

Bristol City Council

Minutes of the Downs Committee

22 January 2018 at 2.00 pm



Members Present:-

Councillors: Lesley Alexander (Chair), Peter Abraham, Donald Alexander, Clare Champion-Smith, Barry Clark, Kye Dudd, Cleo Lake

Merchant Venturers:- J Baker, F Greenacre, C Griffiths, J McArthur, M Prior and T Ross

Officers in Attendance:-

Becky Belfin, Mandy Leivers, Jemma Prince, Ben Skuse, Melissa Inman, Oliver Harrison

Others in attendance in whole or part:-

Tom Hedges (Bristol Zoo), Dr Adrienn Tomor (UWE), Nancy Rollason (BCC – Legal), Kate Fryer (BCC – Legal), Richard Fletcher (BCC – Parks), Jack Penrose (FODAG), Robert Westlake (FODAG)

1. Apologies and introductions

2. Minutes of last meeting

Minutes approved

3. Declarations of interest

James McArthur declared an interest as a shareholder of Bristol Zoo.

4. Public Forum

Peter Weeks made a public statement on behalf of Downs for People re: Zoo Parking on Ladies Mile. DfP believe that the Downs should not be used for car parking and asks the Committee not to renew the Zoo's licence for parking on Ladies' Mile. The Zoo should be charged more for their use of the land.

5. Bristol Zoo use of Ladies Mile Annual Report

Tom Hedges, Director of Estates, Bristol Zoo

TH presented a report on Bristol Zoo's use of the Downs for parking. It is inevitable that some people will travel to the zoo by car, but taking steps to reduce car use, e.g. changing rooms, electric points, big



discounts for public transport (33%). Promoting discounts through newsletters and social media. For staff provide tax free loans for cycle purchases, limited staff car parking. Zoo has strong relationship with BCC parks staff. Ladies Mile is invaluable asset for parking spikes in summer. The ground is well managed and in very good condition. The agreement has been in place for a long time and benefits both zoo and downs. Maximum expected use this year is 35 days.

A member noted that while objections to the parking scheme were understandable, they were not pragmatic. Before the scheme was introduced, traffic was very heavy and ad-hoc parking on the Downs was common. If the scheme ends, more damaging ad-hoc parking could return and there are no resources to police against it.

Members agreed that the current level of charging for zoo parking on the Downs was too low. This should be revisited at the next Events and Finance sub-Committee when the landowner permissions are due to be renewed. Extra income could be used for parking enforcement.

6. Bridge Valley Road Footbridge

Dr Adrienn Tomor attended to give a verbal update on the Bridge Valley Road Footbridge position.

AT worked with FODAG to develop a footbridge to link two parts of the downs to avoid the dangerous on road crossing. All planning has been voluntary funded so far. Downs Committee considered and approved the bridge in principle. Planning went in 2 years ago, was rejected due to trees. Appealed to planning inspectorate and won appeal. After securing planning, we are getting other permissions (including the land owner). Founding a dedicated charity to raise £2m build cost.

Members clarified that the principle had been agreed but a further detailed report would be needed to agree the plan proper, including finances. Suggest that the finance group or a task and finish group come together with officers to examine the scheme alongside the planning application.

It was clarified that Downs Committee is the relevant body for landowner consent rather than Merchant Venturers. Some DC members were sent plans during the planning permission consultation period, but not all of them. There may be conditions placed on any future permission granted to protect DC from liabilities. AT mentioned that BCC may be taking long term maintenance obligation under highways, so DC and BCC will have to work closely on this.

7. Update on Downs Toilet Position

Officers presenting: Nancy Rollason, Richard Fletcher, Kate Fryer

It was agreed at the recent finance and events sub-group to bring officer views and recommendations here to for the Committee to consider. Stoke Road toilet facility is currently damaged and out of use, it



was previously agreed at the toilet sub group that this toilet should be returned to working order before hand over on 1 Feb. Officers agreed to do this.

Confirmed that the suspension bridge trust will be taking over the service and maintenance of the bridge toilet due to an extant lease.

