

THE DOWNS COMMITTEE

Clifton and Durdham Downs (Bristol) Act 1861

Reply to Oliver Harrison

To : Members of the
Downs Committee

Telephone

E-mail

Date

oliver.harrison@bristol.gov.uk

Friday, 12 March 2021

The Lord Mayor and 6 City Councillors

The Rt. Hon. The Lord Mayor Councillor Jos Clark
Councillor Barry Clark Councillor Kye Dudd
Councillor Christopher Davies Councillor Paul Goggin
Councillor Paula O'Rourke Councillor Steve Smith

The Master and 6 Merchant Venturers

Gillian Camm (Vice-Chair) Jonathon Baker
Simon Cooper Peter Rilett
David Freed David Powell
Mike Bothamley

Dear Member,

You are invited to attend a meeting of the **Downs Committee** to be held at **2.00 pm on Monday, 22nd March, 2021 at Committee Room - City Hall, College Green, Bristol, BS1 5TR.**

The agenda for the meeting is set out overleaf and the supporting documents are attached.

Yours sincerely,

OH

Oliver Harrison

Democratic Services Section

3rd Floor Deanery Wing
City Hall PO Box 3399
College Green,
Bristol BS1 9NE

Website

www.bristol.gov.uk

Agenda

1. Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information

2. Apologies for absence

3. Declarations of interest

To note and Declarations of Interest raised by Councillors.

4. Minutes of last meeting (Pages 3 - 6)

5. Action Tracker (Page 7)

6. Events and Finance Group Summary (Pages 8 - 10)

7. Public Forum

To consider items of Public Forum sent to the Downs Committee. Interested parties can submit a written statement of approximately one side A4 to the Downs Committee by sending it to Democratic Services by no later than 12pm Friday 19 March 2021.

8. Downs Management Report (Ben Skuse) (Page 11)

9. Events Report (Amanda Sharpe) (Pages 12 - 14)

10. Finance Update (Kevin Jay) (Page 15)

11. Any Other Business

12. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled to be held on Monday 28 June 2021 at Merchant's Hall.

Oliver Harrison, Democratic Services Officer

Email: oliver.harrison@bristol.gov.uk or democratic.services@bristol.gov.uk

Phone: 0117 35 26162

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 _____



Agenda Item 5

ACTION TRACKER – DOWNS COMMITTEE 22 MARCH 2021

| Date of Meeting | Action Description | Holding Action | Deadline for Completion | Action Taken |
|------------------------|--|-----------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| 29/06/20 | A4018 Project – will need to return to committee | James Coleman | | Awaiting date estimate from Ian Maggs in BCC transport. |
| 25 Jan 21 | Vehicle Dwellers - OH arrange meeting between committee members and relevant BCC officers. | Oliver Harrison | 22 Mar | Attempting to schedule for w/c 15 Mar |
| 25 Jan 21 | JJ to chase up highways re: Circular Road drain collapse. | Jonathan James | 22 Mar | 2 Mar highways have inspected area. JJ will follow up specific actions. |
| 25 Jan 21 | JJ to contact BCC communications about messaging on littering in parks. | Jonathan James | 22 Mar | 2 Mar BCC currently doing city-wide comms on littering in parks including Downs. |

Downs Committee Summary of Events & Finance Sub-Group Meeting 24 February 2021

Members:

Gillian Camm (Master and Chair)
MV Jonathon Baker
MV David Powell
MV Peter Rilett
Councillor Barry Clark
Councillor Paula O'Rourke
Councillor Paul Goggin

Bristol City Council Officers:

Oliver Harrison – Democratic Services
Jon James – Head of Parks
Kevin Jay – Finance
Amanda Sharpe – Events Officer
Ben Skuse – Grounds Supervisor

Apologies:

Councillor Steve Smith

1. Minutes of Previous Meeting

Minutes of the previous meeting 13 January 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

2. Finance Update

- Kevin Jay produced a full year draft outturn for 19/20 and forecast for 20/21. Income may change based on events that are able to go ahead. Loss of income due to certain big events not appearing this year is significant, as is the Zoo shutdown and football league.
- The Downs Football League should be able to commence from the first Saturday in April based on the roadmap. Due to timescale a full league competition may not be possible.
- The Downs may struggle to break even in 20/21 depending on current variables. Covid is causing losses across the Council, the forecast for Downs will reflect that.

