

Bristol City Council

Minutes of the Downs Committee

15 November 2021 at 2.00 pm



Members Present:-

Councillors: Steve Smith (Chair), Jos Clark, Geoff Gollop, Katy Grant, Philippa Hulme, Paula O'Rourke, David Freed (Vice-Chair), Jonathon Baker, Mike Bothamley, Patrick Despard, David Powell and Peter Rilett

Officers in Attendance:-

Stefan Edwards (Events Officer), Kevin Jay and Ben Skuse

1 Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information

The Chair led introductions and read out the safety information.

2 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Gillian Camm and Paul Goggin.

3 Memberships for 2021/2022

David Powell (Merchant Venturers) has stepped down and will be replaced by Mark Burchfield.

RESOLVED the Downs Committee membership for 2021/22 was NOTED.

4 Charing Arrangements

RESOLVED: the appointment of David Freed as Master of the Society of Merchant Venturers and Vice-Chair of the Downs Committee was NOTED.

5 Retiring Members

David Powell is stepping down from the committee so should be added to this list.



RESOLVED: the retirement of members of the Downs Committee was NOTED and a letter thanking them for their past service will be sent by the Clerk to the committee.

6 Dates and Times of Future Meetings

RESOLVED: the Downs Committee meeting dates for 2021/22 were NOTED.

7 Delegations

RESOLVED

- (1) The Committee re-established the Events and Finance Sub-Group.
- (2) The Committee agreed to set up Task and Finish Groups as necessary for other areas of work.
- (3) The Committee noted the continuation of the Strategy and Governance Task and Finish Group.

8 Action Tracker

The action tracker was NOTED.

9 Minutes of last meeting

There are four new Bagot goats, not six as indicated.

RESOLVED the minutes of the previous meeting on 20 September 2021 are agreed as a correct record.

1 Declarations of interest

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Cllr Geoff Gollop declared an interest as a member of FODAG, Respect the Downs and provides services for Jonathan Baker.

1 Public Forum

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The following public forum statements were NOTED:

01. Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge (in person)
02. Downs for People (in person)

1 Downs Management Report

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The Parks Supervisor introduced the report and highlighted the following points:

- The autumn period enables the maintenance team to concentrate on their core duties without spending so much time tackling litter.
- Football pitches are being used twice weekly for football, which means more maintenance is required. However, recent good weather has left the ground in good condition.
- In Clifton playground, the team has added a large amount of bark to mitigate flooding. A longer-term service improvement plan needs implementing for the play area to keep it useable.
- Lots of leaf clearance required, which is being mixed into soil for better nutrient value.
- There was some minor damage in the Sea Walls area due to an oil spill during the Team Love event. This has been remedied and markings are now just cosmetic.
- At the Circus Site a skip has been installed in an awkward area meaning it is difficult to remove.
- The Water Tower site is damaged. It is drying out due to good weather but needs more remedial action and a long-term solution.
- The team will be installing some memorial benches on the Downs. Queries about benches can be addressed to the supervisor.

Discussion Notes:

- If event organisers can install a skip on site at the start of the event there is an expectation that they remove it afterwards.
- There was a discussion about more permanent solutions at the Clifton Play Area. It is too wet now to install the long-term drainage required. The additional bark will be sufficient until site modifications in spring. These are expensive, but POR has received pledges and will apply for grant funding.
- The Committee thanked POR for her work on the playground. It shows that crowdfunding for projects can work, which saves BCC funds for other areas.

1 Education Update

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The Avon Gorge & Downs Biodiversity Education Manager introduced the report and highlighted the following points:

- The project worked with fewer people than usual due to the Covid situation, which limited number of events, their type and capacity. Usually at this time of year major talks are organised, but they haven't run any this year as they felt it would be unsafe.
- There have been 3 guided walks and two courses which have received very good feedback. The October half-term children's event had to be cancelled due to covid.
- There were 9 education sessions for school groups based on autumn wildlife. These went well due to good weather. The team were present at the University of Bristol student welcome fair to promote the wildlife of the Avon Gorge and Downs, the work of the project and to sign up volunteers.



- The “Your Downs” engagement project met to review progress. They have agreed to run guided walks on the Downs for one of the Nordic Walking groups who work with older, isolated people aged 70 – 90. The Nature in the streets project for young people has been postponed due to covid issues and moved to spring 2022.
- The Avon Gorge and Downs learning and engagement officer finishes a 6-month contract next week. She has created 4 new educational, downloadable ‘Activity of the month’ resources for the ‘Kids Zone’ section of the project website. The team thanked the committee for funding this role and a new engagement officer starts in March 2022.
- There was an update on the Bristol Zoo move to the Wild Place. The current entrance to the zoo is planned for conversion into a café and education space for the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project.

1 Events Report

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The Events Officer introduced the report and highlighted the following points:

- There have been two events held since the last meeting, the University welcome event and the Circus. Both events were well managed. There were some issues with parking around the student event and a plan has been developed to improve this next year.
- The committee requested a full grid of proposed events, which is included in the report pack. Please note that the dates are provisional and the Events and Finance Group will work through the details.
- The committee also requested a summary of complaints, which is included.

Discussion notes:

- Members were concerned about the number of official complaints for Love Saves the Day and that the number of informal complaints was likely higher. The committee has a responsibility to not alienate residents.
- The events team has received a letter from organisers to send to residents. This can be forwarded to the committee members (ACTION). There is also an engagement meeting with residents next Wednesday.
- The same event is unlikely to happen again. Love Saves the Day is planning a move to Ashton Court, subject to approval and negotiation.
- The recent strategy engagement meeting held at city hall highlighted the public appetite for a greater variety of events. The Strategy and Governance group will be meeting on 13 December to discuss this and other issues.
- The BCC web team are currently working with the events team to have the confirmed Downs event schedule on the BCC website (ACTION).

1 Finance Update

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The finance officer introduced the report which was noted.

Discussion notes:

- There has been a minor improvement in forecast due to recent successful music events.
- The Circus have paid their event fees. We are waiting for a final estimate of fees for Breaking Bread based on last month's income. This will be brought to the Events and Finance group and will be paid end November.

1 Ice Cream Tenders

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The parks officer introduced the report and highlighted the following points:

- BCC has been working to tender ice cream concessions across the city. It has proved difficult to sell pitches because of lockdown related issues and economic uncertainty.
- BCC is choosing to extend its current contracts by a year. The Downs Committee is asked whether it wishes to do likewise.
- Suppliers have not directly approached the team yet, but they have requested extensions to contracts they hold elsewhere. Officers are confident they will accept.

RESOVLED: Committee extends current ice-cream contracts by one year.

1 Any Other Business

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- Planning permission for the proposed Sea Walls Café expires in 2022, the committee is requested to renew this. We are currently awaiting approval from the Secretary of State, which was submitted in February 2021.
- The costs for renewal are minor. The Downs Act is open to interpretation on this subject and we have been asked by BCC as the landowner to investigate the legality. A cautious approach is best to avoid future challenges.

RESOLVED: planning permission for Sea Walls Café is to be renewed.

- Members asked what the current process is for the approval and installation of memorial benches. These can be referred to Ben Skuse, although there is a limit to how many can be installed.
- There was a discussion about the recent approaches to the Committee from Downs for People and the need for a robust legal response.

1 Date of Next Meeting

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The next meeting is scheduled to be held on Monday 24 January in City Hall.

Meeting ended at 4.00 pm

CHAIR _____

