

Minutes of the Downs Committee

16 November 2020 at 2.00 pm



Members Present:-

Councillors: Councillor Jos Clark (Chair), Councillor Barry Clark, Councillor Kye Dudd, Councillor Christopher Davies, Councillor Paul Goggin, Councillor Paula O'Rourke, Councillor Steve Smith, Gillian Camm (Vice-Chair), Jonathon Baker, Mike Bothamley, David Freed, David Powell and Peter Rilett

Officers in Attendance:-

Oliver Harrison, Ben Skuse, Kevin Jay, Amanda Sharpe and Mark Sperduty (Area Manager, Transport)

1. Welcome and Introductions

2. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Simon Cooper (MV).

3. Membership for 2020/21 (Report of the Clerk to the Committee)

The Downs Committee Membership for 2020/21 was NOTED. It was confirmed that Councillor Paul Goggin (Lab) is replacing Councillor Don Alexander.

4. Charing Arrangements (Report of the Clerk to the Committee)

The appointment of Gillian Camm as Master of the Merchant Venturers and Vice-Chair for Downs Committee 2020/21 was NOTED.

5. Retiring Members (Report of the Clerk to the Committee)

RESOLVED The Downs Committee gave a vote of thanks to retiring members of the committee.

ACTION OH to send letter to retiring members thanking them for their past services to Downs Committee.

6. Dates and Times of Future Meetings - 2021 (Report of the Clerk to the Committee)

RESOLVED the Downs Committee will meet on the dates indicated in this report.



7. Delegations (Report of the Clerk to the Committee)

RESOLVED Events and Finance Sub-Group is re-established. It was NOTED that David Powell and Cllr Paul Goggin are the replacement members on this sub-group. The use of Task and Finish Groups is agreed.

8. Action Tracker

The action tracker was NOTED.

ACTION OH update action tracker for next committee meeting.

9. Minutes of last meeting held on Monday 21st September 2021

RESOLVED the minutes of the previous meeting 21 September 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

10 Summary of the Events and Finance Sub-Group held on 28th October 2020

The Events and Finance Sub-Group summary report was NOTED.

11 Declarations of interest

Cllr Kye Dudd declared an interest as a member of the Downs Football League.

12 Public Forum

FODAG – Update Report
Tim Parnell – Vehicle Dwellers
Giles Drewett – Vehicle Dwellers
Stephen Carroll – Vehicle Dwellers
Chris Hawkins (S) – Vehicle Dwellers
Mike Massey – Vehicle Dwellers
Sharon Baker – Vehicle Dwellers
Jon Craton – Vehicle Dwellers
Pete Vallance – Vehicle Dwellers
Bristol Vehicles for Change – Vehicle Dwellers

13 Downs Maintenance Report (Ben Skuse)

Ben Skuse introduced the report and highlighted the following points:



- This has been a period of very high rainfall, which causes considerable issues for ground management as vehicles are at risk of getting stuck in mud.
- The report is slightly outdated with regards to football, which is on hold during the second lockdown.
- We are currently losing grassland to scrub, so this will need to be mowed more intensively in future.
- 4 new bins and 3 new memorial benches have been bought.
- Evergreen oak is spreading strongly, which is an invasive species. It is being cut down and used as a food supply by Bristol Zoo.
- The circus has finished its extended run and due to excellent management of the ground conditions there is little damage.
- Extension of events into the Watertower Site will require more intensive management.

Discussion Notes:

- The Evergreen Oaks were planted on the Downs in Victorian times for aesthetic purposes, but they are an invasive species. They are very large, spread fast and present a damage risk to clifftop areas. The leaf drops are acidic and nothing can grow under them when they drop. They can be identified by their more oval leaves and their retention of these leaves during winter.

The Downs Maintenance Report was NOTED.

