

Downs Management Report 24 January 2022

Ben Skuse: Area Parks Supervisor

In the short gap between the last report and this one we have had a relatively quiet and productive time.

Benefitting from predominantly dry conditions lots of football has been played with hardly any cancellations. 30 tonnes of soil has gone onto the water tower site. The next step if conditions are favourable will be to drag a chain mat over the areas surface, then spike the ground to promote drying out, roll the surface to flatten it and finally add grass seed. Admittedly this grass seed will barely get a chance to germinate before Funderworld's arrival to begin build on March 28th. However if it is in the ground then the exposed bits can get going with the rest germinating as soon as it is uncovered from whatever fairground ride is on top of it.

So we begin to look at the summer mowing regime from this point onwards. A significant amount of tree canopy lifting has taken place to make sure we can get good access to areas underneath trees and that the footpaths are free from overhanging branches before they get heavy with new leaves. Bench repair and maintenance continues as we look ahead to another busy Easter/May bank holiday period. It will be interesting to note what the impact of being entirely free from C-19 restrictions will have on Downs life this Spring/Summer. The huge crowds of the last 2 Covid years will be a thing of the past I hope.

After the last meeting I met with Ian Johnson at the Clifton Observatory. I made it clear to him that the grounds damage attributed to the waste transfer vehicles that his building requires could not continue. He was well aware of his limits on vehicle movements from BCC licencing and assured me that they stick to this except in exceptional circumstances. We agreed that the size of the vehicles going up there is the problem. He is going to go back to his provider to see what other options may be possible. But more importantly a bollard has finally been installed. This takes control of the vehicle movements for the first time so is a big step in the right direction. The Observatory have also paid to have significant ground re-instatement works carried out to prevent further damage. Most importantly of all the exposed tree roots of the mature Sycamore in the area in question have been covered over with soil taking away the threat to the trees' future health.

So yes, everything has been running to plan since the last report, that is of course until 3 named storms in a row blew in, the 3rd week of February. Considering the red weather warning for wind the Downs got away relatively lightly in terms of fallen trees. A large Holm Oak which was inside the water tower site but fell out onto the Downs being the most significant loss. All were cleared quickly by a combination of my team and the citywide tree contractors. Plenty of woodchip was created which we put to good use throughout the year around the site.

I continue to engage with the preparatory process for our 2022 event programme. Meetings with both organisers and Bristol City Council's site permissions and events team are ongoing as we move forward through the programme for 22.

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