

THE DOWNS COMMITTEE

Clifton and Durdham Downs (Bristol) Act 1861

To : Members of the
Downs Committee

Telephone

E-mail

democratic.services@bristol.
gov.uk

Date

Friday, 25 June 2021

The Lord Mayor and 6 City Councillors

The Rt. Hon. The Lord Mayor Councillor Steve Smith
Councillor Jos Clark Councillor Carla Denyer
Councillor Geoff Gollop Councillor Paul Goggin
Councillor Philippa Hulme Councillor Paula O'Rourke

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 **12.00 pm on Monday, 5th July, 2021 at Remote Access - Via On Line or Telephone Conference Call.**

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

Yours sincerely,

OH

Oliver Harrison

Agenda

1. Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information

Democratic Services Section

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

Website

www.bristol.gov.uk

2. Apologies for absence

3. Declarations of interest

To note and Declarations of Interest raised by Councillors.

4. Minutes of last meeting (Pages 4 - 7)

5. Action Tracker (Page 8)

6. Matters Arising From the Events and Finance Group (Pages 9 - 12)

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 on Friday 2 July.

8. Downs Management Report (Pages 13 - 14)

9. Wildlife Project Education Programme (Pages 15 - 16)

10. Events Report

Report to follow.

11. Finance Update (Page 17)

12. Any Other Business

13. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled to be held at 20 September at City Hall

Oliver Harrison, Democratic Services Officer
Email: democratic.services@bristol.gov.uk

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 _____





Agenda Item 5

ACTION TRACKER – DOWNS COMMITTEE 5 JULY 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.

Downs Committee Notes Of Events & Finance Sub Group Meeting 2nd June 2021

Members:

Gillian Camm (Master and Chair)
MV David Powell
MV Peter Rilett
Councillor Jos Clark
Councillor Paul Goggin
Councillor Geoff Gollop
Councillor Paula O'Rourke

Bristol City Council Officers:

Jeremy Livitt – Democratic Services
Jon James – Head of Parks
Karen Gregory – Finance
Amanda Sharpe – Events Officer
Ben Skuse – Grounds Supervisor

Apologies:

MV Jonathon Baker

1. Minutes of Previous Meeting

Minutes of the previous meeting 24th February 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

2. Finance Update

Karen Gregory introduced the report and highlighted the following points:

- COVID-19 had made a massive impact on income as evidenced in the overall summary and forecast outturn.
- The deficit included non-recurring costs
- Bristol City Council would continue to meet any Downs Committee bills in accordance with the Downs Act

The Sub-Group noted the three key issues in relation to last year's outturn as follows: what is needed to maintain the Downs, how can income be generated and what unavoidable costs are in the Downs budget. It was acknowledged that a fresh plan was required to take advantage of all possible opportunities available.

The following additional points were made:

- A more engaged debate was required with Bristol City Council concerning the Downs Committee, including issues such as events and expenditure

- The Committee needed to assess what was required to maintain the Downs and what Bristol City Council can provide to meet its obligations.
- It was noted that the pandemic had increased usage of the Downs and the amount of litter and had contributed to the erosion of footpaths due to increased use. In addition, there was the associated accumulated ground problems caused by events. Whilst extra resources had been made available for this, a more strategic approach was required

The report was noted.

3. Events Report Update

Amanda Sharpe introduced this report and made the following points:

- Breaking Bread had been open since mid-April. Details of its income would be provided which would increase following the recent reopening of the restaurant
- The Comedy Garden was due to open tonight (Wednesday 2nd July 2021)
- Most events organisers had been offered a discount due to the difficult situation they had face this year with COVID
- Details of the fees calculation were provided for Breaking Bread, Love Saves the Day and the Circus
- Members were reminded that, whilst there was a costing formula for all events, the actual fees were set at the Sub-Group itself. However, generally costs would be based on fees from similar events elsewhere
- Students Union had requested a 2 day live event with the same number of total days as in previous years to make up for students who had missed the 2020 event. Ben Skuse confirmed that the proposed site was less worn than others and so this was feasible
- Downs Circus – The contract had been extended for more than one year. There had been some concern last year about the organisers requiring greater training in health and safety to ensure events were properly COVID secure. Therefore, this year they would be required to attend the Safety Advisory Group before the event. There would also be site visits
- Team Love: Request for an Annual Music Festival. Until 2019, this event had taken place in late August/early September. They had now teamed up with AEG Presents who were an international promoter. In view of this, the possibility of future cancellation of events due to live acts not being available was less likely and would provide income on an annual basis. It was noted that in recent years Team Love had done a good job of working with the local communities to ease their concerns about issues such as noise disturbance.
- Funderworld and Breaking Bread – It was noted that the organisers of Funderworld were disappointed not to be able to hold their event on the Downs in 2021 due to Breaking Bread being on the site they had requested. It was noted that Breaking Bread also favoured the Water Tower site and had requested to be able to use it in 2022.

