

# Bristol City Council

## Minutes of the Downs Committee

16 September 2024 at 2.00 pm



### **Members Present:-**

**Councillors:** Rob Bryher, Kye Dudd, Paula O'Rourke, Mike Bothamley, Bevis Watts and Bourns

### **Officers in Attendance:-**

Kevin Jay and Ben Skuse

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

The Vice Chair Mike Bothamley, in the absence of the Lord Mayor, chaired the meeting and welcomed everyone. Introductions were made and safety information was shared.

## **2 Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: Andrew Varney (Chair), Paul Goggin, Caroline Gooch, David Wilcox. SMV members: Mark Burchfield, Fiona Francombe, David Freed. Officers: Harriet Shannon (City Events & Festivals Manager), Steve Hunt (Events Officer).

## **3 Declarations of interest**

None declared.

## **4 Minutes of last meeting**

**Resolved:** That the minutes of the previous meeting on 10 June 2024 be approved as a correct record.

## **5 Action Tracker**



The Chair ran through actions from the previous meeting and further updates were given and included in the Action Tracker.

Regarding item 6 the Finance Manager confirmed that it was not possible to raise a precept on council tax from local residents near the Downs.

## **6 Matters Arising From the Events and Finance Group**

Noted that there were no matters arising from the last Events & Finance Sub Group to be considered by the Downs Committee at today's meeting.

## **7 Public Forum**

### **Questions**

#### **Mark Ashdown – Tree Forum**

##### **Question 1:**

Is the Committee willing to meet with the Bristol Tree Forum and other interested groups to discuss their statutory obligations under the Downs Act and Commons legislation, particularly in relation to the future of the North Car Park?

Answer – this would be considered under agenda item 9.

##### **Question 2:**

If the committee approves the proposal that the North Car Park be reopened for pay and display parking for Downs users, will it make a planning application seeking permission to this?

Answer – the BCC legal representative confirmed that it was anticipated that it would not be the Downs Committee making a planning application as this was the responsibility of the car park operator. The Operator would need to satisfy themselves that this was done including the obtaining of any consents necessary.

### **Statements**

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

1. Thomas Dawkins
2. Simon Robertshaw
3. Chris Jefferies CHIS
4. Susan Carter - DfP
5. Dominic Hogg



Noted that most of the issues raised in the statements would largely be considered under agenda item 9.

A key point arising from the statements made, was that further investigation should be made into achieving Heritage Lottery Funding, it was considered that if successful this could mitigate a lot of the issues raised. Members were advised that there were a number of key stages to go through to obtain this.

**AGREED – That the Head of Natural and Marine Environment, Parks investigate the feasibility of obtaining Heritage Lottery Funding for the Downs and report back preliminary findings to the 18 November 2024, Downs Committee.**

## **8 Downs Advisory Panel report**

The committee received a report from the Downs Advisory Panel noting that since the last meeting of the Downs committee the Panels dedicated email address and phone line had received over fifty contacts.

Members were specifically asked to note the growing concern from Downs near neighbours, visitors, and locals at the apparent lack of progress in dealing with Downs related issues, including bylaw breaches, vehicle dwellers, the travelling community, noise, and frequency of events.

The report contained four items with recommendations which the committee was asked to consider and agree/disagree on –

### **Recommendation 1 - Green Flag Award**

That the Downs committee commits to and supports an application led by the Downs Advisory Panel to recover Green Flag Status for the Downs.

**Agreed.**

### **Recommendation 2 - The Gully Footpath and Steps**

That the Downs committee contacts the Public Rights of Way team and asks that this well used and important feature be reinstated to an acceptable standard as a priority. PROW had indicated that if “contributions could be found it could help prioritise the work”

**Agreed.**

### **Recommendation 3 - Cliff Edge Fencing**



That the Downs committee urgently consider exploring options to extend the height of the cliff edge fence and look to install warning signs and information panels about the help available for those experiencing suicidal thoughts.

**Agreed.**

#### **Recommendation 4 - Corporate Workdays**

That the Downs committee supports a FODAG led initiative to encourage local companies to partake in corporate workdays.

