial year. Pressures were forecast to occur from changes to several income generating events and lost parking income. Events team to discuss with Finance Officer.
- ii. The events team were working with current and new providers to improve the situation. In the meantime, a temporary income budget of £49k had been added to maintain the same budgets as prior years.
- iii. It was recommended that a review of the service be implemented to mitigate the income losses and reduce expenditure.

It was agreed -

- 1) That a current update of figures be checked and circulated to members asap.  
Action HS
- 2) That Events Team further consider options about fees and relocations having regard to the Downs having higher costs for event users. Explore option of one or two high earning events rather than a number of low earning events.
- 3) That a report be brought to Downs Committee as soon as possible setting out a new finance structure to give confidence to users and wider public, that the budget issue was being addressed.
- 4) The advertising of the new Downs Manager post be chased up as a matter of urgency. Action POR

## 3. Events Update

The Events Officer summarised the key points in the events update paper. In particular the report emphasised disruption that had been experienced regarding the Cancer Research UK's Race for Life event from some travellers being on the downs, causing them to move to a new location. In addition, the event suffered from some anti-social behaviour.

The Pride event went well despite difficult weather conditions. The event also experienced some homophobic and threatening behaviour to security and staff, the police would be approached regarding consideration of mitigation measures for the future.

It was agreed –

**That a letter be sent to the Chief Constable, copying in Pride, about how best the homophobic disruption could be better mitigated at future Pride events.**

**Action: Parks Team**

Members noted that there had been no new complaints through the official council complaints system relating to events on the downs since the last main committee meeting. An informal complaint from Pride had been resolved.

Problems with Bristol Waste not clearing rubbish was noted, Councillor Kye Dudd asked to be kept informed of further occurrences as appropriate.

A proposal to install electric vehicle charging points on the Downs was considered, Steve Hunt offered to pass on power teams contact details if required.

#### **4. Concessions, contracts, and licensing activities on the Downs**

Concessions contracts had been extended until 31st March 2024 in order to put correct administrative processes in place and gain the necessary agreements to proceed.

Licensing activities in parks, to date there had been a failure to gain agreement regarding the charging for these activities so the parks operations team were working to put in place a process which would enable the licensing of activities.

One main contract related to the selling of ice cream on the Downs and was a good income source for the Downs. There was an outstanding issue relating to use of diesel vehicles v electric vehicles. BCC new commercial analyst Greg Want to be invited to comment to/attend the next Downs Committee meeting to update members.

#### **5. Any Other Business**

Downs Manager post, when appointed could lead on a Strategy Review regarding future use of the Downs. Interviews were expected to take place soon and it was suggested that POR/PD/BS could be on the interview panel. Human Resources advice would be sought on this.

**Meeting ended at 15:25**

## **Downs Advisory Panel {DAP}**

### **Report to Downs Committee 18 September 2023**

The Panel met on the 1<sup>st</sup> September at the Zoos Centre for Education.

The Panel has received over thirty communications via the dedicated email and direct telephone line. Predictably most were about ant-social behaviour, the Roma Gypsy situation and van and caravan dwellers. There were also reports of dangerous driving on the Downs, fly tipping, parking on the greensward, inconsiderate joggers, harassment by dogs and one report of youths dressed as Ninja warriors on quad bikes. All were logged and responded to within 48 hours and appropriate advice given.

**The Panel discussed four issues for the Downs committee to consider.**

#### **1 Unauthorised Commercial Activity on the Downs.**

There are currently at least six companies' plus personal trainers advertising on-line outdoor fitness training on Downs land. Currently they operate without any fee for the use of the land and appear to be completely unlicensed, unregulated and unregistered. One company charges £500 per person for a year's membership. Classes of to 60 participants a session have been witnessed.

The argument against fees is that parks are public open spaces and free to use and this is the case for those using the parks for casual play or recreation. However, there is strong case for those wishing to participate in an organised commercial or profitable business {Such as Boot Camps and Personal trainers} to pay an agreed fee, seek permissions and the appropriate licence from the relevant Authority. Other local authorities already have such schemes in place.

It is understood that the City Council Parks Department have considered licencing and fees but is no longer doing so.

Should such a scheme be implemented it would safeguard reputable, qualified and insured training providers and remove cowboy operators providing sub-standard sessions and would balance commercial activity on the Downs. Simply allowing anyone to run a business from the Downs does nothing to safeguard the users of the service or offer anything by way of upkeep of the Downs. A reasonable licence fee would help towards maintenance costs, reinstatement of heavily used areas and avoid the risk to committee should an injury occur.

