

Minutes of the Downs Committee

22 March 2021 at 2.00 pm



Members Present:-

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

Officers in Attendance:-

Ben Skuse, Kevin Jay and Amanda Sharpe

1. Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from David Powell, Councillor Chris Davies and Jonathan James.

1. Declarations of interest

None received.

1. Minutes of last meeting

RESOLVED the minutes of the last meeting 25 January 2021 are agreed as a correct record.

1. Action Tracker

The Action Tracker was noted.

The Clerk informed the committee that there have been some emerging legal issues regarding the vehicle dweller action that need resolving before the meeting can go ahead. Task group members will be updated in the next couple of days.

1. Events and Finance Group Summary

The Summary Report was noted.



The overriding concern is the lack of income from events, and the feasibility of future events including making them Covid compliant. Officers should be commended on how they are managing such a difficult situation.

1. Public Forum

Cycle Sunday: Downs Loop Update

1. Downs Management Report (Ben Skuse)

Ben Skuse introduced the report and highlighted the following points:

- We are still in Covid restrictions, so we are still receiving large numbers of visitors on the Downs. The last weekend of February was good weather, so we experienced the largest number of February visits on record.
- The improving weather is helping the ground situation as mud is drying out.
- There are increased goat checks due to the higher number of visitors going into their enclosure. 4 new goats are to be added this week, bringing us to 6 in total. These are young male Bagot goats, secured from the Street Goat charity.
- Both types of football will be returning to the Downs soon. The Downs Football League will recommence on 3 April. They will be running a cup competition over 6 Saturdays. University football will start on 31 March. We will be providing football services up to the end of May. The dressing rooms will not be in use due to Covid. Players will have to come and leave in their kit. Hopefully when the league returns in September, dressing rooms will be permitted.
- Maintenance teams have lifted canopies above footpaths to improve access. As part of the ecological emergency, parks are identifying where grass can be left to grow and leaving bigger margins for trees. This provides a habitat for insects and improved tree health. There has been a delay to the summer sowing of wildflower seed due to weather conditions.
- The events situation is fluid, BS is in regular communication with Breaking Bread about the water tower site.

Discussion notes:

- Members concurred with the huge volume of people on the Downs. There is a lot of traffic on circular road. There have been some conflict points due to high use. We understand that people need to get out into open spaces in the current circumstances.
- Members thanked BS and the team on supporting the Downs Football League. This is a big help for physical and mental health.
- There was a discussion about the high volumes of litter on the Downs due to the increase in visitors. The regular weekend day volume is comparable to what is expected on bank or school holidays. The first daily job for the team is to clear the ground of litter. This is time that could be spent on other maintenance jobs. The capacity of bins cannot cope, they are full at lunchtime



rather than the end of the day. Regardless, the team will keep emptying the bins and clearing litter the next day.

1. Events Report (Amanda Sharpe)

Amanda Sharpe introduced the report and highlighted the following points:

- While there is a events programme planned, the Covid restrictions mean there are no major events until June. It is not certain whether Pride will go ahead in July. All events will need to demonstrate they can be Covid compliant. All events will be assessed by safety officers.
- The event programme will be busy to fit everything in from June. There will be gaps in event staging to try and protect the sites.
- Consultation will need to be done with residents.
- Following the Events and Finance sub-group, the circus contract has been extended by a year.

1. Finance Update (Kevin Jay)

Kevin Jay introduced the report and highlighted the following points:

- This report shows the outturn for 20/21 and a draft outturn 21/22. There is an estimated £334k deficit. This is based on the considerable disruption to the events programme and the projected costs of the judicial review.
- The estimate for next year also shows a deficit. Prior underspends will need to be utilised to compensate for this.
- These assumptions are based on the full delivery of the events programme as currently planned.

1. Any Other Business

None received.

1. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting has been moved to Monday 5 July at the Merchants Hall.

Meeting ended at 2.30 pm

CHAIR _____



