

# Minutes of the Downs Committee

27 January 2020 at 2.00 pm



## Members Present:-

**Councillors:** Councillor Kye Dudd, Councillor Peter Abraham, Councillor Donald Alexander, Councillor Barry Clark, Councillor Christopher Davies, Councillor Paula O'Rourke, Ross Ancell (Vice-Chair, in the Chair), Jonathon Baker, Simon Cooper, Mary Prior, Peter Rilett and Tim Ross

## Officers in Attendance:-

Ben Skuse, Kevin Jay and Amanda Sharpe and Jeremy Livitt

## Also Attending:

Mandy Leivers – Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project  
Elinor Kershaw – Bristol Zoological Gardens

### 1. Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information

The Master, acting as Chair in the absence of the Lord Mayor, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

The Committee noted the procedures in the event of an emergency evacuation of the building.

### 2. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from the Lord Mayor and from Gillian Camm.

### 3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting Held on Monday 18th November 2019

The Committee noted that £25,000 would be required for the release of match funding in respect of the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project (Minute Number 8), not £30,000 as indicated in the minutes.

It was also noted that the reference to the Richard Bland memorial (Minute Number 12) should be replaced with "Proposed Memorial".

**RESOLVED – that, with the inclusion of the above amendments, the minutes for this meeting be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair. Action: Jeremy Livitt**



It was noted that the minutes for the Special Committee meeting held on Monday 20th January 2020 would be submitted to the next scheduled Downs Committee meeting at 2pm on Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> March 2020.

#### **4. Action Tracker**

The Action Tracker for the Committee was noted.

**Action: Jeremy Livitt to remove all completed actions and update as required.**

#### **5. Declarations of interest**

There were no Declarations of Interest.

#### **6. Public Forum**

The Committee noted the following Public Forum Statements:

(1) Ian Beattie – Bus Shelter Maintenance

On behalf of the Committee, Mr Beattie and the Sneyd Park Residents Association were thanked for the work that they had carried out on the bus shelter on Stoke Road over many years.

There then followed a brief discussion.

It was noted that the Police would continue to tackle any issues of vandalism which arose on this shelter in future.

The Downs Maintenance Manager agreed to examine possible options for repair and restoration of the roof and concrete plinth.

**Action: Ben Skuse to investigate further**

(2) Robert Westlake – Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge

(3) Susan Carter – Downs for People: Zoo Annual Report and Downs Committee Licences

The Committee clarified that Downs for People would need to get clarification from the appropriate Department concerning the issue of the licence and the number of days for which it applies during the year (ie 28, as had been advised) subject to whether or not it was commercially sensitive.

#### **7. Matters Arising From the Events and Finance Sub Group held on Wednesday 15th January 2020**

The summary of these Sub-Group minutes was noted.



## **8. Matters Arising From the Movement and Place Sub Group Held On 15th January 2020**

The summary of these Sub-Group Minutes were noted.

The Clerk confirmed that the recommendations from this Sub-Group concerning the A4018 and the Leisure Loop were considered at the Special Downs Committee meeting on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> January 2020.

The decisions made at that meeting concerning these issues would be recorded in the minutes which would be presented to the next scheduled meeting of the Downs Committee at 2pm on Wednesday 25th March 2020.

## **9. Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project Update (Mandy Leivers)**

Mandy Leivers introduced this report and made the following points:

- Goats continue to do a good job in reducing the amount of scrub in the gorge and in gully areas
- The Scrub Management Plan was now in its fifth year of implementation
- The Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project had expanded to include the National Trust and Forestry England. A funding solution was now in place to manage the gorge sustainably
- Details of events on the Downs were provided, including the development of the new Granny Downs Tree Trail. A brand new website had been set up. FODAG were thanked for the support they had provided for this
- 1,468 pupils had been taught in 2019 as part of 54 Education sessions
- In addition to two schools with areas of deprivation that had re-joined the scheme in 2019 as part of the Audience Development Plan, three new schools had joined. The feedback from these schools showed a very high level of interest in it
- Details of the Ways of Listening Project, Higher Education Learning and Holiday Play Schemes were provided
- The Botany Without Boundaries Project had worked with Dhek Bal to provide 5 educational sessions to a group of 15 older Asian Women and which culminated in a special exhibition of botanical art at the Bristol Museum
- The Your Health Initiative continued to be delivered



- A guided walk was also organised for the Man Alive Group based at the Knowle West Health Centre to work with men suffering from depression or at risk of isolation
- Details of the OVO Energy Volunteer Day and the Bristol Festival of Nature were provided
- It was noted that considerable volunteer support had been provided over the year from 54 people who had given 530 hours of their time
- The Foreign Currency Appeal had been successful, raising £799
- Nicola Cooke, one of the Bristol Zoo's keepers, had run an Ultra Marathon around Cornwall, raising £685 for the Education Programme
- The Committee was thanked for agreeing to contribute to the funding for Mandy Leivers' post
- FODAG was thanked for the support they had provided over the year

**RESOLVED – that the report be noted.**

### **10 Bristol Zoo - Annual Report of the Land off Ladies Mile 2019**

Elinor Kershaw introduced this report and made the following comments:

- Bristol Zoo continued to reduce the number of hours for which they used the Downs for car parking – only 22 out of 30 days had been used in 2019
- The car parking facility on the Downs was used to prevent tailbacks. The Zoo worked with Downs officers to agree an appropriate parking area
- The zoo continued to encourage and support incentives for visitors to travel by more sustainable means. The amount of discounted travel had increased in 2019 following a drop off in 2018 that might have been due to some issues with train and bus reliability in 2018
- Vegetation monitoring takes place regularly over the winter period to ensure the land is properly maintained

