

Downs Committee
Summary of Events & Finance Sub-Group Meeting
Wednesday 28th October 2020

Members:

Ross Ancell - Merchant Venturer (Master and Chair)
Councillor Peter Abraham
Jonathon Baker - Merchant Venturer
Councillor Barry Clark
Peter Rilett – Merchant Venturer
Tim Ross – Merchant Venturer

Bristol City Council Officers:

Amanda Sharpe – Events Officer, Bristol City Council
Jonathan James – Head of Parks. Bristol City Council
Jeremy Livitt – Democratic Services Officer, Bristol City Council

Observer

Gillian Camm – Merchant Venturer

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Don Alexander and Councillor Paula O'Rourke and from Ben Skuse (Downs Maintenance Manager) and Kevin Jay (Finance Team, BCC).

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting – 26th February 2020

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the Events and Finance Sub-Committee of 9th September 2020 be confirmed as a correct record of the discussion.

Matters Arising

Car Parking on the Downs – Tim Ross provided an update on the Downs Committee's defence of the Judicial Review from Downs for People.

Payment of the Car Parking Contract – It was agreed that details of the outstanding payments should be provided by Bristol City Council's Finance Team to enable Peter Rilett and Councillor Peter Abraham to discuss with the zoo the potential deferment of the existing payment for the zoo car parking contract.

3. Events Update

Breaking Bread

Tom Paine (Breaking Bread) attended the meeting to report on the situation concerning this event and provide details of future suggestions for it in 2021.

Tom Paine made the following points:

- Breaking Bread would not be able to continue any longer in 2020 due to the limitations of the weather, ongoing maintenance issues and the uncertainty caused by the worsening of the situation in Bristol from the increase in cases in COVID 19
- He thanked members for all their support for this project
- The overwhelming response from customers and members of the public had been positive
- The event had employed a lot of staff directly and indirectly
- The 2020 event had provided a very solid model which provided food and entertainment, including jazz and acoustic music, singer/songwriters as well as comedians and entertainers
- Members noted details of a draft proposal for the event in 2021 starting in March/April including a provisional site map
- A full licence application would be submitted in due course and would be subject to consultation with stakeholders.
- It was hoped that the 2021 event could be paired with the one city economy plan

In response to members' questions, Tom Paine made the following comments:

- Whilst one person had raised concerns about the event's impact on surrounding restaurants and cafes near the Downs, there had been no direct complaints from any nearby restaurants
- The event organisers were erring on the side of caution for next year. In view of the need to ensure all such events maintained proper social distancing and complied with necessary health and safety requirements, high capacity events would be very challenging to operate in 2021. In addition, since it took approximately 6 months to plan such events, this was a further difficulty for large events

Amanda Sharpe made the following additional comments:

- If this event took place in 2021, it would be part of a very different programme to previous years due to the ongoing situation with COVID-19

- If Breaking Bread was held on this site at the proposed time, it would have implications for Funderworld if that event took place next year. It was noted that Funderworld had been unable to hold a COVID secure event in 2020
- The Showground site was a possible alternative option for Breaking Bread in 2021 subject to other events from previous years such as the Foodies Festival. Comparisons of income and practicality for these events would need to be made

Members made the following additional comments:

- Comments from local residents had been entirely positive. Holding this event in 2021 would be important to make people feel comfortable about visiting restaurants and cafes in future, particularly if the existing restrictions continued into next year
- There would need to be a fresh look at events on the Downs in 2021. An event such as this was a good idea but could be hosted on another site if that provided greater flexibility, particularly if the Breaking Bread event lasted for a number of months
- The Foodies Festival could be requested to discuss with Breaking Bread the possibility of combining their events for the time being

Amanda Sharpe provided an update on other events for 2021:

- Until late Spring 2021, it would not be possible to resume normal event activities on the Downs
- Mass music festivals such as Team Love and Pride were unlikely to be held for the foreseeable future due to the ongoing COVID restrictions and the long lead in time needed to plan for such festivals (ie 6 months)

Circus

- Following an agreed extension, the Downs Circus had operated at less than half capacity. This event had reduced audiences during weekdays but attendances were much higher at weekends.
- 2021 was the final year for the Circus being provided under the existing contract

Amanda Sharpe indicated that she would speak to the Safety Advisory Group and report back on their findings for this event.

Members agreed that the SAG needed a de-brief with the Circus before the event could be approved for 2021.

Pride and Bristol Downs Festival

Analysis was required of the viability of these events to take place in 2021 and also of the fee structure.

March for Men

- This was a proposed one day event for early March 2021 for Prostate Cancer Research that had taken previously taken place at Blaise.
- Since it was a charity event, there was a proposed reduced fee

Comedy Garden

- This event had previously been held at Queen Square.
- A comedy event had previously been held there in September with appropriate seating arrangements and had been very successful
- It attracted a mixed and well-behaved audience
- The event included national and international comedy performers with food

Outdoor Cinema – 5th to 8th August 2021

This event had operated successfully elsewhere in the city.

Smoke and Fire Festival

- This was a proposed new event for the city which had operated elsewhere for the last three to four years
- Officers were concerned about the operation of a barbecue event on the Downs which usually generated a lot of mess and would have a greater impact on a grass site
- This was also proposed to be a large-scale event involving 15,000 to 18,000 people

Wedding Photos

- This event would involve birds of prey
- Whilst there was no Event Management Plan required, a risk assessment and insurance documents would need to be provided

Any large events would require a bond which the Parks team would arrange with the organisers.

Investigations had been made to assess whether a theatre show could be provided on the Downs. However, this was not practical at the moment. Arts organisations had been approached but had expressed a huge reluctance to operate such an event at the moment.

Members made the following comments:

- Smoke and Fire – the proposed date clashed with the Foodies Festival and involved a large barbecue. Since under existing byelaws these were banned on the Downs, this needed to be considered carefully as it could create a lot of damage. An alternative park might be a better option for this proposed event
- Fees – these needed to reflect the fact that events on the Downs normally attracted a premium, notwithstanding that due to the restrictions caused by COVID, these would be slightly
- It was noted that there were many existing organisations which operated on the Downs and were not currently required to pay a fee for doing so. Officers should make investigations into whether a fee could be obtained from them which could help fund an additional post on the Downs, equivalent to the former Downs Ranger post.

Action:

- (1) That a Breaking Bread event for 2021 be approved in principle subject to negotiations on the issues indicated above**
- (2) That it is noted that no mass event is likely to be able to take place on the Downs for the foreseeable future due to COVID-19 restrictions and the timescale involved in setting up such an event**
- (3) That agreement be made in principle for the March for Men, Comedy Garden and Outdoor Cinema events at the proposed fees and terms set out above**
- (4) That agreement is made for the proposed Wedding Photos to take place with no fee but subject to the above conditions**
- (5) That due to concerns about it being a Barbecue event which could cause ground damage to grass and which was not permitted under the existing Downs byelaws, the proposed Smoke and Fire Event is not granted permission**

Amanda Sharpe to take the above action

4. Finance Update

In the absence of Kevin Jay, no comments were made on this report. It was noted that he was available to respond separately to any questions from Sub-Group members by e-mail.

5 Any Other Business

It was noted that this was the last meeting of the Sub-Group that Tim Ross would be attending. Tim was thanked for the work he had carried out in his role over the last few years.

Members of the Sub-Group also thanked Ross Ancell who would be standing down as Master after this meeting.

6 Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of this Sub-Group had not yet been fixed but subject to approval of 2021 Downs Committee dates at the AGM on 16th November 2021, it had been provisionally scheduled for 2pm on Wednesday 13th January 2021.

The meeting ended at 3.30pm