

# Public Forum

## Downs Committee

### 16<sup>th</sup> November 2020 at 2pm



**Councillors:** Lord Mayor – Councillor Jos Clark (Chair), Barry Clark, Christopher Davies, Kye Dudd, Paul Goggin, Paula O'Rourke and Steve Smith

**Merchant Venturers:** Master – Gillian Camm (Vice Chair), Jonathon Baker, Simon Cooper, Peter Rilett, David Freed, David Powell, Mike Bothamley

**Copies Also To:** Amanda Sharpe, Melanie Inman, Ben Skuse, Kevin Jay, Jonathan James

**S next to the name of the person making the statement indicates that they have also registered to speak.**



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Statements	
Statement	Name - Capital S in bold next to the Speaker's Name indicates a request to speak
1	FODAG
2	Tim Parnell
3	Giles Drewett
4	Stephen Carroll
5	Chris Hawkins ( <b>S</b> )
6	Mike Massey
7	Sharon Baker
8	Jon Craton
9	Pete Vallance





## Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge

### November 2020 Statement to the Downs Committee.

FOD+AG remains committed to preserve, conserve and enhance the overall and several distinct environments within the Downs and Gorge for the benefit of all legitimate users and to support the City Council the Downs Committee and the operational team in the good governance of the Downs and Avon Gorge.

The current lock down measures introduced by the Government have brought about the postponement or cancellation of many of our usual activities. The outcome being that planned walks, lectures, deep litter clearance and conservation activities have all fallen victim to the restrictions. Even our volunteer weekend goat monitoring duties have had to be curtailed.

We did however, with a day to spare before lockdown manage to plant 3000 spring bulbs at the Thomas memorial. This is to supplement the herbaceous planting undertaken earlier in the year. FODAG volunteers turned out to plant mixed varieties of dwarf Tulip, Daffodil and crocus. We have also agreed a maintenance plan going forward with the Downs supervisor.

Our own committee have managed to meet via Zoom and plan to continue doing so until the Pandemic is brought under control. As we were unable to hold our traditional AGM members have agreed that our current committee will serve for a further twelve months.

We are planning a Zoom meeting of our full membership early in the New Year. We currently have a committee vacancy and we are actively recruiting from our membership list.

FODAG endorses the proposal to bring Breaking Bread back to the Downs next year and supports the Downs committee and the Events team in their efforts to bring a programme of suitable events back to the Downs for 2021. We note the financial implications and as an organisation take a pragmatic stance about future income generation.

As promised FODAG managed to return to hard copy for our quarterly Newsletter, most were hand delivered to members by volunteers.

FODAG members have expressed early views on the proposed 'yielding' of land near the Water Tower. Concerns about the need for a further playground for the Downs, noise, exact location and loss of open Downland have all been raised.

We would hope that by the next time the Downs committee meets FODAG will be able to report that we have returned to something like our normal level of activity.

Robert Westlake

Chair - Friends of the Downs & Avon Gorge





## STATEMENT 2 – Tim Parnell

I have read with interest the public pack for the above meeting and can see that using the current criteria it is difficult to manage the van dwellers without adversely affecting the use of the downs by the residents of Bristol.

The problems caused by the van dwellers, besides any anti social behaviour towards the local residents, must focus on the dreadful public health risks we are all exposed to by the dumping of human waste in the local areas. It is therefore time that the council grasp the nettle and issue a city wide byelaw banning any overnight camping on the city's highway.

The downs and surrounding roads are not the only places the council needs to protect. Given the numbers mentioned in the pack, any ban on the downs will only push the problem elsewhere, so a city wide ban is the best solution. There are a number of sites which can be offered for a more formal solution to the van dwellers, as we saw in March when the one on the Portway was made available at very short notice.

Thank you for the opportunity to express my concerns.

## STATEMENT 03 – Giles Drewett

Dear Sirs

I am writing to provide a Resident's interest in article 16. Vehicle Dwellers on the Downs of your meeting on Monday 16<sup>th</sup> November.