### **11 Downs Football League - Annual Update Report (Councillor Kye Dudd)**

Councillor Kye Dudd introduced this report and made the following comments:

- The first organised leagues on the Downs had been formed in 1905, with football being played on there long before that
- The ideal number of teams for the Downs would be 48 or 56 but there were 43 operating at the moment since the number of people involved in weekly 11 a side football had decreased. There were in total 1,343 players currently registered to play on the Downs
- The Downs League was almost unique. Other than the League at Hackney marshes, it was the only league in which all football took place in one location
- The changing rooms had been largely unchanged since the 1903's, with very little investment in them. It was noted that the changing rooms did not meet modern requirements in terms of safeguarding or accessibility and were not therefore suitable for women's football. However,



there were some unofficial women's football groups who used the Downs and would be keen to become part of the Downs League

- Referees had their own changing rooms and operated under a mentoring system which trained referees and was well regarded by the Football Association. Some of those had gone on to become professional.
- Players had been very pleased that prices had been frozen for 2020

**RESOLVED – that the report be noted.**

## **12 Downs Maintenance Report (Ben Skuse)**

Ben Skuse introduced the report and made the following points:

- Many areas of the Downs were currently waterlogged
- Litter and bin emptying continued throughout the year
- Bench cleaning and repairs would be taking place in the spring
- The football pitches had been fertilised with sand being applied to help with drainage
- Bridge Valley Road – there would be a number of road closures between now and early March involving the removal of accumulated rock
- Sheep would be brought to the Downs for grazing on 12<sup>th</sup> May

In response to a member's question, he explained that the removal of Memorial Flowers on the Bridge was handled sensitively. Invasive flowers which were planted in the ground had to be removed but those pinned to railings were usually left for several days.

He explained that he was a member of a Working Group with the Emergency Services and the Bridge Master to deal with this issue. Following a request by Mary Prior, he stated that he would invite her to attend a future meeting.

**ACTION: Ben Skuse**

## **13 Proposed Events Schedule (Amanda Sharpe)**

Amanda Sharpe introduced this report and made the following comments:

- Funderworld would operate from 27<sup>th</sup> March until 19<sup>th</sup> April in 2020
- The Foodies Festival would return for 8<sup>th</sup> May to 10<sup>th</sup> May inclusive
- VE Commemoration Event – it was hoped that arrangements for this event would be fixed by the next Committee
- Cycle Sunday – this event was fixed for 14<sup>th</sup> June 2020
- Race for Life – this event was fixed for the last week in June 2020
- Pride – this event would be held on 11<sup>th</sup> July 2020 and would be offered for a 3 Year Term



- Downs Festival – a firm proposal was still awaited from Team Love
- Student Union Welcome Event – negotiations for this event were ongoing
- Downs Circus – this event was already agreed as part of a 3-year contract. The date was yet to be fixed but would be held in the Autumn 2020
- March for Men and NHS Anniversary Events – due to the large number of events and the need to ensure the ground recovers properly, alternative locations were being sought for these events

**RESOLVED – that the report be noted.**

## **14 Finance Update (Kevin Jay)**

Kevin Jay introduced this report and confirmed that the forecast income for 2019/20 was £400,903 with estimated total expenditure of £466, 468. It was noted that the proposed budget for 2020/21 was £373,860.

## **15 Any Other Business**

### Downs Café – Future Course of Action

Jonathon Baker advised the Committee that, following the refusal of the original planning application and with a number of issues to be addressed being highlighted by the Secretary of State in his decision, members were requested to consider whether or not they wished to seek specialist legal advice from a Common Land Solicitor in relation to the operation of Section 38 of the 2006 Commons Act.

Following receipt of this advice, the Planning Application could then be resubmitted.

Councillor Peter Abraham expressed concern that the financial implication of this scheme needed to be properly considered in the form of a report addressing these concerns.

Following a brief further discussion, the Committee:

**RESOLVED –**

**(1) (10 for, 2 against) that specialist legal advice is sought from a Common Land Solicitor in relation to the operation of Section 38 of the 2006 Commons Act to address the issues identified by the Secretary of State in the original Planning Application decision prior to submission of a new application**

**ACTION: Jonathon Baker**



**(2) (unanimously) that details of the expenditure and available funding for the revised Downs café proposal is brought to a future meeting of the Events and Finance Sub-Group**

**ACTION: Kevin Jay**

Parking Restrictions on the Downs

The Committee noted that Mark Sperduty had reported at the last Movement and Place Sub-Group concerning possible options for shortening the time period for parking or for changing the return period. It was noted that the Downs Committee was involved in this issue as a consultee.

Members noted that a report on this issue would need to be reported to a future meeting of the Movement and Place Sub-Group for consideration.

**Action: Mark Sperduty to be reminded that a future report is required to the Movement and Place Sub-Group.**

Play Park – Residents’ Request

Councillor Paula O’Rourke advised the Committee that she had received a request from residents for a play park near the Water Tower.

It was agreed that this matter should be referred to a future meeting of the Movement and Place Sub-Group for future consideration.

**Action: Jeremy Livitt to add this to the agenda for the next Movement and Place Sub-Group meeting.**

**16 Date of Next Meeting**

The Committee noted that the next meeting of the Committee will be held in a Committee Room, City Hall, College Green, Bristol at 2pm on Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> March 2020.

Meeting ended at 3.10pm

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

