

Bristol City Council

Minutes of the Downs Committee

23 September 2019 at 2.00 pm



Members Present:-

Councillors: Councillor Jos Clark (Chair), Councillor Peter Abraham, Councillor Donald Alexander, Councillor Christopher Davies, Councillor Paula O'Rourke, Councillor Mike Langley, Antony Kenny, Ross Ancell, Jonathon Baker, Simon Cooper, Francis Greenacre, Mary Prior and Tim Ross

Officers in Attendance:- Simon Garrett, Mandy Leivers, Steven Riley, Amanda Sharpe, Ben Skuse, Sam Wilcock.

1. Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information

Everyone was welcomed to the meeting and introductions were made.

Councillor Abraham paid tribute to Francis Greenacre who was attending his last meeting of the Downs Committee. He was thanked for his valuable knowledge and service to the Committee over many years and the Committee wished him well for the future.

2. Apologies and introductions

Apologies were received from Councillor Kye Dudd.

3. Minutes of last meeting

The minutes of the meeting of the 1st July 2019 were agreed as a correct record.

4. Declarations of interest

There were none.

5. Public Forum



The following statements were received:

1. FODAG Update on activities
2. Charlie August Public Listings for Downs Events
3. Downs for People Zoo Parking
4. Bristol Tree Forum Richard Bland Memorial Woodland
5. Bristol Naturalists' Society Richard Bland Memorial Woodland

Those who submitted statement numbers 3, 4 and 5 were in attendance.

All the statements were noted.

6. Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project Update (Mandy Leivers and Simon Garrett)

Mandy Leivers presented her report to update members on the activities hosted by the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project since the last meeting.

Simon Garrett of Bristol Zoo addressed the Committee and asked the Downs Committee to contribute increased funds towards the salaries of both the Education Manager and Education Officer in order to provide stability to the project. The commitment would be £27,000 p.a. ongoing. The commitment would enable there to be an application for a £250,000 grant for a three-year expansion of the project through the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Additionally, a one off award of £10,000 as a contribution towards the salary of the bid writer was requested.

It was highlighted that the bid would be of benefit the Downs as a whole as it would develop the work of the project, the offer of the Downs and improvements in features such as signage.

It was confirmed that the Events and Finance Sub Group had discussed and approved the proposals. The Committee were asked to vote by show of hands and it was agreed unanimously that:

RESOLVED – that

- (1) Downs Committee contribute to the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project £27,000 p.a. commencing in the current financial year 2019-2020 (plus an annual increment of 2%)**
- (2) Downs Committee contribute a one of award of £10,000 to the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project towards the salary of the bid writer.**

7. Downs Maintenance Report (Ben Skuse)

Ben Skuse presented the report which had been circulated within the agenda papers.



There had been reported erosion of the grass by the observatory due to vehicular access to the site for deliveries and improvements to the building. This was also a recognised health and safety risk to the public. The lessor had proposed that once the installation of the two lighting units by the observatory (as approved by the Downs Committee in April) was completed, vehicular access to the site would be curtailed by way of installation of a drop bollard at his expense.

It was suggested that both points of access to the site should also be monitored and consideration also given to a second bollard for the other access point.

It was:

RESOLVED that permission be granted for installation of a lockable bollard to restrict vehicular access.

Ben brought the Committees attention to a proposal for a 'Memorial Woodland' on the Downs. The planting would be in memorial to Richard Bland who had been an active member of several environmental societies including the Bristol Tree Forum and Bristol Naturalists Society. Statements in support of the planting had been noted earlier in the meeting. Mr Bland had

Members of the Committee paid tribute to Mr Bland, who sadly passed away in December 2018, and drew attention to the Granny Trail on the Downs which had been dedicated to Mr. Bland. There was some concern regarding the proposal and Members asked that it be presented to the Movement and Place Sub Group for recommendation to the Downs Committee if appropriate. **(ACTION: SW to add to agenda of Movement and Place Sub Group in October)**

The Committee then considered a proposal from FODAG contained within their statement. It was suggested that FODAG become active in the management and reinvigoration of flower bedding on the Downs. This would be in partnership with Parks Officers and it was hoped that beds could be planted by next Spring. The Committee agreed to this proposal and Ben agreed to liaise with FODAG. **(ACTION: BS to liaise with FODAG)**

8. Events Update (Amanda Sharpe)

Amanda Sharpe presented the report circulated within the agenda papers. In response to comments the following points were highlighted:

- The Bristol University Fayre event was now on site. There had been a reduction in the number of days onsite following a request from the Events and Finance Sub Group. Officers would visit to assess the site layout and build.
- Members of the Committee had visited the Downs Festival event and considered it well managed and successful. It had been confirmed that sound levels were set to an industry standard for metropolitan parks across the Country. Letters received regarding noise levels would receive a response to their concerns. **(ACTION: AS to respond in consultation with the Lord Mayor and**



Master). A professional sound contractor would compile a post event report which would be circulated to Members of the Committee. **(ACTION: AS/SW to circulate)**

- With reference to the public forum statement no.2, it was confirmed that the events held on the Downs were highly likely to be listed on the internet via various search engines and event websites. Members of the public could be referred to the Downs Committee minutes and reports from Spring each year which would provide details of events to be held during the Summer **(ACTION: SW to contact public forum participant with information).**

9. Finance Update (Kevin Jay)

The officer presented the report as included within the agenda papers. It was confirmed that there had been no Bristol City Council contribution to the Downs Committee during the current financial year.