3. Events Update

- Format modifications may be needed for some events due to Covid restrictions which consider tents indoor spaces. The events team will be speaking to event organisers about the government roadmap. Some have already indicated they can be moved to a later date if there are complications.

- The Sub-committee resolved to decide any potential Covid related event fee reductions on a case by case basis rather than using a scoring matrix. However, members would like to be aware of what other sites may be charging to inform negotiations.
- Not many large events are able to pay site fees up front as they get their income from ticket sales.
- This is the first time that the committee has encountered problems with events paying their fees. The events team have enacted new training and systems that will make them more dynamic with securing outstanding fees in future.
- On planning for hard access at the water tower site. JJ has received Informal advice from the BCC planning department, who have confirmed this will require planning consent. An archaeology report may also be required due to Roman road.
- Installation of a temporary surface would be prohibitively expensive. The maintenance team has already started reinstating the track area.
- Moving site access to behind the changing rooms presents a firmer surface, but there is a lot more foot traffic there so it would need stewarding. The café will need to be involved as it may affect their business.
- The committee will need to work up a scheme for the site that will pass planning. The site has issues that need to be addressed to make it viable in the long term. A feasible year-round weather independent site would be hugely beneficial.
- Including power points at the site would be a big selling points as generators are expensive and polluting.
- JJ will bring a costed scheme to make the site fit for purpose to the June sub-committee.

4. Downs Trading Pitch Discussion

- Sue Long attended to discuss trading pitches on the Downs. She receives many approaches for trading pitches and responds that there are no vacant pitches available. The committee may want to consider new pitches under the lighter temporary terms used in other parks to compensate for Covid losses.
- The Sub-committee resolved not to review the trading pitches on the Downs at this time.

5. Downs Café Legal Position

- The advice from lawyers has been secured and circulated to members.
- Planning permission for the café lasts until March 2022.
- It is unlikely that these issues will be resolved in enough time to secure the planned Quartet funding.

6. Zoo Parking Invoicing

7. Any Other Business

- BS has inspected the playground at Clifton as requested at the last meeting. The ground there is unstable. The maintenance team are able to put in a temporary measure, but will need a longer term solution for next year.

REPORT OF THE DOWNS MAINTENANCE MANAGER

March 2021, still Lockdown 3.

Still unprecedented levels of people at all times of the week, but especially on weekends. As the weather improves now it is nice to get out of the mud and to walk on the surface of the ground once more. The trees are in bud and birds are nesting. A portent for better times ahead one hopes !.

Daily duties continue with refuse collection and disposal still being priority number one on most days as we still see high parks usage and visitation. Daily Goat checks continue to be important as more people find their way into the enclosure and unfortunately this can mean more Dogs.

Our Winter programme of works with the scrub management plan has finished once more with the onset of nesting bird season. This year we focused on the area of the Downs between Ladies Mile Rd and Upper Belgrave Rd. We have not up to now carried out any work of this type in the area. This area is particularly susceptible to the problem of compartments growing together and forming into larger blocks that eventually form into secondary woodland compartments. We have opened up several areas now to regular mowing and halt the encroachment in these areas. Allowing a chance for limestone grassland habitat to be maintained and not lost underneath encroaching scrub compartments.

We have a bit more clarity now with plans for a resumption of Football at the Downs. The 20/21 league season has been cancelled but play is going to continue with a cup competition. Play restarts on Sat April 3rd and will continue into mid-May incorporating evening matches in April. We took the decision to keep marking the pitches onto the ground during this period without play so we stand ready to resume in April. The restart will initially still be without the use of the dressing rooms. Hopefully the new season 21/22 starting in September could include use of the dressing rooms once more.

Obviously at this time of year grass cutting will resume in earnest. Before we get going with that we'll assess a number of trees that need to have their canopies lifted up to maintain access for mowing underneath. As part of an overall parks wide and citywide commitment to increase bio diversity we are likely to identify a couple areas of normal Downs maintenance to make changes to the type of cut or frequency of cut. Leaving wider margins of uncut grass around the base of some trees may be something members notice. Likewise the formation of 3 areas of wildflower meadow on Clifton Downs in the Christchurch Green area.

