

Downs Maintenance Report to Downs Committee 23rd September 2019

It has been a relief this year to write this report and to not have to be talking about dealing with the effects of a drought. This time last year large parts of the Downs were white in colour and the grass was parched and burnt to the point of being dead in some areas. The conditions this summer are much more normal thankfully and as such the ground recovery after events has been much less problematic. This has also been beneficial in being able to provide a good quality of football pitch surface as compared to last.

However this does mean that we are likely to have to be cutting grass for a good few weeks yet before we can transition to more autumnal/winter works.

The 2019/20 Bristol Downs League football season has begun. As ever marking back on 25 football pitches onto the ground has been a big job. Wednesday afternoon Bristol University student football starts again in October.

The annual Downs hay cut has taken place. The larger meadow areas are carried out as part of a city wide hay cut. However there are still some smaller areas that need a hay cut. Areas such as the water works on the Portway, top of the Goat enclosure and the Zoo banks are much smaller and difficult to access so my team carry out the hay cut in these areas.

Going back to the recent droughts of the previous two summers , it seems that it has taken its toll on some of our trees at the Downs. A Beech, two Silver Birches and a Horse Chestnut have died and will be removed in the next couple weeks. Replacements for these trees will be requested if the tree inspection team agree on species and positioning.

Since the last report Bristol Pride and the Downs festival have been the two most significant events that have taken place at the Downs.

Bristol Pride seems to have been a success, both for them in terms of the move to a new site, and us in terms of using a new part of the Downs for event activity. The Downs festival have recently left site and I am happy that with a reasonable amount of work the site will start to recover well. Just the Bristol University welcome fair and the circus to go now and that will be it for another busy year of events at the Downs in 2019.

It is nice to write a report and not to have to mention travellers. Long may that continue. I am though participating in meetings with a recently formed group called “ protect the Downs “. Their aim is to explore options to prevent access by travellers onto some areas of the Downs. Undoubtedly many of, if not all, of the suggestions or requests that might come from this group will have to come to this forum for approval.

Within Bristol City Council Parks I can report that two vacancies still exist. Head of parks and green spaces and the north area parks manager are still being advertised.

The news from our conservation grazing Goats is that the herd is down to two animals now. It appears that old age seems to be taking its toll now. Bristol Zoo vets have been involved throughout and welfare issues are put foremost at all times. Discussions are ongoing about the prospect of replacing with new Goats and/or Sheep going forward. I will keep the committee updated with future developments in this area.