

# Minutes of the Downs Committee

29 June 2020 at 11.00 am



## Members Present:-

Councillor Jos Clark (Chair), Ross Ancell (Vice-Chair), Councillor Kye Dudd, Councillor Peter Abraham, Councillor Donald Alexander, Councillor Barry Clark, Councillor Christopher Davies, Councillor Paula O'Rourke, Jonathon Baker, Gillian Camm, Simon Cooper, Mary Prior, Peter Rilett and Tim Ross

## Officers in Attendance:-

Jeremy Livitt, Kevin Jay, Amanda Sharpe, Richard Goldthorpe and Jonathan James

### 1. Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed all parties to the remote zoom meeting.

### 2. Membership - Councillor Representatives

The Committee noted that, at the Annual Council meeting on Thursday 21st May 2020, it was agreed that all existing Councillor Representation on Outside Bodies continues for the 2020/21 Municipal Year.

### 3. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Ben Skuse (Downs Maintenance Manager) and Hayley Ash (Jonathan James Head of Parks attending in her place).

### 4. Action Tracker

The Committee noted the Action Tracker for the Downs Committee and that all actions either had been completed or were being reported back to this meeting.

### 5. Minutes of Previous Meetings

The Committee noted the minutes from the meetings at Monday 20<sup>th</sup> January 2020 and Monday 27<sup>th</sup> January 2020.



## **6. Special Downs Committee Meeting - Monday 20th January 2020**

The minutes of this meeting were approved as a correct record.

## **7. Scheduled Downs Committee Meeting - Monday 27th January 2020**

The minutes of this meeting were approved as a correct record subject to the replacement of the reference to the original Planning Application under Agenda Item 15 and its replacement with a reference to the Secretary of State.

## **8. Declarations of interest**

There were no Declarations of Interest.

## **9. Public Forum and Public Participation**

The Committee received Public Forum Statements from the following:

Robert Westlake – Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge  
Susan Carter – Downs for People (including a request to speak)  
Alan Morris – Bristol Walking Alliance  
Stephen Leyland  
Alison Bromilow, Chairman – Redland and Cotham Amenities Society

Susan Carter made the following comments in addressing the Committee:

- Contrary to a recent radio interview from Councillor Don Alexander, there had been no written report that she had seen concerning the car parking licence on the Downs
- The Downs Committee was a public meeting and operated as a statutory body. It also should be subject to the Freedom of Information Act
- The Committee needed to have proper regard to the original purpose of the Downs Act to provide an area of open green space for the people of Bristol. In her view, the provision of car parking on the Downs was contrary to this
- Car parking on the Downs does not prevent car parking taking place near the zoo
- The number of hours permitted for parking on the Downs each year had not always been 60 hours. It had varied in the past

## **10 Matters Arising From the Events and Finance Group - Wednesday 26th February 2020**



The matters arising from the Events and Finance Sub-Group on 26<sup>th</sup> February 2020 were noted.

## **11 Matters Arising From the Movement and Place Sub-Group - Wednesday 26th February 2020**

The matters arising from the Movement and Place Sub-Group on 26<sup>th</sup> February 2020 were noted.

## **12 Future Parks Project Consultation**

Jonathan James (Head of Parks) introduced this report and made the following comments:

- The Bristol Future Parks Project operated to Rethink, Invest and Regenerate in parks across the city
- This project was intended to be a step change in the way parks operated in future
- A partnership would be formed across different sectors improving health and wellbeing for all users
- It was intended to encourage greater use and accessibility and create different funding models
- Funding was a collaborative venture involving the National Trust, the National Lottery Heritage Fund, together with the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government
- The Future Parks Accelerator Programme operated across 80 different Local Authorities in the UK. This was a fast and agile programme for 2 years which had already run for 6 months
- Since parks were not statutory, they had been hit hard by austerity with funding reduced from 6 Million to 2 Million. Attempts were being made to reverse this trend and obtain greater equity of funding. Officers were looking at different commercial opportunities.
- Officers were working with communities organisations and businesses to find a sustainable solution to maintain and improve health and wellbeing for all
- The project had various cross cutting themes including communities, health and wellbeing, biodiversity and nature, enterprise
- A dedicated team had been set up to deliver change by supporting citizens, communities and small organisations to enable them to be part of this change
- The project would secure expert advice to explore new ways of income generation and business opportunities and also invite expressions of interest
- The timeline had been reviewed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and as a result the marketing campaign would not be taking place until February and March 2021 with community events taking place in the meantime
- A pilot project would be taking place between September and December 2020
- Expressions of interest were being sought for any proposed changes in parks and green spaces

In response to questions from Committee Members, the Head of Parks made the following comments:



