

# Minutes of the Downs Committee

25 January 2021 at 2.00 pm



## **Members Present:-**

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

## **Officers in Attendance:-**

Becky Belfin, Kevin Jay and Amanda Sharpe

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

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

### **2. Apologies for absence**

Apologies were received from Cllr Paul Goggin and Ben Skuse.

### **3. Declarations of interest**

Jonathon Baker declared an interest as a trustee of Quartet Community Foundation.

### **4. Minutes of last meeting**

RESOLVED the minutes of the last meeting 16 Nov 2020 are approved as a correct record.

### **5. Action Tracker**

The outstanding action to form a vehicle dwellers task and finish group has been superseded following discussions between members, BCC officers and the Mayor's Office. The Lord Mayor spoke about this in more detail during the public forum item.

### **6. Events and Finance Sub-Group Summary**



The Master summarised this report and emphasised the difficulty in planning and delivering events due to lockdowns and Covid restrictions. This is having a considerable impact on the Downs income.

The summary was NOTED.

## 7. Public Forum

### FODAG – Update Report

The Lord Mayor gave a statement on vehicle dwellers:

Before we take public forum, I would like to update the committee and members of the public, that many residents have been in contact expressing concerns about the growth of people living in vehicles on the Downs' highways. We appreciate residents' commitment to preserving the Downs as a destination and asset for the whole city to enjoy.

We recognise that this is a city-wide matter, with an increase in people living in vehicles across Bristol, some as a lifestyle or heritage choice but others as an alternative to homelessness or unaffordable housing. Many vehicle dwellers are vulnerable and have difficulties in accessing support and accommodation.

The council is working proactively with vehicle dwellers and has recently provided two temporary sites with essential facilities. They are examining more potential sites and are working with several groups to signpost support for vehicle dwellers and minimize impact on residents. There are no plans to put camping facilities on the Downs.

In terms of enforcement, the Downs Committee is responsible for activity on the Downs itself and the Council is responsible for activity on the area's roads. Parking restrictions are being enforced.

Mayor Rees has responded to all those concerned and is happy to receive other suggestions for community-led responses that could address this issue.

- Members noted the Lord Mayor's statement and the response from Mayor Rees, but still thought it was important to have a meeting with officers to explore possible routes forward and to produce a position statement for the Downs Committee that can be submitted to the Mayor.

ACTION OH arrange meeting between committee members and relevant BCC officers.

## 8. Downs Management Report (Ben Skuse)

In the absence of BS, this report was presented by the Head of Parks, who highlighted the following points:



- The past 12-month period has been very hard on parks, with a large uptake in usage due to lockdown restrictions making them one of the few available social spaces. There is an estimated 30-40% increase in visits.
- This does increase wear and tear on the site. Social distancing also increases wear, as minimum distances means not everyone can occupy the same path.
- This has caused damage to the grass, which can only be properly evaluated once lockdown is over and the ground is examined for potential repairs. Some areas will need to be allowed to recover; some damaged areas may need intervention.
- The Downs maintenance team is doing regular duties to keep the park operational, such as an increase in litter picks. They are also looking at health and safety improvements around the cliffside including scrub clearance.

#### Discussion Notes:

- There are two drains on circular road that have collapsed causing the ground to flood and paths to be damaged. BCC highways need to address this quickly before further damage occurs.

**ACTION:** JJ to chase up highways re: Circular Road drain collapse.

- Visitors have been complaining about overflowing bins on the Downs. Due to the high increase in footfall, the maintenance team have started more regular emptying, but this is still a challenge.
- Members asked if it was possible to do some communications about littering on the Downs.

**ACTION JJ** to contact BCC communications about messaging on littering in parks.

## 9. Events Report (Amanda Sharpe)

Amanda Sharpe introduced the report and highlighted the following points:

- The situation is very fast moving and reactive, meaning reports are often obsolete as soon as they are written. There are no certainties on events on the Downs as they are completely dependent on Covid restrictions.
- The Events and Finance Sub-Group have agreed a 2021 schedule of events, but this was prior to lockdown. Large events are unlikely to go ahead in the first half of year. Breaking bread is scheduled to go ahead from April, but this is dependent on tier. The Foodie Festival has been rescheduled to autumn. Love Saves the Day has been approved in principle, but it is too early to tell if it will go ahead. Organisers must be compliant with Covid guidelines.
- For Breaking Bread, there are proposals for ground works at the water tower to improve the site, but it is not feasible to deliver a permanent solution before April as this will require statutory approval. This year will use a temporary surface and alternative entry point. A report for the permanent solution will be going to the Events and Finance Sub-Group in June.
- The event programme is planned to rotate sites on the Downs to allow recovery time.

The Committee thanked Amanda and her team for their good work under such difficult circumstances.

## 10 Finance Update (Kevin Jay)



Kevin Jay introduced the report and highlighted the following points:

- The table shows the overall income / expenditure for 20/21. This is £195k income and £571k expenditure, meaning a potential deficit of £375k based on current information. This is subject to change and depends on the events that may or may not be able to go forward. There is also the potential cost of the judicial review. The deficit will have to be taken from previous year underspends.

## **11 Wildflower Beds on Christchurch Green**

POR and BB introduced the report and highlighted the following points:

- The report is a similar proposal to the one brought to the last meeting, however this one has the finance details as requested. There was some debate over whether the funding from Clifton Garden Society could be spent on beds or signage. It is now confirmed it can be spent on either.
- The costs for annual cutting can be absorbed by the BCC parks budget if required, but a community cutting scheme for cutting is preferable.

RESOLVED scheme approved.

## **12 Any Other Business**

## **13 Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting is 22 March 2021.

Meeting ended at 3.00 pm

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