Research indicates that other Local Authorities are already charging a licence fee with variations between £300 to £1000 per annum Fees are

graduated to reflect the number of participants i.e., a personal trainer operating on a one -to- one basis would pay a reduced fee.

Licence conditions can be imposed on operators to ensure:

- Restricted to specific areas.
- Restrictions on class sizes.
- Ensure that there is no impact on other approved activities or the general public.
- Keeping noise levels to a minimum {especially evenings}
- Ensuring area left clean and tidy.
- Participants to avoid using park benches, Pic-Nic tables, street furniture, and trees etc. as training aids.
- Training providers to provide equipment in good order and repair.

Heavy equipment that could damage the grass surface to be avoided.

- All training providers should have and maintain suitable and appropriate qualifications and accreditation specific to the type of activity and to be suitably insured.
- All trainers to ensure adequate First Aid provision.

The principle for the Downs should be that all training providers who use the Downs for business purposes should do so in a safe and responsible way with due consideration given to land management, conservation and public enjoyment.

**The recommendation / advice from the DAP is that: If the City Council is unable to run such a scheme, then the Downs committee should give due consideration to a fee-paying licencing scheme of its own and should be included as part of the commercial strategy within the Event and Finance team.**

## **2 Out of Hours Security.**

In recent years it has become apparent that anti-social behaviour on the Downs has been steadily increasing. This takes the form of regular incursions from the Traveller community, indiscriminate parking on the greensward, damage from barbecue use, dangerous driving on the Downs, fly tipping and the outfall of the ever-present van and caravan dwellers.

There is a perception amongst the general public that ‘anything goes’ on the Downs and that those responsible for the good governance of the Downs can do nothing to bring about any improvement. These agencies include the Police, the City Council and the Downs committee.

In an attempt to consider redressing this perception FODAG, the Master of the M/V and the Downs supervisor met with Avon and Somerset Police to discuss a way forward. The outcome of the meeting was positive with promises of increased cover from the Police side plus an explanation that much of what is policed on the Downs is unreported. To further improve lines of communication access to individual officer’s email addresses and direct telephone numbers have been obtained. The Police side accepted an invitation to speak to the DAP and agreed to consider speaking at FOD+AG’s AGM. Officers explained how they approached policing the Downs, the limitations and how finite resources are managed and incidents prioritised. Officers expressed a willingness to engage with us to bring about an improved service.

It was further agreed that much better communication and information sharing between all parties would go a long way to correcting possible misinformation. The Police side explained their approach to the management of finite resources, a need to prioritise calls, the legal limitations placed upon them and the agreed policies and procedures currently in place.

This suggests that although we may expect an improved level of service from the Police it is clear that the pressure of day to day policing a large beat will not fully address all the issues of anti-social behaviour and blatant breaches of the Downs bylaws.

Around ten years ago the Downs committee pressed to address budgetary concerns took the decision to discontinue the Downs out of hours security service. The service was provided by Bristol City Council and consisted of a two-person uniformed mobile patrol that covered evening and weekend duties. The team were in radio contact and were able to summon support when required and supply regular reports. Their presence was a visible deterrent and they were able to advise and where necessary enforce bylaw breaches.

The cost of running such a service cannot be ignored but should be balanced against the cost of escalating anti-social behaviour, damage to the Downs themselves and reputational damage to those responsible for good governance.

**The recommendation / advice from the DAP is that: The Downs committee, as the principal power for governance should when funding permits give serious consideration to reinstating the out of hours security service, even if only for the summer months.**

**NB The Committee should note an indication that local residents may be in favour of contributing financially to such a scheme.**

### **3 Downs Parking.**

There are two main issues with vehicles on the Downs where relatively simple action could be taken to improve some localised improvements at reasonable cost.

In considering these issues it was important that any proposed action should not inhibit the free parking and use of the Downs by the great majority of users.

The issues were discussed at some length at the Downs Advisory Panel meeting on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2023. It was recognised that the advice needed to be possible, and effective, and to be of minimum cost.

*Please Note: This does not address the issues of Travellers' encampments or Joy/anti-social driving.*

#### **1. Parking on grassed areas**

It was thought that an improvement in signage, 'No Parking on the Grass' would be a first step to reduce the number of vehicles which park on the grassed areas of the downs.