**Agreed.**

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

## **9 Use of North Car Park**

The Committee received a report seeking approval for an agreement to be reached with a commercial provider for the North Car Park to be re-opened for pay and display parking.

With reference to public forum, the legal representative confirmed that the letter from Downs for People had been received and taken fully into consideration.

Regarding the legal position members were informed that section 8 of the County of Avon Act 1982 remained in force which meant that the Council was entitled to use the North Car Park for parking. In particular s.8(1) stated that the parking must be 'in connection therewith' which meant that the parking should only be for the users of the park/open space, of which the parking area formed part.

Commercial providers had expressed an interest in using the land as a pay and display car park for Downs users. With no feasible alternative use, this would provide an annual revenue stream which would contribute towards the upkeep of the Downs.

Whilst signage would be put in place to designate the car park as being for use by users of the Downs only, it was recognised that there was no feasible way to police this and that signage to this effect was the only proportionate measure available in this regard.

On being put to the vote there were seven in favour and one abstention.

**Resolved -**

- 1. That the proposal for the North Car Park to be re-opened for pay and display parking for Downs users, be approved.**



2. That Bristol City Council be authorised to select and enter into of an agreement with a commercial provider in order to give force to resolution 1 above.

### 1 Downs Business Update Report

0

The Committee received a report from the Business Development Manager reviewing the current facilities and possible opportunities on key locations across the Downs. These included –

- a) North Car Park
- b) Downs Pitches
- c) Stoke Road changing rooms.
- d) Sea Walls site
- e) Private Training Operators.
- f) Zoo north car park.
- g) New concession sites.

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

### 1 Downs Management update report

1

The Committee received an update report from the Area Parks Supervisor summarising the work on the Downs for the summer season.

It was emphasised that the summer period had generated a lot of hard work litter picking, emptying bins, and towing waste trailers to the transfer station, the work had been made even more problematic by the frequent presence of the GRT community on the Downs. The Parks team was still dealing with the aftermath of the last encampment in terms of green waste that was dumped, resulting from the many cash in hand garden jobs offered to the occupants whilst they were on the Downs.

A request from a filming company had been received to film at Black Rock Quarry and car park next to the A4 Portway, week commencing 23 September 2024. Members were in favour of the application.

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

### 1 Downs Events Report

2



The committee received an update report from the Events Officer on events that had taken place since the last meeting. Members attention was drawn to the returning and new events for 2024, as set out in paragraph 2 of the report and for 2025 as set out in paragraph 3. Three complaints had been received in relation to the Funfair returning on the Downs.

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

## **1 Downs Finance Report**

**3**

The committee received the Forecast report for 2024-25. Of note was the net deficit had increased by (£22k), from (£165k) to (£187k).

The report also provided the financial outturn performance of the Downs for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025.

The budgeted and actual income and expenditure up to period 4, April to July 2024, had been analysed, resulting in various under and overspend variances.

A summary of the income and expenditure for 2024-25, the change from the budget and prior year comparators, was as set out in Table 1 of the report.

**RESOLVED – That the Forecast report for 2024-25 be noted.**

## **1 Downs Community Engagement report**

**4**

The committee received an update report on the activities of the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife learning and community engagement programme for July and August 2024.

A major concern this summer had been the unchecked behaviour of a number of minority groups of people on the Downs who were causing significant damage to the different habitats. This might in turn mean that the habitats would no longer be able to support all the organisms which currently make up the Downs and Gorge ecosystem.

Members noted the human impact such activities had on the Downs and were supportive of emphasising the environmental/ecological impact this had in future policy documentation.

This was particularly concerning given that the Downs was officially recognised as an integral part of the ecological network of the Avon Gorge (Special Area of Conservation International designation). In addition



to this the Downs itself was a valuable natural space and the largest area of calcareous grassland in the Bristol area.

The report outlined a number of proactive opportunities that could be implemented to mitigate the damage that had occurred too date.

**RESOLVED – That the Downs Community Engagement report be noted.**

**1 Any Other Business**

5

None.

**1 Date of Next Meeting**

6

Monday 18 November 2024, 2 pm at City Hall.

Meeting ended at 4.15 pm

**CHAIR** \_\_\_\_\_

