

# Bristol City Council

## Minutes of the Downs Committee

28 June 2022 at 11.00 am



### Members Present:-

**Councillors:** Paula O'Rourke (Chair), Steve Smith, Katy Grant, Philippa Hulme, David Freed (Vice-Chair), Jonathon Baker, Mike Bothamley, Mark Burchfield, Gillian Camm, Patrick Despard and Peter Rilett

### 1 Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and did a round of introductions.

### 2 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Townsend, Councillor Clark, and Councillor Dudd.

### 3 Declarations of interest

There was none.

### 4 Chair's Business

The Chair noted that:

- There had been a last minute amendment to the papers the day before the meeting to include additional items, Chair's Business and Downs Committee Work Plan. The Chair apologised for the error as these items should have been included in the initial reports pack.
- The layout of previous meetings was not ideal as members of the public were positioned behind the committee which made it difficult for people to see/hear. Going forwards, the committee would look to improve the layout with the public facing the Committee, where possible.
- The Committee had only accepted statements to date, but they would like trial accepting questions at the next Committee meeting in September. It was noted that the Committee wanted to open up a dialogue however, due to limited resources, this would only be temporary arrangement.



## 5 Minutes of last meeting

Resolved; That the minutes of the previous meetings on 21<sup>st</sup> March and 20<sup>th</sup> May 2022 be approved as a correct record.

## 6 Action Tracker

The Chair noted that there was only one action on the tracker from the previous meeting which had been completed. Going forwards, she would like to the Committee to be more outcome led with the intention of adding more actions to the tracker at upcoming meetings. She added that Cllr Smith had done great work on the Downs Committee Work Plan which had generated lots of actions to be embedded throughout the year.

## 7 Matters Arising From the Events and Finance Group

The Master of the Society of Merchant Venturers introduced the item and noted there had been a detailed discussion on the finance report which now gave a more detailed breakdown on income and expenditure.

There was a discussion around parking on the downs and the future use of the Zoo car park and Members noted that this was to be discussed at a future meeting.

## 8 Downs Committee Work Plan

The Chair gave attendees a few minutes to read through the Work Plan as the report was published late. Councillor Smith then introduced the report and noted that the Work Plan was split into 3 strands which were as follows:

- Income and finance
- Assets and infrastructure
- Governance and accountability

It was noted that some of the items in the Work Plan were 'business as usual' so a task and finish group wouldn't be required.

Discussion points:

- The Chair noted that the Committee would like to look at the Downs Byelaws which was to be discussed in more detail at an upcoming meeting.
- There was a discussion around enhancing the use of the Downs for all of the city, specifically supporting smaller events.
- It was noted that the planning application for the Sea Walls Café was to be heard at Development Control Committee B on 29<sup>th</sup> June 2022. This was a repeat of a previous application and if granted, there would still be a requirement for the scheme to be approved by the Secretary of State and following this, funding



would need to be established. It was noted that this would be a long process and a Member of the Downs Committee should monitor as it progresses.

- There was a conversation around infrastructure on the Downs, specifically the changing rooms and it was suggested that a Task & Finish group be set up to progress on section 4 of the Work Plan.

**ACTION:** Report around the Committee's governance to be brought to the next Committee meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> September.

**ACTION:** Events team to look at ways to enhance the use of the Downs specifically for smaller events and report back to the Committee at its meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> November.

**ACTION:** Update on the planning application for the Sea Walls Café to be provided at the next Committee meeting.

**ACTION:** Establish a Task & Finish Group to progress issues in section 4 of the Work Plan – Buildings / Assets / Infrastructure.

## 9 Public Forum

The following Public Forum statements were received and noted by the committee:

1. Bristol Tree Forum, Mark Ashdown (in person)
2. Downs for People, Susan Carter (in person)
3. Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge, Robert Westlake (in person)

There were concerns raised around drifting on the Downs and officers advised that 101 had been contacted and police had been present in the past. It was suggested the Committee raise the issue with the Police & Crime Commissioner.

**ACTION:** Councillor Smith to raise issues around drifting on the Downs with the Police & Crime Commissioner. Information available on the matter to be sent to Councillor Smith.