However, Funderworld had also asked if they could come back in 2022 in this location. The Sub-Group discussed various options to meet their needs, including holding Funderworld in late March/early April 2022, followed by a break to allow reinstatement of the site followed by Breaking Bread operating until September/October 2022. Ben Skuse indicated that this proposal would be very difficult to operate as the ground could be badly affected, particularly if Breaking Bread continued late and no work could be done on the ground during the late Autumn/Winter period.

Whilst it was noted that the proposed roadway on the site (see item below) could mitigate this by approximately 80% if the timescale allowed it to be built in 2022, members expressed concern as custodians of the Downs at the impact of two events on the site in one year. It was also not clear how long it would take for Planning Permission for the roadway to be approved. It was further noted that, if Funderworld were re-located to the Show Ground Site, it would not provide the space needed and would not give them access to water.

It was further noted that the demographics for each event varied considerably, with the Funderworld event attracting a younger group of people which would provide additional value.

Members of the Sub-Group agreed with the principle that two events could not be held in succession on the Water Tower site in one year until a roadway was in place.

4. Downs Event Track Scheme

Jonathan James introduced this report examining possible options for provision of an access route for vehicles at the Water Tower site and made the following points:

- There were two main options – the use of an MOT Type 1 track or plastic moulded cells
- Two phases would be required – Phase 1 Entrance Way and Phase 2 Hardstanding Area
- Assessments of costs were included in the report and were based on industry costs
- The proposals would require planning consent and an archaeological watching brief. They would also require a power supply. Further detail could be provided directly to Sub-Group members by the Parks Department Team
- The plastic moulded cell was a better option to ensure the least intrusion and would allow a return to the grass area on site. It would allow traffic to be used all year round. Whilst this was the more costly option, it was likely to be a more preferred option for planning
- Officers recommended that both phases took place together

During discussion, members made the following points:

- The key issues to consider were the timescale for a return on investment, the purpose of doing it (ie to protect the Downs or allow further events to generate income) and whether there were any legal issues in the Downs Act to consider
- The possibility of sponsorship and grants needed to be investigated

Ben Skuse stressed the importance of any proposal being effective in preventing any further deterioration on site. Current costs for tractor use and soil and grass resupply on the site at the end of each season were provided.

The following actions were agreed: (1) Plastic Moulded Option to be approved in principle with both phases to take place at the same time (2) Development of a Business Plan which dovetails with the Bristol City Council budget , provides a cost/benefit analysis of the proposal and which assesses the impact on the amount of income that can be generated including timescale for payback of costs (3) An assessment of the legal implications of the proposal through the Downs Act

At the end of the meeting, the Sub-Group noted that Amanda Sharpe was shortly leaving Bristol City Council. They thanked her for all her hard work during this period and said they had hugely valued her contribution to the Committee.

The meeting ended at 3.50pm

Downs Maintenance Report – Ben Skuse, Area Supervisor

Firstly, it is nice to be able to start a report that does not mention either a lockdown or associated restrictions for the first time since Jan 2020.

High Summer on the Downs, the daily focus is very much on litter removal and removing from site, the many tonnes of rubbish left behind by the many people enjoying our wonderful green space. The costs associated with this process, the drain on the team's ability to be getting on with anything else at times, plus the sense of disillusionment that none of this waste is going to be recycled is beginning to be a big concern. Something needs to change in this regard. It feels like we cannot carry on in this way. Bristol Parks Dept and Bristol Waste Company need to come together here to find a solution.

Our grass cutting regime continues in earnest as does football pitch renovation and seeding. Daily Goat checks also continue. Our 4 new Bagot Goats have fully integrated into life in the Gulley now since arrival in March. Happily they do seem to have lost some of the tameness that they came in with. Their propensity to approach people boldly looking for some food was not ideal when they first came in. But they seem to have attained a bit more wildness now which is good to see.

