

REPORT OF THE DOWNS MAINTENANCE MANAGER

Due to the loss of March's meeting I am reporting on a longer period than is normal.

The period though has been anything but normal !

We came out of the wettest February on record and went straight into a lockdown and a drought !

Due to the Covid situation both types of football ceased in March and Funderworld and Foodies did not take place. Trying to take the positives from this situation, both the football pitch surfaces and the event areas, in particular the water tower site, have benefitted greatly from the protracted break from activities. The water tower site was in not great shape after last year's event activities and due to the wet late winter we had not really had a chance to get it fit for 2020's programme. Funderworld and Foodies not happening has really given us the time to get the ground sorted again and as such it is in good shape for events ahead. Likewise the football pitches. It has done them no harm to get an extra rest. The extra time has allowed us to get the re-seeding done earlier than normal and should allow for better grass coverage when the 20/21 season begins.

In the early days of lockdown the Downs was reasonably quiet. Just having people local to the Downs doing their 1hrs exercise meant that there were far fewer people here than would normally be expected. This meant that even though the weather was fine the Easter and early May bank holiday periods were far less busy than normal, (no overflowing bins , cars parked everywhere, fires etc) to deal with !. Grass cutting and daily duties continued unhindered and we made good progress.

The lockdown was loosened by the end of May and on cue our first set of travellers for 2020 arrived !. They arrived on May 19th onto their favoured site of right out the back of our depot on the area between Ladies Mile and Belgrave Rd. So at this point we had travellers and a gradual reversion to the more anti-social elements that you expect to see on the Downs on hot weekends in Summer. When we reached the weekend of May 30/31st the nation had been told that they could meet people from other households outside and the weather was hot. This perfect storm of people feeling released from weeks of lockdown and looking to do something social for the first time in ages but the only place they could do this was in a park !. These conditions resulted in that weekend being one of the busiest I have ever seen on the Downs. The number of gatherings was crazy. It was akin at times to a weekend long festival and as such it was a struggle to cope with the litter. It basically took all of the team a week afterwards to get the Downs looking reasonable again. The quantities of black bags of rubbish we were clearing daily was unprecedented. On 4th June the travellers left the site leaving behind the usual conditions which the team worked hard to clear up ASAP.

So all in all this period has been quiet until the back end of May when things became crazy in terms of litter. Many members will have seen some of the many traveller and litter associated contacts from members of the public and councillors. I have been working to respond to all of those concerns. However I am pretty clear that around that period things were unprecedented and those conditions will not readily be recreated I hope !. The hot conditions meaning slow grass growth has been a good thing as our tractor driver has had to spend most of his time driving to and from the waste transfer station with trailers full of rubbish cleared off the Downs. I will say at this point that I think people are starting to notice the amounts of unsorted metals/glass/plastics that get left and I

have had enquiries and comments about having recycling points installed around the Downs. This is undoubtedly a correct aspiration but would cost a significant amount of money to build and would need the co-operation of Bristol waste company to make it work.

On a more positive note my team were able to plant the flower beds at the top of Blackboy Hill. Members will remember that FODAG put a proposal to the committee whereby they purchased plants for these previously fallow beds and using volunteers planted up and maintained these beds going forward. The Parks dept for a time stopped volunteer activities due to Covid and my team had to do the planting out in the end. We are allowed to use volunteers again now (socially distanced) so FODAG have taken over the maintenance from here as planned. My thanks to them. It is a great improvement.

In terms of the goats, there was a plan to travel to the Great Orme in June to get 4 more animals to re stock our herd to 6 animals. Due to Covid this plan has been delayed. I will update the committee with future plans in this regard.

The toilet facilities and play areas in all of Bristol Parks have been closed during this period. The Downs have matched in with this. I intend to align with BCC Parks in terms of the re-opening timeline. Again I will keep members updated.

I hope as we come out of this strange time when people have not been able to venture far, that the local community have even more appreciation of this amazing asset. I think people will recognise more than ever how important urban green spaces such as the Downs are for people's health and mental wellbeing. Into the future I hope people remember how important the Downs was as a place to be able to come for fresh air, wide open spaces and as a place to exercise throughout the oppressive and difficult lockdown period.