14 Events Report (Amanda Sharpe)

Amanda Sharpe introduced the report and highlighted the following points:

- Since the last committee, 2 events have been running: Breaking Bread and Circus Montini.
- Breaking bread had a successful 3 month run and decided to close in November due to worsening weather conditions. The lockdown would have resulted in closure anyway. BB provided employment for the hard pressed hospitality sector so the event has been very positive.
- The circus had their run extended due to the cancellation of their Bath site. The circus was run successfully despite operating on a reduced capacity due to Covid restrictions.
- A detailed schedule of proposed events is due to be agreed at the Events and Finance sub-group.

Discussion Notes:

- The details of potential future restrictions on events are unknown. All event applications being considered are those that can be operated in a Covid secure manner. Organisations are asked to account for social distancing and increased hygiene. All events must be safety compliant and pass BCC, public health and emergency services measures.

The Events Report was NOTED.

15 Finance Update (Kevin Jay)



Kevin Jay introduced the report and highlighted the following points:

This is the current financial outturn to end October. There is a substantial deficit in 20/21 caused by Covid disruption to events and hospitality and the estimated costs for judicial review. The deficit can be covered by previous year underspends.

Discussion notes:

- It was confirmed that the overspend figures have been caused by several different drivers, but the most significant is legal fees related to the judicial review.

16 Vehicle Dwellers on the Downs (Mark Sperduty)

Mark Sperduty introduced the report and highlighted the following points:

- This is a discussion paper to identify possible options to address concerns regarding vehicle dwellers. It makes no recommendations, but about what is possible on highway terms.
- Single yellow lines and parking restrictions were installed following previous consultations between residents and visitors. Actions taken will have an impact on certain groups.

Discussion notes:

- Concerns about vehicle dwelling have been raised by local residents in the public forum for this meeting and via local councillors.
- Any proposed action would need to be examined in detail as it would require funding. The cabinet member for transport and the Mayor's office would need to be involved in discussions. Any creation of new byelaws would need dedicated legal advice. Any enforcement would also require funding.
- As vehicle dwellers live on the highway they are technically under the jurisdiction of the council highways department rather than Downs Committee. The committee would need to request that highways act on its behalf.
- The original restrictions place on these roads needed large amount of consultation and negotiations. There will be a similar requirement for vehicle dwellers.

RESOLVED (unanimous vote FOR) That a Task and Finish group be created for the vehicle dweller issue, organised along similar lines to the parking task and finish group.

17 Christchurch Green Wildflower Beds

Councillor Paula O'Rourke highlighted the following points:

- Local residents have requested more wildflower meadow areas, with an associated reduction in short mown grassland.
- This has been examined with BCC parks officers. The proposal is to have three swathes of natural grasses on Christchurch Green. There has been a site visit, with BB advising on ecology and best location (e.g. to avoid seeds going into the gorge).



- The ask is for seed to be purchased and sown, harvested and replanted as part of a community project using hand tools.

Discussion Notes:

- This site is next to Avon Gorge so we are being careful about any species potentially getting into the gorge. Native species mix, with only wildflowers and no grasses, suitable for limestone soil.
- Concerns were raised over the height of grass and its position near the highway. Highways should be consulted to ensure that it does not block sightlines.
- The cost for seed and planting is estimated at £200. POR has a community fund of £500 for the meadow and information boards. It is not clear whether this fund is for the meadow in general or just the boards.
- The area is to be maintained by a team of volunteers to remove any ongoing cost element to the project, however there are no formal proposals as yet.
- BS confirmed that there was no significant ongoing cost apart from the initial planting and that BCC parks could cut the area if required.
- Concerns were raised over safety issues of volunteers using hand tools to cut the grasses. However, any volunteer cutters would be supervised properly and this has been done before with appropriate risk assessments.
- It was confirmed that this seeding could be done in Spring 2021.

RESOLVED a more detailed report with relevant financial data should be presented at the January Downs Committee Meeting.

ACTION POR BS and BB to draft Christchurch Green Wildflower Bed report for next meeting.

1£ Any Other Business

1£ Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Downs Committee is Monday 25 January 2021.

2£ Exempt Item: Bridge Road Toilet Block

RESOLVED (unanimous vote FOR) the recommendations are approved as set out in the report.

Meeting ended at 16:00

CHAIR _____