10 Matters Arising From the Events and Finance Group

The matters arising report from the Events and Finance Sub Group meeting was considered. It was noted that recommendations regarding the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project had been agreed.

With reference to the need for a tractor for the Parks Department to efficiently maintain the Downs, the Sub Group had made further enquiries of the Finance Officer and an update would be provided to the next Sub Group meeting in October.

11 Matters Arising from the Movement and Place Group

It was reported that an additional meeting of the Movement and Place Sub Group had taken place to facilitate further discussions regarding the Leisure Loop proposal. A traffic survey was required and once complete, the matter would return to the Downs Committee.

12 Cycling Provision A4018 (Steven Riley)

Steven Riley outlined the presentation to the Committee as included within the agenda papers. The following points were reiterated:

- The path would be located on Downs land the other side of the trees along Westbury Road.
- It was proposed that cyclists would be directed to the current pathway and pedestrians to the new path. Signs would feature, however use would be difficult to enforce.
- The material to be used would be hard surface such as gravel or limescale tread but had not been determined yet.
- Any impact on the wildflower meadow would be as limited as possible.
- Consultation during Feb/March 2019 had not presented a clear view from the public regarding the proposals.



- The planning application could include the completion of the 'Severn Sisters Loop' as a possibility for the future.

In response the following supporting comments were raised;

- As the Council had declared a climate emergency and aimed for carbon neutrality, as people's habits changed there was a need for additional cycling provision.
- There were improved health benefits of increased cycling within the city.
- The resulting walkway on the 'Downs side' of the trees would create a haven for pedestrians and prams and open up the route to more leisure cycling.
- People were already using the path on the other side of the trees as a 'desire line'. To protect it with an appropriate material was in the best interests of the ground.
- The proposals were part of the programme of mitigations for the A4018 following developments at Patchway/Cribbs Causeway. The added cycling provision would ease congestion pressure on Westbury, Henbury and the edge of Stoke Bishop. The funding would come via the project to alleviate the effects of that development.

There was concern regarding the robustness of the surface to withstand the access and egress of heavy goods vehicles and cars driving onto the Downs for events. In response to this the officer confirmed that the HGV access point would not be affected, but the surface would be designed to assist vehicular access to the car parks.

It was suggested that it was premature to pinpoint mitigation for that stretch of road when problems could be more prevalent on Falcondale Road and further to the north of the City.

Members were unsure that the loss of green space could be justified when there was already a wide footpath for shared use along the stretch identified. It was suggested that the money be used to improve and reinvigorate the current path rather than creating another at a detriment to green space.

The following comments were made with regards to the already established cycle path on Saville Road/ Stoke Hill;

- The clear route for pedestrians and cycles from the top of Blackboy Hill was to the already established wide public footpath and cycle way.
- The access points to the existing space and path could be improved to create a better shared cycle way with an improved surface.
- It was highlighted that cyclists varied in why and how they preferred to cycle. The proposed option may appeal more to the commuter however improvements to the current path would likely benefit the average leisure cyclist. One was not more important than the other.
- Bristol Cycling campaign data had established that the preference amongst cyclists was the most direct route from A to B, which supported the proposed route for commuters.
- The existing route was not easy to use or access so was not popular with commuters. The bus stops and degraded surface meant it was not well used.



Officers considered the original proposals to be a better solution that would reach more people and increase the numbers of cyclists along the route. To upgrade the current path would likely not appeal to cyclist commuters.

It was clarified that the officers were asking the Downs Committee for permission in principle so that the path would be included within the planning permission sought. The Downs Committee as landowners were being asked their permission to yield the land to the scheme.

Officers confirmed that before planning permission was sought, the Downs Committee (via the Movement and Place Sub Group and main committee) would be consulted on details such as exact materials for the path.

The following motion was proposed and seconded:

“That the Committee

1. Give landowner approval in principle and the permission that will yield the land as outlined within the proposals and maps presented.
2. Such permission in principle would be subject to subsequent approval of the details which would be outlined within the planning permission.
3. Detail should be taken to the M&P or full Committee as appropriate before planning permission is sought.”

Upon being put to the vote, six members voted for, and six against. The Lord Mayor abstained from the vote. No decision was made.

The following motion was then proposed and seconded:

“That the vote be postponed pending further investigation of the existing land potential of the existing cycle route if resurfaced, improved and extended.

That further investigations and reasons why that could not happen should be brought back to the next meeting of the Downs Committee. The matter would then be revisited.”

Upon being put to the vote, ten members voted for and one against. There were two abstentions.

Therefore it was RESOLVED:

That the vote be postponed pending further investigation of the existing land potential of the existing cycle route if resurfaced, improved and extended.

That further investigations and reasons why that could not happen should be brought back to the next meeting of the Downs Committee. The matter would then be revisited.

13 Any Other Business



It was confirmed that the meeting was the last with the current Master of the Merchant Venturers, Tony Kenny was thanked for his work for the Downs Committee and wished well for the future.

14 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting would take place on Monday 18th November at 2pm in City Hall.

Meeting ended at 4.00 pm

CHAIR _____