However, it was recognised that some form of low-level obstruction such as short posts, dead hedging, tree trunks laid horizontally or ditch and bank would probably be required to obtain a major reduction.

Never-the-less however some form of enforcement backed up by a fine would probably also be needed to obtain near 100% compliance.

**The recommendation / advice from the DAP is that: There should be a number of suitable signs displayed in the relevant areas, and that some sort of obstruction was considered and at first the cheap option of leaving long grass at the edges might deter some driving onto the grassed areas.**

#### **2. Long term parked vehicles**

A number of vans, caravans and mobile homes have recently spread from the Parrys Lane end of the Downs to the area of Ladies Mile and Circular Road. It was considered necessary to attempt to reclaim that area before the number became unmanageable.

It was suggested that a total parking ban from 1am until 4am would solve the problem but would also leave the option for those vehicles to join those in the Parrys Lane area. Note - A temporary total ban was in place for 2 days for the latest Downs Event.



It was also thought that, as it would not be necessary to identify arrival times and departure times, it could be enforced with minimum expense by using automatic plate recognition with fines of say £500 and for any without a registration plate to be towed away.

**The recommendation / advice from the DAP is that: An overnight parking ban, 1am – 4am, should be actively sought and imposed on Ladies Mile and Circular Road as soon as possible. The DAP recommendations should be considered by the Task & Finish Group as part of their current deliberations.**

#### **4 Childrens Playground.**

The DAP received a request to resurrect a previous Downs committee decision in 2020 to agree in principle a proposal from Cllr. O'Rourke on behalf of Cllr. Denyer to yield land for the installation of a Childrens play area to be located near the Water Tower. This was previously put to the vote and: *“Resolved unanimously that the Committee expresses a willingness to work with Cllr. Denyer and others on the design, funding and location of a new playground on the Downs.”*

**The recommendation / advice from the DAP is that: The applicant be permitted to further research planning, design and funding issues.**

## Downs Management Report – 18 September 2023

I had a brief look back at the previous report to June's meeting. I was amused to see how I talked about how lovely and lush and green things were at that time of year and to enjoy it as likely the second half of the summer would see the ground become parched with dying yellow grass and fires! Well, that was wrong!

Since then, we have had a very wet July and August, but as ever in the grounds industry this brings both positives and negatives.

Positives, lush, green, healthy grass growth growing thickly over event sites and football surfaces and great results for grass seed germination. The Sea Walls event area will particularly benefit in terms of it standing up well to all the vehicles, staging and footfall.

Negatives, whilst normally we would be thinking about parking the mowers or carrying out the last cut on the grass that has ground to a halt in dry conditions, this year we are still having to mow intensively to keep the grass in check and will have to do so for a few weeks yet.

So, every year is different, and we work flexibly with the conditions that we get. Last year I was looking at some areas of the Downs and wondering if the grass would ever recover, but it has and it does given enough rain, and we have certainly had enough rain!

So into the Autumn. We have our football pitches ready to go for the 23/24 season.

Bristol Downs League, Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> September.

Bristol University, Student Union, Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> September.

In terms of events upcoming, I have been involved with event organisers to make sure sites are ready. We have a new circus operator this year and a new small one-day charity event. It's important for me to pay extra attention to the new operators. Hopefully both of those will go well. Bristol University Welcome fair is an established event now and I have met organisers to work on this year's event at Parry's Lane.

It needs to be reported to the committee that this year has been a particularly difficult one in terms of travellers at the Downs. This then causes some concerns if we have events at the Downs at the same time. I have maintained regular dialogue with the associated BCC officers and event operators and work hard to alleviate concerns.

To end, unfortunately, maybe as a result of last year's drought conditions, we are still seeing losses amongst our tree stock at the Downs. The latest being a large Red Oak outside the mansion house on the Promenade. This is a shame as it was such a prominent and beautiful specimen. Once we have ground out the stump, we can look to plant another tree to replace.

Ben Skuse

Bristol City Council Parks

Area Parks supervisor, Downs, Blaise, and Kingsweston Estates

## Downs Committee – 18<sup>th</sup> September 2023

### Events Update

**1. Events that have taken place since last Downs Committee festival**

Cancer Research’s Race for Life and Pride were both successful events but suffered from problems during their build periods. Forwards festival will have recently happened.

