

REPORT OF THE DOWNS MAINTENANCE MANAGER

January 2021, Lockdown 3

We never really considered within Parks that a time or an event would come around whereby, at least in a city setting, parks and open spaces would suddenly become the only place that you could go to be outside, to exercise, or to see anyone socially (1 person at 2m !).

The effects of the three lockdown periods in the last 11/12 months are evidenced all over the Downs. The amount of trampling/wear and erosion to the ground has gone from being only in a few key places and at certain times of year, to being in all parts of the Downs throughout the year. Unfortunately this includes some areas that have a nature conservation value like our wildflower meadows and SSSI clifftop areas within the Goat enclosure.

The crowds of people and increased footfall has created huge amounts of work for the team throughout the year. If the Downs did not benefit from a dedicated team based on the Downs itself I am sure it would not have been possible to keep up with all the clearing up that has been required on a daily basis.

Whilst recognising that it has been hugely important for us to be providing a safe and welcoming opportunity for people to get some space and freedom in these times, the associated negative impacts of all these people being here will have to be assessed and dealt with at a time in the future when things calm down and we can return to a more normal level of visitation and usage.

So for now the team are focusing on a pared down schedule of daily duties. Mainly dealing with litter, emptying bins, dealing with site H&S issues and continuing daily goat monitoring. We are also continuing managing scrub compartments with the management plan. This will continue up until February 28th, after which it is bird nesting season. Between now and the spring a proportion of our benches will be jet washed off and re wood stained.

Obviously both types of football have ceased once more. The extent to which it will be possible to restart the season is unknown at this point.

Discussions around what is possible in terms of events at the Downs in 21 are ongoing and I am part of those discussions. Clear answers are in short supply right now so I will make sure that we carry out work to the ground at the event sites to be ready for all eventualities. There are going to be some spends associated with this, soil and grass seed purchase for example, which I will communicate at the finance and event sub group.

One thing that is still going ahead due to the safety monitoring aspect is the annual cutting back of vegetation on the rock slopes above Bridge Valley Rd. This allows for annual rock safety inspections to take place. I have road closures in place for 3 consecutive Sundays coming up, where my team will carry out this work alongside engineering geologists from WSP.

Sunday January 31st

Sunday February 7th

Sunday February 14th