The situation with events at the Downs in 21 still remains fluid. I will continue to communicate with the Finance and Events sub group to keep abreast of plans and make sure that we are in a position to react to enable events to happen if restrictions allow.

Downs Committee –22nd March 2021 Events Update

No events have taken place on the Downs since the last Committee meeting in January 2021.

2021 Events

Following the latest government update on 22nd February relating to plan to ease lockdown restrictions in England, no live events can take place until at least 21st June 2021. This does not apply to temporary, outdoor hospitality venues which would be able to operate from 12th April.

The dates set for the stages & dates set out in the government's plan will only apply if the data allows which means there is still a potential risk for events planned over the summer. If the recovery does go according to plan, the following events are planned for the Downs in 2021;

| | | |
|---------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|
| Breaking Bread | April - September | Water Tower site |
| Comedy Garden | late June/early July | Showground site |
| March for Men | June | Parrys Lane site |
| Cycle Sunday | July | On closed roads/Circular Road |
| Adventure Cinema | August | Parrys Lane site |
| Foodies Festival | September | Parrys Lane site |
| Love Saves the Day | September | Circular Road site |
| Circus | September/October | Showground site |
| Student Union event | September | Parrys Lane site |

Race for Life: will not be held at its usual slot in June and is looking to postpone until the autumn.

Pride: discussions are ongoing on whether to go ahead with this in July as usual or postpone until later in the year.

The events programme has been carefully planned to ensure that different sites on the Downs are utilised and that sufficient time is left between events to allow the site to be reinstated if necessary.

It should be noted that events will only go ahead if organisers can demonstrate to the Safety Advisory Group that their event complies with any Covid restrictions and guidelines that may be required at the time.

Resident consultation on events

Organisers of long running and high impact events e.g. Breaking Bread are required to consult with residents as part of the planning process for their events. Breaking Bread offered resident consultation meetings to residents in February. This was done through local resident association and FODAG. If, as scheduled, Love Saves the Day is able to go ahead in 2021, a consultation process with residents will be carried out by Team Love.

Downs Circus

The contract for the Downs circus is currently held by Tony Hopkins Entertainments who bring a circus to the Downs each year in late September/early October. The contract is in its final year and the Downs sub-group have agreed that they would like to extend the contract for a further year (to November 2022) which they have the option to do under the current agreement.



The Downs

Outturn Forecast 2020/21 and 2021/22

The latest full year outturn forecast for 2020/21 and the draft 2021/22 projection is as follows:

Income and Expenditure Summary

| | Full Year Budget | 2020/21 Forecast Outturn <i>(as at 31.1.21)</i> | 2020/21 Variance | Notes - 2020-21 Forecast | 2021/22 DRAFT Forecast Outturn <i>(as at 1.3.21)</i> | 2021/22 Variance | Notes - 2021-22 Forecast |
|--------------------------|------------------|--|------------------|--|---|------------------|--|
| | £ | £ | £ | | £ | £ | |
| Income | | | | | | | |
| Total Income | 350,260 | 239,309 | (110,951) | Deficit | 361,350 | 11,090 | Surplus |
| Expenditure | | | | | | | |
| Total Expenditure | (350,260) | (574,011) | (223,751) | Overspend | (441,350) | (91,090) | Overspend |
| FINAL NET OUTTURN | 0 | (334,703) | (334,703) | Representing Downs generated net surplus/(deficit) | (80,000) | (80,000) | Representing Downs generated net surplus/(deficit) |

Based on current information, there is a significant forecast deficit for 2020-21 due to the Coronavirus pandemic causing uncertainty within the events and hospitality sector, and an estimate for potential legal costs associated with the defence of a Judicial Review. The deficit will be met from prior year underspends.

Early projections for 2021-22 show an improved position but there remains a lot of uncertainty within the events and hospitality sector. The draft position is a deficit next year which unfortunately due to the pandemic during 2020-21 has result in prior years underspends being fully utilised and additional funds will need to be identified.