

# THE DOWNS COMMITTEE

## Clifton and Durdham Downs (Bristol) Act 1861

### Minutes of the Downs Committee – 13 January 2025

#### Members present:

**Bristol City Councillors:** Andrew Varney, Caroline Gooch, Kye Dudd, David Wilcox, Izzy Russell (subst).

**Society of Merchant Venturers:** Robert Bourns, Jonathon Baker, Mike Bothamley, Fiona Francombe, David Powell, John Watson.

**Officers present:** Luke Mackenzie (Business Development Manager-Clifton & Durdham Downs), Steve Hunt (Events Officer), Ben Skuse (Area Parks Supervisor-north area), Anna Stevens (Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Biodiversity Engagement Manager), Ian Bowen Service Coordinator Gypsy Roma Traveller Team, Steve Gregory (Democratic Services).

**Others present:** Robert Westlake Downs for People (DAP)

#### 1. Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information

The Chair welcomed everyone. Introductions were made and safety information was shared.

#### 2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors George Calascione, Paul Goggin, Paula O'Rourke (substituted by Cllr Izzy Russell), and also from Bevis Watts (SMV), Kevin Jay (Finance Manager).

#### 3. Declarations of Interest

None declared.

#### 4. Minutes of the Last Meeting

**Resolved:** That the minutes of the previous meeting on 18 November 2024 be approved as a correct record.

#### 5. Action Tracker

The Chair ran through actions from the previous meeting and further updates were given and included in the Action Tracker.

## **6. Verbal Update from the Service Coordinator Gypsy Roma Traveller Team**

Members were given a summary of the work of the Gypsy Roma Traveller Team which now included vehicle dwellers located on the Downs and other areas of Bristol. Importantly dwellings on the public highway came under the auspices of the Neighbourhood Enforcement Team.

In 2024 there were fewer travellers in the city but an increase in vehicle dwellings on roads. The legal situation for dealing with illegal parking on roads was complex and could be lengthy as most actions required significant evidence to progress or resolve. Where there was serious incidents of anti-social behaviour or criminal offences only the police were able to intervene under the powers granted to them by the Criminal Justice Act 2024. Injunctions required a large amount of evidence-based information to resolve.

It was noted that most complaints of a serious nature were directed to the Council when most often it was a police matter. Arising from this a member suggested that a meeting be convened with the police, noting that detailed evidence was vital to make any significant progress.

The DAP representative offered to discuss this with the police representative at the next DAP meeting and report back to the Downs Committee in March. This approach was agreed.

Members were also informed that incidents of vehicles driving over the grassed areas of the Downs were often carried out by wider members of the public not just vehicle dwellers. A members suggested that to help obtain evidence members familiarise themselves with a dashcam reporting tool ie, <https://www.avonandsomerset.police.uk/report/accident-on-the-road/#/>

## **7. Matters Arising from the Events and Finance Sub Group**

Noted that there were no matters arising from the last Events & Finance Sub Group to be considered by the Downs Committee at today's meeting.

## **8. Public Forum**

### **Questions**

#### **Question(s) 1**

No 1, on behalf of Downs for People, the Bristol Tree Forum and the Clifton and Hotwells Improvement Society

North Car Park, when can *Downs for People* and the *Bristol Tree Forum* expect a reply to their letter of 8 April about the North Car Park?

Answer – a letter of reply had been sent by e-mail on 13 January 2025.

No 2, on my own behalf (Susan Carter)

Padel courts and mini-golf course. Can the Committee explain how it will be possible to construct padel courts and a mini-golf course without enclosing parts of the Downs?

Answer – the Downs Committee was lawfully able to enclose after due appropriation of the land for the purposes of exercise or recreation as defined in section 11 byelaws.

Supplementary Question – when can we see the legal advice on this?

Answer – BCC legal team will consider this in due course.

**Question (s) 2**

**Zoo - North Car Park redevelopment**

We understand that the Committee believes that, as there is a planning consent from 1996 for the use of the land as a car park and that there is no intended change of use, the Committee only needs to apply make any necessary amendments to the previous planning conditions before it proceeds with its plans to reopen the North Car Park for visitors to the Downs.

**No 1**

Will this be done under section 73 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 in order to amend Condition 3 of the planning consent which was imposed '*to ensure that the parking is controlled and is therefore, only available to visitors to the zoo*'?

Answer - This matter was ongoing, and the appropriate mechanism was yet to be defined.