For the past two years I have seen growing numbers of Vehicle Dwellers parking on the Roads around the Downs (Parry's Lane, Saville Road, Circular Road and Westbury Park) averaging 30-plus at any one time. I have also seen that it has not been possible for Parking Services and the Neighbourhood Enforcement Team to prevent or reduce the growing numbers. In this regard I am in favour of a review of the Traffic Restrictions.

I believe that option 13(v) of the proposals is likely to be the most effective means of regaining control of the Highways, in combination with option 13(iii). These would still allow Residents, Sports Enthusiasts and Dog Walkers etc with adequate time to use the Downs as was initially intended.

It may be appropriate to further add into Option 13(v) that "Vehicles converted to provide accommodation, camper vans and caravans" as the restricted type so as not to alienate trades-people etc from Parking within the rules and denying them access to the Downs.

**Alternatively – I would like to request the Downs Committee to consider imposing a Byelaw to cover the Downs and Surrounding Roads which prohibits Overnight Camping.**

This simple solution would deliver the following benefits:

1. Prevent repeated use of Council resources to renew injunctions for the prevention of trespass onto the Downs.
2. Prevent repeated use of Council resources to apply for short term removal measures under Neighbourhood Enforcement measures.
3. Create a clear boundary of use for the Downs which can be clearly understood and enforced by CEO's, the Police and Neighbourhood Enforcement officers.
4. Allow a TRO review to be more focussed on allowing CEO's to effectively managing parking around the Downs without also having to try and use it to manage the Vehicle Dwelling Issue.

Perhaps the Mayor/BCC could consider allocating a proportion of the City's less used Park & Ride Car Parks toward creating managed sites for Vehicle Dwellers which would enable them access to the City, Waste & Hygiene Amenities and welfare where required.

#### STATEMENT 4 – Stephen Carroll

With respect to 'Vehicle Dwellers on the Downs', I wish to endorse the option of creating a byelaw to ban overnight camping on the Downs and surrounding highways to resolve this persistent and growing problem.

Further, I would endorse amending the TRO to restrict parking to cars only or vehicles of a maximum length / height - on Parrys Lane, Saville Road, Ladies Mile, Stoke Road, Westbury Park and Circular Road as these roads - except for Westbury Park - are mainly non-residential highways or off-street parking is possible for most residents. A small number of designated spaces could be set aside for larger vehicles on each of these highways, with signage or different / coloured road markings to communicate that different restrictions apply.

STATEMENT 5 – Chris Hawkins

I'm a local resident in Westbury Park to the Bristol Downs.

Just to form my view below is a snap from The National Trust Website which I think clearly states why campervans should not be allowed overnight stays on Bristol Downs, I have seen so many examples of all these issues below.

We should be looking after our green spaces.

Why does the National Trust not allow camping at their car parks?

- Sadly, many visitors leave rubbish, empty glass bottles and disposable BBQ's which pose a risk of fire.
- There are no toilet facilities and so human waste and used toilet paper is often left in hedges. This isn't good for wildlife or nice for our rangers when strimming or undertaking other conservation work.
- There is no planning permission in place and camping is in breach of National Trust bye-laws.

By not wild camping you are helping to look after and protect the wildlife that makes this place their home. Thank you.

STATEMENT 6 – Mike Massey

To the Members of the Downs Committee.

My wife and I wish to register our protest at the growing number of vehicle dwellers on the Downs, particularly in the vicinity of Parrys Lane, Saville Road and Westbury Park.

The Downs are unquestionably very beautiful and a huge asset to this City.

To see it turned into a virtual camp site by the owners and occupiers of these vehicles and caravans is an absolute insult to those of us who appreciate the area not least, the local residents.

It appears that the present situation has developed because of a lack of resolve and action by the leaders of our council, particularly the Elected Mayor.

A simple remedy would seem to be a total ban on overnight parking on the Downs for any vehicle.

I accept this presents an enforcement problem but not insurmountable if the will is there. Two circuits of the Downs during night hours would soon identify those who ignore the order.

There needs to be a penalty of some substance to back up the ban - again if the will is there this can be achieved.