Events wise, Comedy Garden have come and gone and the event organiser was happy with how it went. The circus site was in good shape when they arrived to begin build and the weather remained fine for the duration so there was hardly any ground impact to be concerned about which is always pleasing.

Breaking Bread are still with us on the much discussed water tower site. My team duck in and out periodically to carry out grass mowing. Due to the duration of their stay and the time of year that they will be breaking down in, a significant amount of ground reinstatement is inevitable but we will come onto that in the Autumn.

I have had meetings with organisers of both the Race for Life and the BU SU welcome fair to prepare for their events later this year.

One negative point to report. It is likely that we will be losing 2 veteran Ash trees from the main meadow area of the Downs. Having reported to the tree officer that a large piece had broken from the canopy and was left hanging dangerously in one of the trees, the tree was inspected and found to be succumbing to Ash die back. The dangerous branch was removed but the long term outcome for the tree's may be complete removal. This would be a shame as Ash trees at this veteran status are amazing for bio-diversity and present welcome shade for school groups on Mandy Leivers environmental education sessions. However the North Area Arboriculture Officer will make this call on the grounds of safety, so we will see.

3 more positive notes to end with:

Members may be interested to hear that the Downs will be featuring in an upcoming BBC natural history unit production, Green Planet. I did some filming with them in early June. Scheduled to go out in Jan 2022.

I have engaged with UK government Kickstart scheme and have a new member of staff for 6 months. The scheme is aimed at giving young people recently out of school but not getting into long term employment an opportunity in work. Matthew started with us on June 2nd and will work with us for 25hrs per week until Dec 2nd. These 25hrs are funded by the Department of Work and

Pensions. Hopefully this will work out well for both parties, we definitely could do with an extra pair of hands and Matthew can get a good amount of work experience on his CV for the future.

Finally my ongoing thanks as ever to FODAG.

- Dead hedge renovation and rebuild.
- Extra daily Goat checks around the time our new arrivals came in.
- Re painting the White Tree.
- Weeding and maintenance at the Thomas Memorial plant beds.

To name but a few things they have contributed to Downs upkeep since the last report.

Summary of activities of the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project education programme

Officer Presenting Report: Mandy Leivers, Avon Gorge and Downs Biodiversity Education Manager

After almost a year of being on furlough (with a few false starts), I returned properly just after Easter. It's been a busy time getting the education programme back up and running again, especially with all the covid considerations, new systems of work and new risk assessments to write.

Avon Gorge and Downs Learning and Engagement Officer and volunteers

In April we began the recruitment process for the Avon Gorge and Downs Learning and Engagement Officer. Vanessa Adnitt was appointed and began, in post, on the 24th May. Thereafter followed an intensive induction and training programme to get her up to speed.

Our volunteers are vital in helping us to deliver the education programme so it was important to spend time re-building the volunteer team. I contacted our pre-lockdown team to find out who was still able to volunteer with us, and thanking those that had moved on. With support from the Bristol Zoological Society's Volunteer Services Manager we began recruiting and training new volunteers. We ran a successful 'Volunteer welcome evening', via Zoom, and now have a great team made up of returning AG&DWP volunteers, newly recruited volunteers, and BZS volunteers who have switched roles (whilst their previous or current volunteer roles are limited due to covid).

Schools, uniformed groups and playschemes

I returned from furlough to lots of emails from schools, eager to book education sessions with us. From mid-June to mid-July we will be running 18 sessions, teaching approximately 474 children. This is a lot less than we would normally teach at this time of year but we are starting back slowly so that we can follow covid precaution protocols. This includes giving ourselves extra time for cleaning and disinfecting equipment between school visits. At the time of writing, we have already run our first education sessions and these have gone really well. Before the end of term, we will be contacting schools to offer sessions for the autumn term as well.

We've also run a 'Discover the Downs' session for a brownie group. Their session was re-scheduled from July 2020. We're also in the process of contacting playschemes to offer them sessions for the summer holidays.

Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project events programme

The majority of our spring and summer 2020 events had to be cancelled but two of the courses 'Birdsong on the Downs' and 'Spring on the Downs in batik' were re-scheduled. Part one of the Birdsong identification course took place, via Zoom, on 9th April and the second part happened, on the Downs, on 23rd May.