**2. Confirmed events 2023**

This is the events calendar for The Downs in 2023, subject to site permissions. Please note addition of the Safe Haven charity event on the 7<sup>th</sup> October

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 1/9/23 - 2/9/23	
						Bristol Uni Fayre Parrys Lane 22/09/23	
						Circus Extreme 15/09/23 - 08/10/23	Safe Haven 7th October

**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 2023-24

- 1.1 The report provides a forecast of the financial performance of the Downs for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024.
- 1.2 The budgeted and actual income and expenditure up to period 5, April to August 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 2023-24, the change from the budget and prior year comparators, can be seen in Table 1.

TABLE 1 - Overall Income and Expenditure Budget Summary

Budget 2023-24	Full Year GROSS Budget £	2023-24 Forecast (P5 - Aug23) £	Variance £	Notes	2022/23 Outturn £	2021/22 Outturn £	2023-24 Forecast (P2 - May23) £	Movement P2 v P5 £
<b>Income</b>								
Gross Income	394,750	355,150	(39,600)	Deficit	430,170	332,600	341,900	13,250
<b>Expenditure</b>								
Total Expenditure	(394,750)	(498,780)	(104,030)	Overspend	(505,172)	(637,576)	(486,856)	(11,924)
<b>Transfer from Reserves</b>	0	0	0	Reserves are exhausted	0	97,680	0	0
<b>NET OUTTURN</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>(143,630)</b>	<b>(143,630)</b>	<b>Net surplus / (deficit)</b>	<b>(75,002)</b>	<b>(207,296)</b>	<b>(144,956)</b>	<b>1,326</b>

- 1.4 Gross income for 2023-24 is currently forecasted to be in deficit by £40k, expenditure is forecast to overspend by (£104k), resulting in a net deficit of **(£144k)**.
- 1.5 Expenditure pressures are forecast to occur from out of hours working; pay awards and higher premises costs including, buildings R&M, cleaning, and energy costs.
- 1.6 Income pressures are forecast to occur from changes to several income generating events and lower parking income. The events team are working with current and new providers to improve the situation.
- 1.7 Further information, explanations and comparisons to prior years can be found in table 2.