## 10 Downs Management Report

The Area Parks Supervisor for the Downs introduced the Downs Management report and highlighted the key points as follows:

- The grass mowing regime was going as planned, and the animals remained well.
- The team were nervous about potential problems with litter on the Downs over the bank holiday weekend, but the bad weather meant that this wasn't an issue.
- There would be full renovation of the football pitches in May 2023.
- The water tower site was damaged, and the team were looking to improve the condition of the site ahead of the next event, Funderworld, which was due to take place in early 2023.
- A wooden bin store had been installed outside the Spire hospital for Bristol Waste Company to use instead of placing them around the Thomas Memorial plant beds.



- Due to the Ecological Emergency, Parks had been asked to implement measures to mitigate the impact of climate change. Therefore, following a trial last year, colleagues have kept areas of unmown grass on the verges of Westbury Road to help enhance wildlife.

#### Discussion points:

- There was a discussion around the mowing regime, and it was suggested that the team look at ways to keep people updated on the reasons for the unmown grass and also, the possibility of involving schools for science projects.
- The Chair noted that grant funding was available for the improvement of the Downs Play Area.
- There was a conversation around the possibility of having sheep on the Downs but unfortunately, this was not possible as it would need fencing off to keep the sheep safe.
- The Area Parks Supervisor was seeking approval from the Committee to set up two compound sites on the Downs for gas pipeline works to be completed by Wells and West Utilities. He advised that each site will be at different times of the year with the first one starting imminently at the top of Stoke Road. The contractors would pay for the use of the space and the ground would be covered with matting to facilitate the work but there would be no digging involved. They had agreed to reinstate the land afterwards.
- Following questions from the Committee, the Area Parks Supervisor confirmed that the first round of gas pipeline works was to be completed by December 2020, the space used would be 30m x 30m and that charges would apply. Also, that letters had been sent to local residents informing them of the works. As the fees had not been set, the Committee suggested that Wells and West Utilities are charged a proper commercial rate in line with fees for events and, that the contract should be for 6 months initially with a possible extension subject to a review.

**ACTION:** Update to be provided on the finances relating to the two gas pipeline and structure work compounds on the Downs.

## 11 Downs Education Report

The Chair noted apologies from the Avon Gorge and Downs Biodiversity Education Manager and introduced the Downs Education report.

The Committee thanked the Avon Gorge and Downs Biodiversity Education Manager and colleagues for their great work on the Downs wildlife project education and community engagement programme.

There was a discussion around the planning application for Bristol Zoo and it was noted that the Committee should continue to communicate with them on future plans for the site.

**ACTION:** Chair to collate Committee's views on Bristol Zoo's planning application to be submitted as an official response from the Downs Committee.

Peter Rilett left the meeting at 12:14pm.

## 12 Events Report



The Events Officer introduced the item and highlighted key points as follows:

- Foodies Festival, Funderword and Comedy Garden had already taken place this year with the next events being the Born Free Exhibition and Bristol Pride in July.
- The already damaged water tower site was in bad condition following Foodies Festival and event organisers had address concerns and suggested improvements for the future.
- There had been 3 official complaints received through the council's system since the last report about events on the Downs which were all related to noise levels.
- Officers encouraged Committee Members to direct people to the councils' complaints webpage so issues can be addressed, and complaints are recorded.

### **13 Finance Update**

The Finance officer introduced the item and ran through the report which covered the outturn for 2021/2022, the budgeted income and expenditure and a high level summary.

Discussion points:

- There was a discussion around the deficit in the budget and it was noted that this was mostly due to legal costs relating to the parking legal case and ongoing Covid-19 related expenditure.
- Members asked why the budget for salaries was lower than the forecast outturn and were advised that this was because the council does not allow for a deficit budget.
- There was a discussion around opportunities for receiving sponsorship/grant funding for Downs projects.
- There was a discussion around governance and a Service Level Agreement as Members noted they were keen for the Committee to function efficiently and effectively.

The Chair thanked the Finance officer for producing a more detailed version on the finance report for the Committee.

**ACTION:** Report on the breakdown of Downs Committee finances for previous years to be produced ahead of the next Committee meeting.

### **14 Any Other Business**

An issue was raised around a local resident who had installed a private gravel driveway on what was thought to be Downs Committee owned land without permission. It was noted that the Council's legal team was looking into this, and Members suggested that an update be provided at the next committee meeting.

**ACTION:** Investigate the issue around a resident installing a private driveway that is thought to be on Downs Committee owned land and provide an update at the next Committee meeting.

### **15 Date of Next Meeting**



The next meeting will take place on Monday 19<sup>th</sup> September at City Hall.

Meeting ended at 12.35 pm

**CHAIR** \_\_\_\_\_

