

# **Downs Advisory Panel {DAP} Report to Downs Committee**

**March 10<sup>th</sup> 2025**

The Downs Advisory Panel met on February 17<sup>th</sup> to consider a range of issues raised by Downs neighbours, FOD+AG members and Downs users.

In addition to regular Members the Panel were joined by a representative from Avon & Somerset Police and Alderman Judy Patterson a previous City Councilor and previous member of the Downs committee.

At the last meeting of the Downs committee {DC} a DAP recommendation was to close Ladies mile for a trial period, maybe just a day or a long weekend The purpose to examine the site as a possible events space capable of generating income and to monitor public reaction to the principle of closing off parts of the Downs.

## **Items reported to the DAP.**

Since the December meeting of the Downs committee the Panels dedicated email address and phone line has received 25 contacts. All inquiries received a prompt response and been logged. In addition to direct contacts the Panel engages directly with local community groups, Councilors, 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 directly to questions of a more general nature.

The content of inquiries remains unchanged with complaints about kerbside vehicle dwelling continuing to dominate, citing no action on abandoned caravans, dumped rubbish, shrubbery used as latrines, contaminated waste and human waste deposited in neighbours refuse bins. The recent Council report to the Homes and Housing Delivery Policy Committee did generate a flurry of interest. The DAP was able to advise numerous callers about Public Forum statements. The DAP understands that the Policy committee received a record number of 172 statements and over 50 attended in person.

## **The Panel debated several items and have numerous recommendations plus items of information for the committee to consider.**

Following a verbal update from the Service Coordinator Gypsy/Roma/ Traveler Team at the last Downs committee it was suggested that a response from the Police Service be sought. The Advisory Panel offered on behalf of the Downs committee to contact the Police and invite a representative to the next DAP meeting to discuss specifically, the Traveling Community and the kerbside van dwellers.

The Panel welcomed PCSO Senior Supervisor Kelly Taylor and were able ask questions about Police responses to perceived criminality and agreed codes of conduct with other agencies, including the City Council. Kelly Taylor gave open and frank responses about what could and couldn't be realistically done. Kelly also explained about evidence gathering and about incident reporting.

***Recommendation: {1a} That the Downs committee and other agencies provide clear and timely evidence of incursions onto Downs land and ensure all incidents including anti-social behaviour are reported to the City Council and where appropriate the Police.***

***{1b} Ensure the legal process including recent changes to legislation for managing Travellers is properly implemented including longer and more comprehensive injunctions.***

The Panel discussed at length the impact of the van dwelling population on Downs visitors and near neighbours.

The Panel debated the outcome of the very recent Homes and Housing Delivery Policy Committee and are pleased that there was at least an acceptance that the situation had become untenable and that a new Policy was required. The Panel supports the proposals contained within the report.

Measures to engage more effectively with van dwellers, consideration of permanent and temporary meanwhile sites and serviced sites providing basic facilities were all proposed and appear to be the first steps forward in what may yet prove to be long road.

The Panel were pleased that the chair of the H&HDP committee had offered local residents a public meeting and the DAP would also make itself available to assist with any public meetings that might bring about a satisfactory resolution to this long running saga.



*Image of a destroyed caravan following a liquid gas container explosion*

***Recommendation: {2a} That the Downs committee request from the chair of the H&HDP committee that proposals and recommendations made on the 14<sup>th</sup> February are backed up with a timeline and action tracker.***

***{2b} That the Downs committee supports a recommendation that the DAP is represented at any future public meeting***

### **Ladies Mile, Trial Closure**

The Downs committee agreed in principle at the last meeting, a trial closure of Ladies Mile from Stoke Road to its junction with Circular Road. The Panel is advising a proposed closure date of May 18<sup>th</sup>. The intention is to apply for a Street Party licence which the City Council offers for free. The event would be very much family fun orientated, bring a Picnic. Garden games, etc.

A Police bike marking and registration day has been promised and the DAP is pleased that local partners have agreed to provide exhibitions and educational displays.

The site itself may also lend itself to some small scale commercial activity.

The proposal has received approval from the DAP, FOD+AG, AG&DWL Project, Avon & Somerset Police, and the Cycling Lobby.

***Recommendation. That the Downs committee supports a proposal for a trial road closure on the 18<sup>th</sup> May.***

**Lottery:** Robert Bourne is currently progressing the Heritage Lottery Bid and will keep the Downs committee apprised of progress.

**Green Flag:** A FOD+AG Proposal to seek reinstatement of the Green Flag Award has for the moment been put on hold. This is because the DAP has been unable to secure permission from BCC Parks who as joint land owners would be required to grant that permission. There would also be a small requirement for documentary support from BCC Parks Officers.

**Downs Business Development Manager** presented an update and progress report to the Advisory Panel and will report separately to the Downs committee later this afternoon.

### **Tussocky Grassland Regime:**

This is a conservation proposal and was one of the documents attached as part of the DAP Report. Bristol City Council (BCC) Parks department, in conjunction with the Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge, and the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project, are proposing to introduce areas of tussocky grassland on the Downs.

The proposal was discussed and endorsed by the DAP.

BCC Conservation Officer Rosie Jackson will give committee a brief overview of the Project and will be happy to answer any questions about the Project.

***Recommendation: That the Downs committee Committee accepts the proposal to manage particular parts of the Downs to create areas that will be of greater conservation value.***

### **Relocating Picnic benches.**

*The Picnic benches located at Ladies Mile, are in poor condition. In addition they are sited in a particularly sensitive area of the Downs and as such encourage, driving and parking on the Downs to get to a Picnic bench, encourages the use of single use barbecues and generates additional litter.*

***Recommendation. That the Downs Supervisor works with the Conservation officer to assess current condition of picnic benches, consider any repairs where practical, identify suitable alternative locations and relocate.***

### **Replacing Bus stop.**

It was brought to the attention of the Panel that the bus stop located at Downleaze is over fifty years old and in particularly poor condition. The structure is rusted out and becoming unsafe. More importantly the design make using the stop increasingly difficult and there is no provision for disabled access

It appears that the City Council are willing to do the upgrade to modern standards, including raising the kerb but apparently need the permission of the Downs committee to carry out this work and may also require the permission of the Secretary of State.



Bus Stop Downleaze

***Recommendation: That Downs Downs Committee grants permission for the improvements to be carried out.***

***Robert Westlake***

***Chair***

***Downs Advisory Panel.***