The Batik workshop was re-scheduled to 26th June but as it was taking place indoors, and there was going to be a delay in lifting the restrictions, we took the decision to cancel the event until restrictions are fully lifted.

Your Downs activities

We've begun planning the 'Nature in the Streets' project - a nature connection, art and wellbeing project for young people (aged 18 – 24). We are running this particular project in partnership with Off The Record and Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge

(FOD+AG), with funding from the Co-op membership scheme, and the Commoners of Durdham Down and Durdham Downs Charity.

On 6th June, Robin Haward (FOD+AG) and I co-lead a guided walk, on the Downs, for the Long Ashton Horticultural Society.

Wastes and Strays

In 2019, Ben Skuse, and Downs Committee members Councillor O'Rourke and Councillor Abraham, went to a meeting about the Wastes and Strays project. It's a project, coordinated by Newcastle, Exeter, Sheffield and Brighton Universities who are studying four 'Urban Commons', and "will promote them as publicly accountable, open, green, spaces vital for culture, health, wellbeing and biodiversity in the metropolitan context". The project involves:

- Researching their history and contemporary perceptions of biodiversity and use.
- Working with stakeholders to generate ideas for the future.
- Trialing new methods of engaging communities.

You can find out more here: [Wastes and Strays | Wastes and Strays | Newcastle University \(ncl.ac.uk\)](#)

At the original meeting various commons were invited to be part of the project, and the Downs was chosen to be one of the four.

Livi Dee, a researcher associate at Newcastle University has already started to gather oral histories. FOD+AG members, Ben Skuse and I have been interviewed by Livi. John Wedgwood Clarke (from Exeter University) will be a 'Poet in Residence', on the Downs, this year. As part of our school education sessions, John ran workshops with two classes from Westbury Park School, creating poetry about the wildflowers in the meadows on the Downs.

We have planned two history / poetry guided walks with Francis Greenacre, as part of the public Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife events programme. John will also run a workshop with FOD+AG members. A celebration event, to showcase the work that's been created, is also being planned for the end of project.

Publicity about the new goats

As you know, at the end of March, four rare breed Bagot goats joined our two Kashmir goats in the Gully. After the goats had had a month to settle in, I drafted a press release with contributions from Chris Westcott (Natural England), Becky Belfin (Bristol City Council Nature Conservation Officer) and Ben Skuse. This was then passed to the Bristol City Council news desk who edited and issued it. As a result, Ben, Carol Laslett (Bristol Street Goat) and I were interviewed for a piece on the ITV teatime news.

Posts about the goats on our Project Facebook page www.facebook.com/avongorge have been very popular!



The Downs

Outturn 2020-21 and Forecast 2021-22

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

TABLE 1 - Overall Income and Expenditure Summary

	Full Year Budget £	2020/21 Forecast Outturn (as at 31.3.21) £	2020/21 Variance £	Notes - 2020-21 Forecast
<u>Income</u>				
Total Income	350,260	218,038	(132,222)	Deficit - Covid-19 pressures - No events
<u>Expenditure</u>				
Total Expenditure	(350,260)	(456,028)	(105,768)	Overspend - Covid-19 pressures, JR Legal case
<u>Transfer from Reserves</u>	0	237,990	237,990	
FINAL NET OUTTURN	0	0	0	Representing Downs generated net surplus/(deficit)

In 2020-21 there was a significant deficit mainly due to the Coronavirus pandemic and its negative impact on the events and hospitality sector, coupled with some legal costs associated with the defence of a Judicial Review. The deficit has been met from prior year underspends.

TABLE 2 - Overall Income and Expenditure Summary

	Full Year Budget £	2021/22 Forecast Outturn (as at 27.5.21) £	2021/22 Variance £	Notes - 2021-22 Forecast
<u>Income</u>				
Total Income	350,260	306,211	(44,049)	Deficit
<u>Expenditure</u>				
Total Expenditure	(350,260)	(577,600)	(227,340)	Overspend
<u>Transfer from Reserves</u>	0	97,764	97,764	All reserve funding has been exhausted now
FINAL NET OUTTURN	0	(173,625)	(173,625)	Representing Downs generated net surplus/(deficit)

The forecast for 2021-22 is a further deficit mainly driven from final legal costs associated with the defence of a Judicial Review and some ongoing Covid-19 related expenditure, such as additional cleaning and maintenance. Prior year underspends can assist the deficit to some degree, however they are limited.