

# Minutes of the Downs Committee

20 January 2020 at 3.00 pm



## Members Present:-

Councillor Jos Clark (Chair), Councillor Peter Abraham, Councillor Donald Alexander, Councillor Paula O'Rourke

Merchant Venturers: Ross Ancell (Vice-Chair), Jonathon Baker, Gillian Camm, Simon Cooper, Mary Prior, Peter Rilett and Tim Ross

## Officers in Attendance:-

Ben Skuse, Richard Goldthorpe, Stephen Riley and Ella Hogg

**Other Attendees:** Mandy Leivers (Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project ), Vicky Cracknell and Jonny Wood (Cycle Sunday)

## 1. Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information

The Lord Mayor welcomed all parties to the meeting and asked everyone to introduce themselves.

Everyone present noted the arrangements in the event of the sounding of the emergency fire alarm.

## 2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Barry Clark, Councillor Chris Davies and Peter Rilett (Merchant Venturers).

## 3. Declarations of interest

There were no Declarations of Interest.

## 4. Public Forum

The Committee received Public Forum statements from the following:

Peter Weeks

Ollie, Matt and Sam – Ashton Court Golf and Cycle Club



Nick Davies – Chair, Bristol Cycling Campaign  
Eleanor Hewitt  
Susan Carter – Bristol Ramblers  
Luna Moss  
Joshua Starke  
Collette Brown  
Peter and Jenny Weeks – Downs for People  
Harriet Blackmore – Cycling Without Age  
Roger Gimson – Bristol Walking Alliance  
Zoe Banks Gross – East Bristol Kidical Mass

## 5. Re-Brief of the Downs and Place Movement Framework

The Committee received a presentation from Richard Goldthorpe on this issue who made the following key points:

- Bristol City Council's Asset Management Plan set out places for recreation now and in future
- Following a report produced by Sustrans concerning the provision of cycling on the Downs, an agreed brief was prepared to produce a comprehensive design to improve provision for pedestrians and cycling
- In April 2015, officers had been instructed by the Downs Committee to produce a Place and Movement Framework
- Following a meeting held in 2018, other issues had arisen which needed to be addressed ie provision for cycling alongside the A4018 and the proposed Leisure Loop
- The framework set out the policy context, the relationship with the Downs Act and conservation issues (ie listed buildings etc)
- It considered the walking and cycling network and outlined 3 scenarios for a future vision, including 2 separate paths, 1 for pedestrians and 1 for cycling
- There were some generous footpaths on the Downs but some were difficult to cross with an old-fashioned junction and design and parked cars providing an obstruction
- There were desire lines on parts of the Downs, often during the summer months
- Other areas are more vulnerable to erosion such as the Sea Walls and along the A4018
- A slide was shown indicating the Nordic walking Group walking past the 7 sisters
- There was also a need to address problems associated with events access
- A slide showed an 1830 Panorama looking at the view from Observatory Hill indicating the rough landscape of the open Downs at the time
- In 1869, an engineer had been requested to propose a layout of roads to deal with the increasing number of visitors landing at Hotwells who wanted to travel to the Sea Walls to see the view
- In 1870, the Downs Committee took the decision to make infrastructure changes to the Downs including at Sea Walls and the Circular Road
- The Downs is special but not unique as a large landscape in an urban area and needed to adapt and respond to changing patterns of recreation – other examples of similar areas included:



### Newcastle Town Moor

Harrogate Stray. A map of this area showed routes which were used for utility cycling and of a shared path with traditional raised signs

Hyde Park. There was very large infrastructure on generous roads used as utility but also to support recreation

Richmond Park. This was a very large landscape area approximately three times the size of the Downs. Materials had been used to signal areas to be invite the use of cycling in a controlled way and with signage to separate different users. Walking and cycling was shared for leisure uses and proved to be a satisfying experience for each.

Three different scenarios arising from the framework were outlined including continuation of the current situation with better management of erosion and support of improved walking and cycling through targeted improvements.

The Downs Committee had requested a workshop. This had created a vision that was formally approved by a subsequent Downs Committee meeting.

There had been some loss of impetus in 2018 and therefore a Sub-Group was formed to further discuss this issue. It had produced a quick document to spell out what the vision had showed. This had identified certain fundamentals, including:

- Off road provision at Saville Road and a cross path connection at Ivywell Road but not at the Blackboy Hill/Pembroke Road junction
- The need for adjacent footways but not impacting the football pitch layout. There was a lot of discussion concerning the potential width of routes
- Officers and Committee members had examined the Kingston Lacey National Trust Multi Use Nature Trail in Dorset
- The different activities on the Downs had been noted, including walking, cycling and recreation
- Any proposed activity needed to be useful, attractive and durable
- It was acknowledged that there was currently limited dedicated cycling on the Downs (only at Stoke Road), there were poor crossings on the Downs, existing paths were frequently narrow and there was erosion at the entrances to access points.

