

Downs Committee
Notes Of Events & Finance Sub Group Meeting
2nd June 2021

Members:

Gillian Camm (Master and Chair)
MV David Powell
MV Peter Rilett
Councillor Jos Clark
Councillor Paul Goggin
Councillor Geoff Gollop
Councillor Paula O'Rourke

Bristol City Council Officers:

Jeremy Livitt – Democratic Services
Jon James – Head of Parks
Karen Gregory – Finance
Amanda Sharpe – Events Officer
Ben Skuse – Grounds Supervisor

Apologies:

MV Jonathon Baker

1. Minutes of Previous Meeting

Minutes of the previous meeting 24th February 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

2. Finance Update

Karen Gregory introduced the report and highlighted the following points:

- COVID-19 had made a massive impact on income as evidenced in the overall summary and forecast outturn.
- The deficit included non-recurring costs
- Bristol City Council would continue to meet any Downs Committee bills in accordance with the Downs Act

The Sub-Group noted the three key issues in relation to last year's outturn as follows: what is needed to maintain the Downs, how can income be generated and what unavoidable costs are in the Downs budget. It was acknowledged that a fresh plan was required to take advantage of all possible opportunities available.

The following additional points were made:

- A more engaged debate was required with Bristol City Council concerning the Downs Committee, including issues such as events and expenditure

- The Committee needed to assess what was required to maintain the Downs and what Bristol City Council can provide to meet its obligations.
- It was noted that the pandemic had increased usage of the Downs and the amount of litter and had contributed to the erosion of footpaths due to increased use. In addition, there was the associated accumulated ground problems caused by events. Whilst extra resources had been made available for this, a more strategic approach was required

The report was noted.

3. Events Report Update

Amanda Sharpe introduced this report and made the following points:

- Breaking Bread had been open since mid-April. Details of its income would be provided which would increase following the recent reopening of the restaurant
- The Comedy Garden was due to open tonight (Wednesday 2nd July 2021)
- Most events organisers had been offered a discount due to the difficult situation they had face this year with COVID
- Details of the fees calculation were provided for Breaking Bread, Love Saves the Day and the Circus
- Members were reminded that, whilst there was a costing formula for all events, the actual fees were set at the Sub-Group itself. However, generally costs would be based on fees from similar events elsewhere
- Students Union had requested a 2 day live event with the same number of total days as in previous years to make up for students who had missed the 2020 event. Ben Skuse confirmed that the proposed site was less worn than others and so this was feasible
- Downs Circus – The contract had been extended for more than one year. There had been some concern last year about the organisers requiring greater training in health and safety to ensure events were properly COVID secure. Therefore, this year they would be required to attend the Safety Advisory Group before the event. There would also be site visits
- Team Love: Request for an Annual Music Festival. Until 2019, this event had taken place in late August/early September. They had now teamed up with AEG Presents who were an international promoter. In view of this, the possibility of future cancellation of events due to live acts not being available was less likely and would provide income on an annual basis. It was noted that in recent years Team Love had done a good job of working with the local communities to ease their concerns about issues such as noise disturbance.
- Funderworld and Breaking Bread – It was noted that the organisers of Funderworld were disappointed not to be able to hold their event on the Downs in 2021 due to Breaking Bread being on the site they had requested. It was noted that Breaking Bread also favoured the Water Tower site and had requested to be able to use it in 2022.

However, Funderworld had also asked if they could come back in 2022 in this location. The Sub-Group discussed various options to meet their needs, including holding Funderworld in late March/early April 2022, followed by a break to allow reinstatement of the site followed by Breaking Bread operating until September/October 2022. Ben Skuse indicated that this proposal would be very difficult to operate as the ground could be badly affected, particularly if Breaking Bread continued late and no work could be done on the ground during the late Autumn/Winter period.

Whilst it was noted that the proposed roadway on the site (see item below) could mitigate this by approximately 80% if the timescale allowed it to be built in 2022, members expressed concern as custodians of the Downs at the impact of two events on the site in one year. It was also not clear how long it would take for Planning Permission for the roadway to be approved. It was further noted that, if Funderworld were re-located to the Show Ground Site, it would not provide the space needed and would not give them access to water.

It was further noted that the demographics for each event varied considerably, with the Funderworld event attracting a younger group of people which would provide additional value.

Members of the Sub-Group agreed with the principle that two events could not be held in succession on the Water Tower site in one year until a roadway was in place.

4. Downs Event Track Scheme

Jonathan James introduced this report examining possible options for provision of an access route for vehicles at the Water Tower site and made the following points:

- There were two main options – the use of an MOT Type 1 track or plastic moulded cells
- Two phases would be required – Phase 1 Entrance Way and Phase 2 Hardstanding Area
- Assessments of costs were included in the report and were based on industry costs
- The proposals would require planning consent and an archaeological watching brief. They would also require a power supply. Further detail could be provided directly to Sub-Group members by the Parks Department Team
- The plastic moulded cell was a better option to ensure the least intrusion and would allow a return to the grass area on site. It would allow traffic to be used all year round. Whilst this was the more costly option, it was likely to be a more preferred option for planning
- Officers recommended that both phases took place together

During discussion, members made the following points:

- The key issues to consider were the timescale for a return on investment, the purpose of doing it (ie to protect the Downs or allow further events to generate income) and whether there were any legal issues in the Downs Act to consider
- The possibility of sponsorship and grants needed to be investigated

Ben Skuse stressed the importance of any proposal being effective in preventing any further deterioration on site. Current costs for tractor use and soil and grass resupply on the site at the end of each season were provided.

The following actions were agreed: (1) Plastic Moulded Option to be approved in principle with both phases to take place at the same time (2) Development of a Business Plan which dovetails with the Bristol City Council budget , provides a cost/benefit analysis of the proposal and which assesses the impact on the amount of income that can be generated including timescale for payback of costs (3) An assessment of the legal implications of the proposal through the Downs Act

At the end of the meeting, the Sub-Group noted that Amanda Sharpe was shortly leaving Bristol City Council. They thanked her for all her hard work during this period and said they had hugely valued her contribution to the Committee.

The meeting ended at 3.50pm