TABLE 2 - Income and Expenditure Budget

Budget 2023-24	Full Year GROSS Budget £	2023-24 Forecast (P5 - Aug23) £	Variance £	Notes	2022/23 Outturn £	2021/22 Outturn £	2023-24 Forecast (P2 - May23) £	Movement P2 v P5 £
<b>Income</b>								
Fees - Events	310,750	257,900	(52,850)	Deficit - reduction in events	284,560	237,214	257,900	0
Fees - Licensing & Rents	79,000	92,250	13,250	Surplus	135,810	82,060	79,000	13,250
Fees- Other	5,000	5,000	0	Breakeven	9,800	13,327	5,000	0
<b>GROSS Income</b>	<b>394,750</b>	<b>355,150</b>	<b>(39,600)</b>	<b>Deficit</b>	<b>430,170</b>	<b>332,600</b>	<b>341,900</b>	<b>13,250</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>								
<b>Employees</b>	<b>(205,060)</b>	<b>(287,792)</b>	<b>(82,732)</b>	Forecast TYD plus 5% inflation - Additional Gardner post, pay award and overtime	<b>(273,515)</b>	<b>(258,171)</b>	<b>(285,335)</b>	<b>(2,456)</b>
<b>Premises</b>	<b>(33,940)</b>	<b>(72,303)</b>	<b>(38,363)</b>		<b>(73,082)</b>	<b>(68,087)</b>	<b>(62,435)</b>	<b>(9,868)</b>
* Planned R&M	0	0	0		0	(2,321)	0	0
* Buildings R&M	(13,700)	(20,200)	(6,500)	Downs compound, toilets and changing rooms	(18,300)	(17,515)	(19,000)	(1,200)
* Grounds Maintenance	0	(11,000)	(11,000)	YTD £10k	(3,335)	0	(2,500)	(8,500)
* Fuel costs	0	(2,000)	(2,000)	YTD £2k	(2,502)	(1,873)	(1,700)	(300)
* Cleaning Contract	(17,040)	(33,603)	(16,563)	Based on YTD invoices - Cleaning & locking up of toilets	(41,909)	(40,737)	(33,735)	132
* Utility Costs	(2,700)	(5,000)	(2,300)	Electricity, water and sewerage	(6,566)	(5,289)	(5,000)	0
* Waste Management	(500)	(500)	0	Septic tank	(470)	(352)	(500)	0
<b>Transport</b>	<b>(26,600)</b>	<b>(26,600)</b>	<b>0</b>	Vehicle R&M, fuel, contract hire	<b>(21,007)</b>	<b>(25,325)</b>	<b>(26,600)</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Supplies and Services</b>	<b>(39,750)</b>	<b>(39,350)</b>	<b>400</b>		<b>(35,975)</b>	<b>(199,423)</b>	<b>(39,750)</b>	<b>400</b>
* Equipment & Materials	(11,750)	(11,350)	400	Seed, soil, uniforms, hire of mobile work platform	(10,363)	(34,335)	(11,750)	400
* Contribution to Educational posts	(28,000)	(28,000)	0		(25,612)	0	(28,000)	0
* Fees & Charges - Legal costs	0	0	0		0	(160,294)	0	0
* Fees & Charges - Eviction costs	0	0	0		0	(4,794)	0	0
* Security Costs	0	0	0		0	0	0	0
<b>Third Party Payments</b>	<b>(5,000)</b>	<b>(5,000)</b>	<b>0</b>	Annual contribution towards managing the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project	<b>(5,000)</b>	<b>(5,000)</b>	<b>(5,000)</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>(310,350)</b>	<b>(431,045)</b>	<b>(120,695)</b>	<b>Overspend</b>	<b>(408,579)</b>	<b>(556,006)</b>	<b>(419,121)</b>	<b>(11,924)</b>
<b>Net Total before Support Services</b>	<b>84,400</b>	<b>(75,895)</b>	<b>(160,295)</b>	<b>Deficit</b>	<b>21,590</b>	<b>(223,406)</b>	<b>(77,221)</b>	<b>1,326</b>
<b>Support Services</b>	<b>(84,400)</b>	<b>(67,735)</b>	<b>16,665</b>		<b>(96,592)</b>	<b>(81,570)</b>	<b>(67,735)</b>	<b>0</b>
* Events Team	(34,350)	(17,685)	16,665	Less events income at the moment - 15% of gross income from event fees (excluding football)	(34,379)	(25,580)	(17,685)	0
* Human Resources	(50)	(50)	0		(57)	(26)	(50)	0
* ICT	0	0	0		0	(62)	0	0
* Finance	(4,300)	(4,300)	0		(4,300)	(4,200)	(4,300)	0
* Democratic Services	(6,000)	(6,000)	0		(5,900)	(5,900)	(6,000)	0
* Parks Management	(12,700)	(12,700)	0		(12,700)	(12,700)	(12,700)	0
* Other	(27,000)	(27,000)	0	Parks technical support, asset management, tree works and advice	(39,257)	(33,102)	(27,000)	0
<b>Net Position</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>(143,630)</b>	<b>(143,630)</b>	<b>Deficit</b>	<b>(75,002)</b>	<b>(304,976)</b>	<b>(144,956)</b>	<b>1,326</b>
<b>Transfer from Reserves</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	Reserves exhausted	<b>0</b>	<b>97,680</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>NET OUTTURN</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>(143,630)</b>	<b>(143,630)</b>	<b>Net surplus/ (deficit)</b>	<b>(75,002)</b>	<b>(207,296)</b>	<b>(144,956)</b>	<b>1,326</b>

## Report for July, August and September 2023 summary of activities of the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife learning and community engagement programme

**Reporting Officer: Anna Stevens Avon Gorge and Downs wildlife biodiversity engagement and learning manager**

In July, August and September we directly engaged with **783** people (as at 7 September) through the learning and community engagement programme. We engaged indirectly at the Sparks installation with an estimated 1500 people per weekday and 2500 per weekend day (Sparks own statistics).

### **Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife (AGDW) events programme July-August**

We have a quieter time in our events programme during the summer months and we ran two Discovery Walks in July and August. **Butterfly Heaven** in conjunction with FoDAG and **Ramble with a Woodland Ranger**, our first foray into demonstrating the landscape approach to conservation in the Avon Gorge, in conjunction with Forestry England. Both these events were fantastic with positive quotes given on feedback forms. In September we ran two further Discovery Walks – **Batty Beauties**, to discover which species of bat we have on the Downs, and **Whitebeam Wonders** which is an in-depth look at the variety of and variation in whitebeam species we have in the Gorge. This second walk is run in conjunction with the University of Bristol's Botanical Gardens.