The Downs are for us all to enjoy, but not for a minority who choose a lifestyle that takes them outside the norm and which apparently carries no financial burden or payment towards the up-keep of this fine City and County.

## STATEMENT 7 – Sharon Baker

I would like to comment on the large lived-in vehicles parked on Circular Road. Over the years this has increased but in recent weeks the numbers have fluctuated. My comments are limited to this area as it is where I walk on a regular basis and my comments are based on the Report provided by Mark Sperduty for the proposed meeting on November 16th. I submit these comments in order to support the removal of these vehicles and changing the TRO to prevent this class of vehicles being parked anywhere on the Downs.

1. Damage to the Downs: Because of the width of these vehicles, which park on the grass between the pavement and the road, destruction of the grass verge and the curb stones has occurred. On Circular Road these appear to be re-used cobbles and look like a fairly original feature. Thus in the near future the repair of both will cause expense to both the Downs and Highways in order to re-instate them.

2. Waste: There has also been instances in the past 3 years of them dumping waste on the side of the road by the trees, or actually emptying Elsans in the bushes by the entrances to the goat gully. The cost of waste clearance needs to be taken into account, which, I believe, are another burden on the Downs committee finances.

3. Lack of parking penalties: I find some of the excuses about the role of this by the Parking Services derisory. In the past, Parking Services have readily ticketed private cars for overstaying their welcome in the same area as the lived-in vans. As I walk that route sometimes on a daily basis I can tell that some of the vans don't move for weeks, let alone the permitted 5 hours. And as for not knowing who owns the van, surely if they are not insured then they should be towed away as soon as possible and if they are insured the owner can be identified and then a ticket can be produced and stuck on the van. Parking Services have been targeting private individuals whilst the van dwellers are being treated differently, which is unfair and discriminatory and possibly lazy as presumably it entails more work.

In conclusion I believe that amending the traffic order to preclude camper type vehicles is the only option.

My only further comment is on the area in which many vans are situated: the road from Westbury Rd to the top of Parrys Lane. It would be unfair to commercial vehicles, like the coach companies who deliver people to the zoo and then park there whilst the visitors are in the zoo/museum etc, to ban all vehicles from that area. It seems only fair that commercial vehicles should be allowed to use that as a parking space, which they cannot do at the moment since it has become a parking space for lived-in vehicles.

STATEMENT 8 – Jon Craton

Regarding Agenda Item 16 : Van Dwellers on the Downs.

I support any actions taken to reduce or eliminate the use of the Downs as a place for overnight camping. The Downs is intended for use and enjoyment by all which live in or visit Bristol. The proliferation of purpose built and converted camper vans around the Downs :

- directly impacts the availability of parking for visitors to the Downs
- represents a health hazard due to the use of bushes etc as a latrine by van dwellers
- Is an open invitation to others to use the Downs similarly - further van dwellers, travellers.

Additionally, the apparent tolerance by the council of van dwellers overtly ignoring parking restrictions sends a message that the laws associated with area are not enforced and is highly likely to contribute to others contravening regulations.

I wholeheartedly support the introduction of an overnight camping ban on the Downs - potentially effected through TRO change option (v) with restricted vehicles being defined as camper vans and other vehicles that have been converted for the purposes of providing accommodation.

STATEMENT 9 – Pete Vallance

I request that the Committee consider a No Overnight Camping Byelaw for the Downs and surrounding Highways - which would provide an unambiguous and clear guideline for Council Officers, Vehicle Dwellers and Residents alike.

Every year the number of overnight campers increases. The Downs has no facilities for people to go to the toilet overnight, the council should enforce travellers to camp on the appropriate serviced camping sites. For residents enjoying the amenity of the Downs the presence of large numbers of vans is intimidating and to allow this to continue is encouraging more and more vans which in themselves are unsightly and are degrading one of the city's major recreational facilities.

May I suggest also, that the broad top section of Parry's Lane does look as though it is designed for long stay parking – an open invitation for travellers – this should be closed off and in time when funds allow should be grassed over.

Perhaps consideration should also be given to closing off other roads on the Downs to cars to encourage cycling and walking.