References to Merchant Venturers owning toilets in the report should be changed to Downs Committee as BCC/MV responsibility transferred to the committee under the Downs Act. BCC is ceasing to fund the cleaning and maintenance of these facilities rather than 'decommissioning' them.

BCC officers confirmed that there is no council budget to manage the Downs toilet facilities. It is up to the Downs Committee how to finance and manage maintenance of these facilities, BCC is offering to help with procurement if needed. Downs Committee is currently in discussion with BCC finance and legal colleagues about how DC can have a payment mechanism for a third party cleaning / maintenance contractor.

Legal view was given that TUPE was unlikely to apply due to the nature of the service and commissioning body being different.

It was clarified that the BCC parks team would not be able to provide an interim service as was suggested as a possibility at the previous meeting.

It was agreed that references to estimated costs of maintaining the toilets should be removed as these were unlikely to be accurate.

Downs Committee thanked all parties involved for their good work on this.

ACTION Jonathan Baker, Cllr Don Alexander and Nancy Rollason to liaise on the practicalities

8. Downs Management and Events Report

Melissa Inman introduced the report

Negotiations are still ongoing about holding a 2 day concert. Colston Hall has been approached but is not available. An update will be written for the next sub group meeting. Ben is doing a site visit with the Race for Life organisers to walk through the route. Ben is also waiting to hear back from organisers on parking issues. Extension to 2018 has been approved to Russian circus, but parking should also be discussed for that. The new Gromit trail has proposed locations on Zion hill, Stoke road and Observatory. DC will be given a proportion of BCC's income from all sites in the City.

Recommendation on Gromit locations approved

Clifton Suspension Bridge Trust is renovating the toll booths and has requested permission for a construction compound. Members agreed that a detailed plan / footprint and more specifics on the time



period were required. Committee should also look at land charging for any period over 3 months and enacting penalties for overrunning.

ACTION BS to ask Bridge Trust to submit formal plans to the committee via OH

9. Finance Report

Jemma Prince presented the finance report, recommending the committee to approve and adopt a draft 18/19 budget. This budget was discussed in detail and approved at the sub-committee. Savings target in 17/18 was to reduce budget by £62k. Savings should be £79k over this target. Next year target is to achieve a further £100k saving, but this target is currently expected to be missed by circa £16k. This is largely due to the possibility of £17k income loss from not achieving a 2 day concert.

Committee thanked JP for her good work in getting finances in shape and approved the adoption of the draft budget

10 Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project Annual Report

Becky Belfin introduced the report.

Scrub clearing over winter has gone well, tricky and requires rope access. Goats are useful to control scrub, 2 have been killed by dogs this year. have put up new signs and public space protection order. In future, team will look at ways to exclude dogs from that area altogether. Positive numbers counted of the Silky Wave Moth, which is only found in the Gorge.

Mandy Leivers reported on the achievements of the Education Programme

Was a very successful year, we engaged with over 11,000 people. The events programme has proved popular among all age groups. 2000 primary school children have been engaged, with the involvement of 5 new schools. Sessions have excellent feedback, with a 9/10 average. We also engaged with 7,932 people through community activities. Work began on an Audience Development Plan in autumn 2017. This is looking to identify people we currently do not reach. Including setting up projects to work with children, young people, older people and refugees from the less well-off areas of the city. Committee congratulated Mandy on developing the programme successfully.

ACTION ML to supply 15 year review document to Claire Campion Smith, so that she can see where visitors to the Downs are coming from.

Report was noted

11 Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge Report

Robert Westlake introduces report. Jack Penrose was elected chair of FODAG, all other officers remain unchanged. Held the Downs Star Party in conjunction with the Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project and



Bristol Astronomical Society. The Downs is a designated Dark Sky Discovery site, due to less light pollution than other areas of the city. There was the first snow on the Downs since 2014, which drew lots of visitors. An anonymous poet has been posting poems on the Downs. FODAG is increasingly concerned about dogs attacking the goats. The report at the next Downs Committee will be FODAG's 10 year anniversary.

Report was noted

12 Any Other Business

Meeting ended at 3.40 pm

CHAIR _____