**No 2**

Section 73 may not be used if there is no relevant condition in the permission listing the originally approved plans. The 1996 does not contain a condition listing the originally approved plans.

How does the Committee plan to overcome this?

Answer – This matter was ongoing, and the appropriate mechanism was yet to be defined.

**Statements**

The following public forum statements were received from the public listed below and were noted by the Committee.

1. Mark Ashdown – Tree Forum
2. Susan Carter

The committee received a report from the Downs Advisory Panel noting that since the last meeting of the Downs committee the Panels dedicated email address and phone line had received and logged twenty-one contacts.

The Panel had considered numerous items of business and had made three recommendations for the committee to consider.

a) Closure of Ladies Mile Road

The committee considered the DAP Panel proposal and feasibility of closing Ladies Mile Road to all traffic except bicycles for a trial Bank Holiday weekend during this summer.

Recommendation: That the Downs committee asks the Events & Finance subgroup to consider a trial weekend closure of Ladies Mile Road.

**On being put to the vote it was agreed (8 for and 3 abstention's) to approve a trial weekend closure of Ladies Mile Road.**

b) Business Development

It was considered imperative that schemes like the north car park, the Seawalls Cafe/toilet block, pay and display parking and the Downs dressing rooms projects were progressed as a matter of urgency.

Recommendation: That the Downs committee act decisively to progress proposed income generating projects.

**Agreed unanimously to act decisively to progress proposed income generating projects.**

c) Future Accommodation

The agreement with the DAP was that the Downs committee would provide suitable accommodation for DAP meetings.

Recommendation: That the Downs committee confirms suitable accommodation for future DAP meetings.

**Agreed unanimously that Merchants Hall would provide accommodation for future DAP meetings.**

The remainder of the report content was noted.

## **10. Downs Business Update report**

The Committee received an update report from the Business Development Manager on business opportunities at key locations across the Downs. These included –

- a) Zoo - North Car Park
- b) Stoke Road Pitches
- c) Stoke Road changing rooms.
- d) Sea Walls site

- e) Private Training Operators.
- f) Lottery heritage Funding.

Arising from discussion the following points were raised/clarified –

- Bristol City Council did not have a Biodiversity Net Gain plan in place for the Downs. This was under review.
- Legal framework summary for the Padel Courts/mini golf course to be provided by legal team as soon as possible. The Committee voted unanimously in favour of the principle of the development proposal. Noted that the legal challenge to this proposal was not accepted by the Downs Committee.
- A children's playground on the Downs could only be funded if there was a successful application from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

**RESOLVED – That the report be noted.**

### **11. Downs Maintenance report**

The Committee received an update report from the Area Parks Supervisor summarising the work on the Downs for the summer season.

**RESOLVED – That the report be noted.**

### **12. Downs Events Report**

The committee received an update report from the Events Officer on 2024 events that had taken place since the last meeting and future events in 2025.

**RESOLVED – That the Events report be noted.**

### **13. Downs Finance Report**

The committee received the Forecast report for 2024-25. Since the last report in September the forecasted net deficit had improved by £41k, reducing from a deficit of (£186k) to (£145k).

A member asked if the Council's wider budget savings would impact the future finances for the Downs, the Finance Officer to respond when possible.

**RESOLVED – That the Forecast report for 2024-25 be noted.**

### **14. Downs Community Engagement Report**

The committee received an Annual Review of the activities of the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife learning and community engagement programme for 2024.

Highlights of 2024 for Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife (AGDW) had been the year-round delivery of the 'Little Kids' on the Downs pre-school age nature club; expanding delivery

across the primary to secondary school age range; engaging the general public at a variety of festivals and events to help them discover the Avon Gorge and Downs through the wildlife prism; and launching the Treeburt tree trail on the Promenade.

Points arising from discussion were –

- Areas of high value grassland were being considered for annual cutting only to maximise wildlife potential, the project team would work with Parks Supervisor via the steering group to identify exact areas to be considered.
- Proposed funding cuts by BCC would likely end community engagement work by end of March 2025. If funding was found by the end of January there would be a greater emphasis on secondary school work as this yielded greater income and was more suitable to the current environment on the Downs. Grant applications would also be considered to plug the gap until Heritage Lottery Funding was obtained.

Members welcomed the review and expressed their support and sincere appreciation for the work being done.

**RESOLVED – That the Downs Community Engagement Annual Review be noted.**

**15. Date of next meeting**

Monday 10 March 2025, 2pm at City Hall.

**16. Any other business**

None.

Meeting ended at 3.45 pm