Participants particularly enjoyed

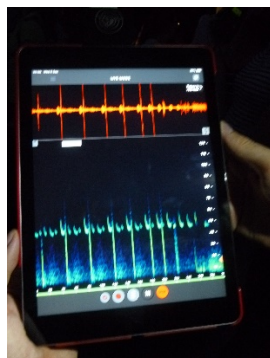
*"..The enthusiasm and knowledge of the leaders. The information provided was interesting and at the right level."*

*"..The obvious passion and enthusiasm of all the leaders - truly inspirational."*

*"..More of the same and similar for us paying adults .. but not to detract from, maybe to better support, great work you're doing with kids and families."*

*"..The balance of areas covered was very good, ranging from identifying individual trees and plants to how the woodland is managed as a whole."*

Our events can be found here <https://avongorge.org.uk/whats-on/> and we welcome the attendance of any Downs Committee members for free.



### **School learning and playscheme sessions**

During this period we engaged with eight different schools and 357 children both on the Downs, and also in-school in the last three weeks of term, as well as 28 brownies. We were able to go into school twice where coming to the Downs was not an option allowing us to outreach in Knowle West and Southville.

We have been very pleased to welcome seven different holiday playschemes to the Downs with several of them bringing different children two or three times over the summer holidays. The schemes are part of the Your Holiday Hub scheme in Bristol funded by the Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) programme providing free food and activities for children who qualify for FSM. It affords children who may not be able to access breakfast or lunch during the summer, good food, along with a variety of experiences and activities. We have worked with schemes from Totterdown, Lawrence Weston, Easton, Oldbury Court (Stapleton/Fishponds), Knowle West, St Werburghs, Eastville and in two cases have visited the scheme in a green space at their site due to lack of transport. Sadly two schemes had to cancel their visit due to lack of their own staff members. Altogether we have worked with 182 children during this period plus their helpers.

We have had very positive feedback from our schools and playschemes this summer:

schools commented:

*"..Our visit was wonderful. The activities were very accessible to the children and they thoroughly enjoyed them. They linked very well with the learning we had already completed in school."*

*"..It was perfect for our children."*

*"..Children really enjoyed it - inspired and want to go back with their families to see the peregrine falcons."*

*"..For our needs, a place for the children to eat lunch under cover in case it rained and the access to toilets was perfect. The time we spent on the Downs provided the children with different natural environments, meadow and woodland."*

playschemes commented:

*"..The leaders are always brilliant!"*

*"..We have brought the children to these sessions for the past few years so knew what to expect, they are always really good and very appreciated."*

*"..the sessions are very appreciated for groups like ours as a charity we are able to take our children who would not necessarily get to access trips through the summer holidays."*

Committee members are welcome to observe any learning session AGDW runs this year in order that they can understand how we operate in the formal education capacity. AGDW will need to seek permission from the education group attending.



AGDW is offering its first paid sessions on the Downs to two private schools in September and is running its first pilot A level session in November (unless another request comes in before this date). The charge for the private school is currently at £8.00 per child and the pilot A level session from South Gloucestershire and Stroud is not being charged.

### **Outreach to schools in areas of deprivation**

Headley Park and Stoke Park primaries were contacted before the summer holidays and have since been contacted again at the beginning of this term, offering in-house assemblies and workshops during the autumn and winter months, to find out more about the nature of Bristol. This is hoped to also lead to their visiting the Downs in 2024 with a variety of year groups. We are meeting Headley Park Primary to discuss ideas and dates with them in the second week of September, and aim to book in an assembly and some workshop sessions in-school. This opportunity will also be used to encourage a visit the Downs to complement their in-school sessions. We wait to hear back from Stoke Park primary and will contact them again once school has settled into the new term.

Knowle Park primary have been contacted this term with the aim of arranging some further after school club sessions in-school.

Action tracker from June 2023; there has as yet been no contact with Cllr Christine Townsend and we welcome any list of schools or charities which are suggested by either Cllr Townsend or the Chair.

### **Outreach**

The project attended the Forwards Festival on the Downs in early September to engage with the general public and directly interacted through activities with 175 people over two days. This was a fantastic outcome and allowed us to talk about the biodiversity on the Downs and in the Gorge with people who may not ordinarily come to the site. We were also able to talk about our upcoming programme for the autumn.