- A presentation at the National Trust which had recently been attended by some Committee Members was part of the same project. Similarly, the work being carried out by Charlie Bennett, Bristol and Bath Parks Foundation, was also connected to this. The project would look at parks and green spaces across the whole city and consider if there were any commercial opportunities available. Colleagues from Public Health would also be involved and would be subject to a budget. A better idea of the likely opportunities could be made once expressions of interest had been received
- The issue of officer time and capacity would be a challenge. Evaluation and discussions with organisations would be taking place. Support from the Downs Committee would be appreciated
- Any expressions of interest in the Downs would require the involvement of the Site Permissions Team. There could be an issue with capacity due to the limited numbers of staff
- There would be opportunities with income generation requiring close work with communities where needed. The criteria for this would be assessed. It was important not to stifle innovation. There may be opportunities in catering, ice cream van and theatre. As in other parts of the country, work would take place with groups such as the National Trust to develop any new ideas
- No assessment would be made for each individual park of the likely financial opportunities as some would be honeypot sites. The wealth could be spread across the entire estate with an aspiration to get income back to previous levels
- There was no commitment for the Committee for any of the opportunities that arose. Any income generated on the Downs would remain within it
- The process would enable the Downs Committee to be signposted to any external organisation that provided an opportunity to be further investigated

Committee Members made the following comments:

- Whilst this Parks initiative should be welcomed, the Downs Committee had its own initiative and had achieved financial break even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Third party funding would also be welcomed
- An inclusion of the Downs Committee at an early stage in the process was very helpful. The Committee could examine expressions of interest on a case by case basis and was using an existing process. There was no commitment. It could be helpful in bringing to the Committee's attention to something that it had not previously thought of.

The Head of Parks confirmed that a pilot scheme would be operating for the next few months and would test decision-making as well as obtaining clarity on funding arrangements.

**ACTION: Head of Parks to bring a report back to a future meeting.**

### 13 Leisure Loop (Vicky Cracknell and Johnny Wood)

Vicky Cracknell and Johnny Wood gave a presentation to the Committee and made the following points:



- Following the decision to approve the Leisure Loop in principle at the meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2020, a route change had been made at Ivywell Road
- Traffic calming measures were required. These could include a 20mph zone along Circular Road
- The proposed surface was as used by the National Trust in their multi-user trails on 10 of their properties throughout the country
- The Ashton Park Link had been created following work between Greenways and Cycleways by Jon Grimshaw and now provided an example of how a construction could fit into the landscape
- A very productive meeting had taken place with Richard Goldthorpe on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2020 and had provided an insight into developing traffic calming measures on the Circular Road. Whilst this did not require planning permission, it would require a Traffic Regulation Order. The paths would require a Planning Application
- Funding had now been identified through Greenways and Cycleways carrying out work on their routes
- Public consultation would be required to assess local support for a Downs Loop. Discussions were needed with communities, stakeholders and the wider city. The Committee's support was requested prior to doing this.

In response to questions from the Committee, Vicky Cracknell made the following comments:

- The Downs was now busier as more children were cycling on the grass during COVID-19, particularly along the route from Stoke Road to the Sea Walls
- The very early period of the pandemic gave a good example of how the proposed leisure loop could work
- Self-binding aggregate would be used to construct the loop as had been used for the Ashton Park Link. Consultation would be carried out to assess different options for this. However, one option would be to widen the existing path along Ivywell Road and colour it as required with variation along different sections of the loop as required
- Streets 3 would be used to carry out the consultation. Due to COVID-19, there was likely to be less face-to-face work and greater use of a time-limited online survey through the local media and magazines. Consideration would also be given as to how to consult those without access to the internet or smart phones. One approach for these groups of people would be to provide a phone number contact and then send a questionnaire by stamped addressed envelope or conduct a phone interview. Any gaps in the range of stakeholders would be identified at this stage
- The current focus remained on the development phase and obtaining planning permission. Once this was achieved, discussions would take place with large funding bodies such as British Cycling (who operated a scheme called Places To Ride) and Sports England. However, it was acknowledged that some funds were on hold due to COVID-19. It had been made clear that this was not a Bristol City Council project and that therefore BCC would not be funding it
- The key point of the scheme would be to help more people get access to the Downs and therefore the consultation would take this into account. 30% of households in Bristol do not own a car. Provision of greater interpretation and guidance was also important along with making the Downs a welcoming place for people to arrive at by bus



The Committee noted that, since it had supported the scheme in principle, it was reasonable to support the proposed consultation.

**Resolved (unanimously) that the Committee supports public consultation on the proposed scheme.**

**Action: Vicky Cracknell and Johnny Wood (Cycle Sunday)**

#### **14 Downs Maintenance Report (Ben Skuse)**

The Committee noted that Ben Skuse had given his apologies for the meeting and would respond to any questions by the Committee separately outside of the meeting.

