

**Downs Advisory Panel {DAP}
Report to Downs Committee
September 16th, 2024**

The Downs Advisory Panel met on August 19th to consider a range of issues raised by Downs neighbours FODAG members and Downs visitors.

Items reported to the DAP.

Since the last meeting of the Downs committee the Panels dedicated email address and phone line has received over fifty contacts. All enquiries have received a prompt response and been logged. In addition to direct contacts the Panel is regularly included in communications from local community groups, Councillors, local MP's, City Council officers and the Police.

The Panel continues to act as a first point of call for a range of Downs related issues and responds to questions of a more general nature.

The committee should be aware that there is a growing concern from Downs near neighbours, visitors, and locals at the apparent lack of progress in dealing with Downs related issues, including bylaw breaches, vehicle dwellers, the travelling community, noise and frequency of events.

Committee may be aware of a strongly worded complaint to the Event Director of Team Love which the DAP were copied into. The complaint focused on the overt political nature of the Massive Attack Concert, in particular pro Palestinian rhetoric and content.

The Committee Chair & Vice Chair were informed.

The Panel considered six agenda items and included four of those items in the report.

Item 1.

Green Flag Award.

In 2007 the Downs along with five other Bristol Parks applied for and achieved Green Flag Status but unfortunately mainly due to budgetary constraints all six were lost. There remains a vestige of this prestigious award near the Downs Cafe. A lonely flagpole now minus its once proud ensign.

The Green Flag Award scheme is the National benchmark standard for parks and green spaces. Holding a Green Flag Award brings with it a vast amount of prestige. It is also an excellent example of civic achievement and provides communities with a great sense of civic pride and we really do need a good news story for the Downs.

Winning a Green Flag Award brings with it a wealth of benefits, from the status of being affiliated with a prestigious awards programme through to tangible benefits such as boosting visitor numbers and opening revenue opportunities.

Should the Downs be successful it would be the only Park or open space in Bristol to hold the award.

Achieving the Green Flag will entail a significant joint effort from all parties including, BCC Parks, the Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project, FODAG, The Downs Advisory Panel and of

course the Downs committee. The previous successful application was strongly supported by this committee.

It has been a long held personal ambition to reinstate the Green Flag Award back to the Downs.

At this stage the Panel is seeking to gauge the level of support from all the partners involved and backing from the Downs committee will add significant weight to the proposal.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Downs committee commits to and supports an application led by the Downs Advisory Panel to recover Green Flag Status for the Downs.

Should Downs committee members wish to learn more about the scheme and the criteria required to achieve the award this link will take you to the Green Flag page.

<https://www.greenflagaward.org/>

Item 2

The Gully footpath and Steps.

The footpath and Victorian steps in the goat gully have long been a FODAG flagship project. Some years ago, FODAG funded and oversaw a project to refurbish the steps; but over the years the steps and footpath have suffered critical erosion, some areas are now unsafe and in urgent need of repair.

Recently FODAG and volunteers on a corporate workday made some temporary repairs, but it now needs input and expertise from BCC Public Rights of Way team who have a legal responsibility to keep the path and steps in good order.

There is a wider Portway Corridor Improvement Plan that will include work to the steps and path, but the proposed start date is some way off. {Possibly as late as 2027} FODAG is currently lobbying PROW to reconsider and bring the date forward.

Recommendation:

The Downs committee through its good offices contacts the Public Rights of Way team and asks that this well used and important feature is reinstated to an acceptable standard as a priority. PROW has indicated that if “contributions could be found it could help prioritise the work”

Item 3.

Cliff Edge Fencing.

Downs committee members who attended the last meeting may recall a Public Forum statement from a lady whose son had died after falling or jumping from the cliff edge near the Observatory. {The coroner recorded an open verdict} Her moving statement asked that when funds allow the protective fencing should be raised. This may help prevent a fatal accident or reduce the likelihood of spontaneous or impulsive suicide. The image below shows the fence at lower than waist height.

The Observatory Tower area is a huge draw for visitors and at times large numbers gather to watch for example the Balloon Fiesta. The low fence offers little or no protection should a sudden crowd surge occur.

The Samaritans found that men, from disadvantaged backgrounds, in their 30s, 40s, and 50s, are at highest risk of dying by suicide. To help reduce the risk the cliff edge fence could be raised in height relatively cheaply, simply by welding extensions to the current fence posts

and fitting wires to prevent easy access. This would be the same principal adopted by the Suspension Bridge Trust when they experienced a spike in sudden suicides.

In addition, warning signs about the danger and signs showing the help available should also be considered.

In one month, April 2024 out of 340 deaths by suicide: {UK Government figures} 264 (77.6%) were in males and 76 (22.4%) in females 45 (13.2%) were in people aged 10 to 24, 111 (32.6%) in people aged 25 to 44, 144 (42.4%) in people aged 45 to 64, and 40 (11.8%) in people aged 65 and over.

Legally, suicide has historically been a cause of death that exonerates other parties from liability, but currently there are two general exceptions to this view. Specifically, another party may be found responsible for a suicide if that party either caused the suicide or failed in its duty to prevent the suicide from occurring.



Recommendation:

That the Downs committee urgently consider exploring options to extend the height of the cliff edge fence and look to install warning signs and information panels about the help available for those experiencing suicidal thoughts.

It may be appropriate to seek advice from organisations like the Samaritans and the Suspension Bridge Trust on how best to proceed.

Item 4.

Corporate Workdays.

During the summer FODAG has been experimenting with the organisation of corporate workdays.. These are events that are becoming increasingly popular as local companies look to make a conservation contribution and to enhance their green credentials.

Supported by the Downs supervisor and his team, a couple of projects were identified and completed.

The Panel discussed whether this is an initiative that should be further developed and a resource that could be beneficial to the Downs.

Important ambitious tasks - for example clearing encroaching vegetation from the Iron Age Fort and clearance of the zig zag footpath that leads from the Grand Spa Hotel right down to the Portway could be undertaken.

It may be that members of the Downs committee have links to companies that may wish to benefit from the scheme.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Downs committee supports a FODAG led initiative to encourage local companies to partake in corporate workdays.

Note to Committee

At a recent meeting of the Downs Advisory Panel the Business Development Manager gave a progress report. Part of this report was documentation clarifying the legal position with regard to the future use of the North car park.

It was the view of the Panel that it should offer its support to the Downs committee to progress this development.

Robert Westlake

Chair

Downs Advisory Panel {DAP}