The project attended the Student Welcome Fair on the Downs to engage students into the project through volunteering, as well as push the message about the damage that barbecues and fires do to biodiversity on the Downs.

The project took part in the Euro BioBlitz 2023 at the end of September by running activities from the Learning Hub at the Suspension Bridge. The aim of the BioBlitz is to record as many species as possible over two days in order to build up a picture of biodiversity on the Downs. We run this in conjunction with the Natural History Consortium and iNaturalist.



### **Sparks project**

We have been updating and revamping our installation at Sparks in Broadmead adding colour through crafted dragonflies and flowers as well as Bristol onions. We also replaced the dead whitebeam trees courtesy of the UoB Botanical Gardens. We had a crafting session on site with the general public in August to increase awareness of AGDW and to create leaves and berries for the



whitebeams. Anna met with the Global Goals lead to discuss how workshops will function in the education space and fit in with the other activities on offer. To find out more about Sparks please visit <https://sparksbristol.co.uk/about/>.



### **Nature Works**

The project met with Off the Record Nature Works, a youth mental health charity, in order to plan a series of sessions for young people aged 11-25 in Bristol on the Downs. The aim of this is to produce calming and stress-reducing opportunities for those who may not find them in everyday life. Alongside this, trying new things, gaining new skills and learning ways to relax in the outdoors can be hugely uplifting and provide an invaluable opportunity to improve confidence, self-esteem and resilience. Off the Record and AGDW are still considering how they would best engage this group on the Downs in order that they develop a sense of responsibility, engagement and ownership. Off the Record requested reconvening in September and AGDW is waiting for Off the Record to return from the summer currently.

### **Adoption West and Children in Care**

After an initial very positive meeting with Adoption West where we discussed thoughts and ideas to best help families in the early stages of adoption, this was put on hold as our contact at Adoption West went on sick leave for some time over the summer. She is now back and a plan will be taken forward with her Service Manager.

Katherine Juniper, Senior Education Advocate from the Hope Virtual school thanked us for our offer and declined as this was not timely for them at present. However, Katherine has passed our details through to the Chair of the Bristol Foster Carers' Association (BFCA) as they are in a position to offer events to foster carers and their families at weekends and during holidays.

### **Bird survey**

Our bird survey in conjunction with Bristol Ornithological Club (BOC) continues and in July our survey took place for the second time at Sea Walls, in August at the scrub patches and in September at Zoo Banks and Fairyland. We are now inviting MSc students who are joining us to record on BirdTrack. We hope at some stage to hand over to students.

### **Volunteers**

The volunteers had a fantastic visit to the Vaults courtesy of our strong relationship with the Visitor Centre at the Suspension Bridge. In July, August and September we have had 15 volunteers helping us for a total of approximately 206.5 hours on our events, school and playscheme sessions (as at 7<sup>th</sup> Sept).

### **Social media**

We have been widely sharing our Facebook posts in order to extend our reach to the general public as well as specialised Facebook groups. Facebook views as at 7<sup>th</sup> September: 10,410. We can be found at [www.facebook.com/avongorge/](http://www.facebook.com/avongorge/).

### **Pre-school age sessions**

The first pre-school age sessions with adults begins on September 18<sup>th</sup> and will run on a weekly basis. The current charge is £5.00 per session to provide for direct costs as well as to make a small income for the project.

### **25th Anniversary of AGDW**

Ideas are being considered for some suitable events and activities to celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the project. One of the main plans currently is to completely revamp the Tree Trail at the Observatory and the Promenade. We met with Sarah's Wildlife Projects representatives to discuss this in September as they are kindly offering to donate the cost of the signage which will be needed in order to achieve this revamp. The trail will be linked to AGDW website with activities for children and information for adults. They are currently sourcing a suitable organisation which can produce the types of arboretum sign required to be attached to the trees. Sarah's Wildlife Projects have previously donated to the project through the production of interpretation boards on the Downs.

### **Other**

An AGDW Steering Group meeting took place in July and the current actions of all the partners reported and discussed. This included such topics as the goats in the Gully; the new DAP; the Botanical Gardens' new strategy on civic and global engagement; Natural England's focus on the Avon Gorge woodland and grassland monitoring and the impact of recreation. The role of the AGDW project officer was also discussed.