Members of the Committee thanked Ben for the hard work he had done maintaining the Downs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### **15 Events Report (Amanda Sharpe)**

Amanda Sharpe introduced this report and made the following comments:

- There had been no events held on the Downs so far in 2020
- All events previously scheduled for July 2020 had been cancelled and none were currently scheduled for August 2020
- Whilst there were two proposed meetings in Late September 2020 (Student Union Welcome Event on 27<sup>th</sup> September 2020 and Downs Circus on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2020), these would only proceed subject to adherence to Government guidance on social distancing to enable them to proceed
- The events team would consult with events organisers when restrictions were eased including proposals for any further events on the Downs in Autumn
- Further detail would be provided at the forthcoming Events and Finance Sub-Group on 10<sup>th</sup> July 2020

The Committee noted this report.

#### **16 Finance Update (Kevin Jay)**

Kevin Jay introduced this report and made the following comments:

- Details of the outturn for 2019/20 were set out
- Income was £350,000 with expenditure of £420,000. There was a small deficit which was covered by previous surpluses



- Details of the 2020/21 projections were set out. The measures caused by the introduction of COVID-19 had made a significant impact. The current estimated deficit of £124,000 was subject to change. Further discussions would take place at the Events and Finance Sub Group on how to improve during the year this projected deficit

The Committee noted this report.

## 17 Enforcement of Byelaws

The clerk advised the Committee that this matter had previously been referred by the Movement and Place Sub-Group for discussion to the Downs Committee in March 2020 but this meeting had been cancelled and therefore it had been deferred to this meeting.

The Committee also noted that Bristol City Council's Legal Section had been approached to confirm if they would be able to carry out some work in this area but had indicated they would require a formal instruction from the Committee with greater detail and would request a charge for this service.

The Vice-Chair and Master (Ross Ancell) drew attention to the criticism the Committee received due to illegal van parking and also waste and barbecues left by some Downs users, including those in illegal encampments. In addition, there were problems with anti social littering on the Downs.

The Committee noted that the public frequently did not understand the mechanisms that were used in enforcing byelaws.

During the discussion, it was noted that the Movement and Place Sub-Group was proposed to be abolished in a later report on the agenda. Therefore, it was suggested that Committee members submit any issues of concern requiring byelaws or relating to the enforcement of existing byelaws. This could then be discussed in more detail at a Task and Finish Group and report back to the main Downs Committee at a future date.

It was agreed that this group would consist of Councillors and Merchant Venturer Representatives to be decided.

**Action: Clerk to write to Committee Members to request suggestions concerning issues requiring byelaws or concerning enforcement of existing byelaws and refer to the Lord Mayor to set up a Task and Finish Group.**

## 18 Delegations - Sub-Groups (Jeremy Livitt)



The Clerk introduced this report. He explained that, since most of the work of the Movement and Place Sub-Group concerning the A4018 and Leisure loop was now completed, it was proposed that this Sub-Group is formally abolished. The Events and Finance Sub-Group would remain unchanged.

Councillor Peter Abraham moved, seconded by Councillor Barry Clark and upon being put to the vote it was

**RESOLVED – that the Movement and Place Sub-Group is abolished.**

**Action: Jeremy Livitt**

## 19 Any Other Business

### Zoo Car Parking Contract

The following comments were made concerning this issue:

- Councillor Don Alexander drew attention to the Public Forum Statement from Susan Carter about his recent radio interview concerning the above issue. He explained to the Committee that the zoo were working on a future trajectory with the zoo to reduce the amount of parking on the Downs. Therefore, any information concerning the agreement to sign the document should be understood in that context
- Councillor Kye Dudd expressed concern that there was no written report on this issue at the meeting even if it was held in exempt session due to it containing commercially sensitive information. Whilst in an ideal world, there would be no parking on the Downs, the reduction in finance for the Downs Committee meant that the financial interest of the Downs needed to be looked after in order to ensure it was sustainable
- Councillor Peter Abraham expressed support for Councillor Don Alexander's views. He referred to recent e-mail correspondence between him and Lucy Fleming in Democratic Services which appeared to confirm that there was no record of any formal decision on this issue having been made at Committee. He expressed concern that a decision had been made in a way that was unclear and requested that assurances be given in future that decisions of this nature would be taken in the appropriate way. He noted that if there was commercial sensitivity, a report could be held in exempt session
- Tim Ross expressed concern that this discussion was being held in public and not in a separate private informal discussion as he was originally advised. He confirmed that a decision had been made at the Downs Committee meeting at 1<sup>st</sup> July 2019 and that this had been minuted. However, as the item had been held in exempt session, there was no record of the decision and this may have caused confusion. He pointed out that a detailed report had been presented to this Committee meeting and to the subsequent Events and Finance Sub-Group where details were also recorded.





The Lord Mayor stated that clarity would need to be obtained from officers on the agendas and minutes that led to the decision on this item.

## **20 Date of Next Meeting**

The Committee noted that the next meeting would be held at 2pm on Monday 21<sup>st</sup> September 2020.

Meeting ended at 12.30 pm

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

