

Downs Committee
Notes of Events & Finance Sub-Group Meeting
12 January 2021

Members:

David Freed (Master and Chair)
MV Jonathon Baker
Councillor Jos Clark
MV Patrick Despard
Councillor Paul Goggin
Councillor Geoff Gollop
MV Peter Rilett

Bristol City Council Officers:

Kevin Jay – Finance Officer
Stefan Edwards – Events Officer
Ben Skuse – Grounds Supervisor
Oliver Harrision – Democratic Services

Apologies:

Councillor Paula O'Rourke – Councillor Kay Grant substitutes

1. Minutes of Previous Meeting

Make the following amendments on the minutes of 22 November 2021:

- On item 2 'Finance Update' the first bullet should read 'total overspend £273k' change Judicial Review costs to £140k.

After these amendments, it was RESOLVED that the minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as a correct record.

It was noted that the outstanding actions on business rates and the Team Love contract would be discussed in today's meeting.

2. Finance Update

The Finance Officer presented their report and highlighted the following points:

- The grey box on the right side of p.6 shows the forecast position for 2021/22. We expect income of £317k and expenditure of £579k. The underlying deficit is £262k, which is reduced to £164k after reserves are drawn on.
- There has been income lost this year on events. Increased costs include an additional gardener post (up to 5 from 4) and additional building, repairs, and cleaning due to Covid.
- The educational post was furloughed last year. The zoo kept the Covid grant for that at the time, so we will not be paying for the post next year.

- Re: Business Rates, Kevin has contacted the officer that notified him about potential charges to request a permanent solution. It was noted by members that it was the usual position of BCC to not charge, so this represents a change in policy that needs an explanation.
- This is an optimistic budget based on events team estimates. We need to generate more income or make some reductions. BCC is doing this at the moment as they have a significant budget gap. It is a similar story for the Downs. Starting from events income informs how much we can spend.

Discussion Notes:

- We should hopefully be able to go back to a normal cleaning regime in the new financial year. The assumption is that BCC parks will do the same at this point, but this needs to be clarified.
- Invoices from events come into the system and are logged in the accounts, but this does not necessarily mean the monies are in hand.
- There was a discussion on the drop in income. This is mainly due to the loss of the zoo parking. There has also been a drop in event income.

3. Events Report Update

The Events officer presented their report and highlighted the following points:

- The report shows the expected event list for the upcoming year.
- Committee guidance is requested on setting site fees for events that have previously been granted a reduced rate due to Covid. BCC is granting reductions until the end of the financial year and will set regular fees after that. The committee can choose to use reduced, standard or increased fees.
- There is a summary of complaints re: Love Saves the Day along with the noise report. This confirms that the event did not breach licensed noise levels. The report will be included in the full committee papers. The number of complaints received is low considering the size and impact of the event.

Discussion Notes:

- If this is going to be the major annual event for the Downs, it needs to be managed carefully. There was a residents' meeting attended by JB where concerns were raised.
- Team Love have acknowledged that the music genre was not suitable for the location and will not do it again.
- It is preferable to have one major event over a weekend rather than multiple smaller events in terms of disruption for residents.
- Regarding site fees more generally, the financial outturn is based upon fees returning to a standard pre-covid level. The committee agreed to return to a pre-Covid level. Any increase beyond that could result in events being non-viable.
- There was a discussion about the University Freshers Fair event. This does substantial damage to the ground due to high footfall on soft ground.
- Members asked SE to investigate with BCC film officers whether there was any filming happening on the Downs that could be charged or encouraged.

4. Any Other Business

- The Sea Walls Café planning permission extension has been reapplied for.
- The Deputy Lord Lieutenant has requested that the Downs Committee contributes to the Queen's Diamond Jubilee via the Green Canopy Project. JB has worked with Francis Greenacre and BS on a suitable location on the Downs to plant trees. There are two proposed projects: planting of five native tree species in a circle off Ladies Mile and a single oak next to the existing Golden Jubilee oak at the top of Bridge Valley Road.
- The estimated cost is around £1500 and a sponsor has been approached to cover some of this. Members discussed the possibility of Crowdfunding the project as the trees will not be planted until November.

The proposal was AGREED and will be referred to the full Downs Committee for approval.