

REPORT OF THE DOWNS MAINTENANCE MANAGER

March 2021, still Lockdown 3.

Still unprecedented levels of people at all times of the week, but especially on weekends. As the weather improves now it is nice to get out of the mud and to walk on the surface of the ground once more. The trees are in bud and birds are nesting. A portent for better times ahead one hopes !.

Daily duties continue with refuse collection and disposal still being priority number one on most days as we still see high parks usage and visitation. Daily Goat checks continue to be important as more people find their way into the enclosure and unfortunately this can mean more Dogs.

Our Winter programme of works with the scrub management plan has finished once more with the onset of nesting bird season. This year we focused on the area of the Downs between Ladies Mile Rd and Upper Belgrave Rd. We have not up to now carried out any work of this type in the area. This area is particularly susceptible to the problem of compartments growing together and forming into larger blocks that eventually form into secondary woodland compartments. We have opened up several areas now to regular mowing and halt the encroachment in these areas. Allowing a chance for limestone grassland habitat to be maintained and not lost underneath encroaching scrub compartments.

We have a bit more clarity now with plans for a resumption of Football at the Downs. The 20/21 league season has been cancelled but play is going to continue with a cup competition. Play restarts on Sat April 3rd and will continue into mid-May incorporating evening matches in April. We took the decision to keep marking the pitches onto the ground during this period without play so we stand ready to resume in April. The restart will initially still be without the use of the dressing rooms. Hopefully the new season 21/22 starting in September could include use of the dressing rooms once more.

Obviously at this time of year grass cutting will resume in earnest. Before we get going with that we'll assess a number of trees that need to have their canopies lifted up to maintain access for mowing underneath. As part of an overall parks wide and citywide commitment to increase bio diversity we are likely to identify a couple areas of normal Downs maintenance to make changes to the type of cut or frequency of cut. Leaving wider margins of uncut grass around the base of some trees may be something members notice. Likewise the formation of 3 areas of wildflower meadow on Clifton Downs in the Christchurch Green area.

The situation with events at the Downs in 21 still remains fluid. I will continue to communicate with the Finance and Events sub group to keep abreast of plans and make sure that we are in a position to react to enable events to happen if restrictions allow.