There then followed a discussion concerning the A4018.

Steven Riley made the following points:

- The Downs Committee had previously considered an option of shared use along the A4018 from Blackboy Hill to as close to Badminton Road as possible. However, it was now considering a proposal to create a footpath on the Downs and re-making the existing path for use by cyclists only



- A proper detailed design will take place at a future date when funding becomes available. A full segregated cycle path would enable the maximum possible enforcement of cycling on the appropriate route
- The issue of the pedestrian crossing at Durdham Park would need to be considered with a possible path/ramp at appropriate bus stops
- It was noted that the Movement and Place Sub-Group at its meeting on Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> January 2020 had proposed a path width of 2 metres for the new path
- Since the existing pavement was not very suitable for shared use, the proposal was a more appropriate first stage. Once funding became available, a proper segregated footpath with signage could be created
- The surface of the path could be whatever was deemed suitable – officers would seek advice concerning this issue

Committee members made the following points:

- The revised proposal was a significant improvement on the previous one
- Since cycling was not currently allowed on Downs land under existing byelaws, these would not need to be altered if this revised proposal was agreed

The Committee then voted on the Movement and Place Sub-Group's proposal for the A4018 and

**RESOLVED: (9 for, 1 abstention) – that the Committee agrees to Bristol City council continuing to develop the scheme in order to submit a planning application for its implementation in due course. The existing shared use tarmac pavement will be for bicycles whilst an additional route will be provided on Downs land for pedestrians, wheelchair users and those with prams, the proposed surface of which will be brought back to the Movement and Place Sub-Group.**

**Action: Steven Riley**

### Leisure Loop

The Committee then received a presentation from Vicki Cracknell (Cycle Sunday) concerning the proposal for a Leisure Loop. She made the following key points:

- The proposal had been developed with John Grimshaw (Sustrans) and would be a 3.7km along Stoke Road to Downleaze/Rockleaze and require the footpath along Ladies Mile to be rebuilt
- The first path of the path currently had a heavily eroded desire line
- Circular Road is quieter and more open
- Traffic calming in the area would be helpful – in France, signs are frequently used to encourage sharing routes and encourage users to slow down at particular points
- The current path at Ladies Mile was muddy



- There were differences between shared use between cyclist and pedestrians on the Downs and elsewhere since pedestrians were not restricted in their usage. Users without good mobility were restricted in their use. The proposed usage would be more appropriately termed multi-use
- There were a number of examples shown of people with limited mobility who might benefit from the proposal
- Cycle hire could be considered as an option – the logical place for this would be on Stoke Road at the bus stop
- Signage could be provided to key destinations ie the café
- It would provide an even and flat road
- Children in buggies would be helped with this
- Traffic calming was proposed for Circular Road
- Bikes would be mobility tools
- The health benefits of walking and cycling on the proposed route would be particularly important for those with low confidence and with mobility issues
- The section at Downleaze/Rockleaze was essential
- There would need to be a crossing point at Ivywell Road

The Committee discussed how the A4018 proposal would interact with the leisure loop proposal along Ladies Mile and its impact on the Rockleaze/Downleaze area. It was noted that the Leisure Loop proposal would help encourage users to get off the carriageway and onto the rich expanse of the Downs subject to events usage and scrub management of the Downs.

The Committee noted that the changed route was a great improvement on the previous proposal. The proposal for a route and crossing at Circular Road would encourage motorists to slow down. Some members expressed concern that, since runners liked to run on grass, if a pathway was built along Ladies Mile, they would run even further from the road and continue to cause erosion and create desire lines during the summer.

The Committee also acknowledged that there would need to be a sympathetic surface and noted the different types of tarmac available.

It was noted that capital could be sought through British Cycling's Places to Ride Programme.

The Committee noted that:

- the scheme needed to be self-funding and to also provide a fund for continued maintenance
- The first step would involve a Project Development stage before arrangements for funding were clarified
- The project would operate as a partnership between Cycle Sunday and the Downs Committee



- Since the Downs Byelaws prohibited cycling on the Downs, these would need to be changed as required

It was noted that, if the proposal was agreed, it would require approval of a formal planning application.

Councillor Paula O'Rourke proposed, seconded by Councillor Don Alexander and it was **RESOLVED (6 for, 1 abstention) – that the proposed scheme be approved in principle subject to further consideration of detail (such as the materials to be used) at the Movement and Place Sub-Group.**

**Action: Vicky Cracknell to bring back proposals to a future M and P Sub-Group meeting**

## 6. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next scheduled meeting of the Downs Committee would be held at 2pm on Monday 27<sup>th</sup> January 2020 in Committee Room 1P09, City Hall, College Green, Bristol.

Meeting ended at 5.00 pm

**CHAIR** \_\_\_\_\_

