

Downs Management Report 15 November 2021

Ben Skuse: Parks Supervisor

As a team we always enjoy this time of the year. Having firmly left the crowds, bins and litter behind for another summer, autumn represents a time where we look forward to getting into other jobs without the incessant backdrop of overflowing bins and constant litter to be picked up.

Normal duties continue, as we start to use our football pitches on a twice weekly basis now, we must put more time into keeping the surfaces playable with tractor mounted chaining and spiking operations. As the winter really kicks in, we'll no doubt start to incorporate some sand onto the surfaces to aid drainage.

Speaking of drainage (or not) as the case may be, the Clifton playground drainage issues have been to some extent mitigated by the addition of a large amount of play bark. This will at least keep people up and out of the pooling water across the winter until the longer-term surface improvement plan can be agreed upon and implemented.

Between now and the Christmas break a huge tonnage of leaves are going to fall, particularly on The Promenade. These leaves fall in such quantity that they need to be cleared each year. This will happen across several weeks as they fall. In other areas of the Downs, we'll just concentrate on clearing footpaths. The collected leaves are hoovered up by a tractor mounted implement. In recent years we have started to turn these leaves periodically to make a leaf mould type product which we then mix into the soil that we buy throughout the year. We find that not only does this keep costs down because we buy less soil, but mixing this into the soil we buy greatly increases the nutrient value of the soil and we are getting improved grass seed germination and growth when we are looking to repair event sites and football pitch surfaces.

Speaking of event sites, unless we get an unusually dry spell, then there will not be much further work possible on any of our 4 Downs event sites now.

Parry's Lane: In good shape, no damage, no further works required.

Sea Walls: In good shape, some visible damage, grass turf area took well and is integrated successfully. I am comfortable that the visible markings that are still there will grow out in time across the winter. Minimal further works required.

Circus Site: The Circus did a reasonable job to get off site with quite small-scale damage. The big problem here was that they left a skip to be collected and the skip lorry could not access it for several days afterwards and we had to assist the lorry when it did come on to prevent it getting stuck whilst accessing the skip. It is gone now, and we have sorted the ground for now. Some further works required but nothing out of the ordinary.

Water Tower: As ever this is our biggest headache. The ground is significantly damaged, with much work still to do. We were able to carry out quite a lot of work to start the ground repair process, but now the area is flooded in places and we cannot work on it anymore (unless we get a freak dry spell as mentioned). We will take whatever opportunities the weather allows between now and the arrival of the next event onto this area next year, to carry out ongoing works to ensure the ground is fit. The good thing is, having a team based at the Downs allows for us to work with the weather in this way.

Again this winter, we'll be looking to install maybe 5 memorial benches for customers. Alongside this carrying out repairs, cleaning and finally repainting and staining in the spring to all of our other bench stock, a job that in the past we have used people from the community payback scheme to carry out to good effect. Speaking of benches, I was contacted by someone from Clifton Rotary group. Due to retail and housing developments in Clifton village, a bench needs a new home as it needs to be removed from where it currently sits. We will be taking delivery of the bench, refurbishing it and putting it out somewhere on Clifton Down this winter.

For our scrub management work this winter we have decided to focus our attentions on the bank that leads from the Suspension Bridge buttress down to Tuffleigh House next to the White Lion Hotel. This area has not been tackled for several years and is fast reverting to secondary woodland with mainly self-seeded Ash and Sycamore and Hazel growing up to a height that is beginning to shield the views of the gorge and bridge, even the viewpoint area with the lectern on it. In addition to this we will pick a couple of compartments out on the wider Downs, but this job will take much of our attention this winter.

Members will be aware that each year myself and my team carry out de vegetation operations on the rock slopes above the highway on Bridge Valley Rd. This will be taking place again in the new year, across 3 Sundays. Road closures will be in place on

Sun 30th Jan

Sunday 6th Feb

Sunday 13th Feb

I will be able to give further details about this at the next Downs Committee on Jan 24th.