

## Proposal to the Downs Committee

### Hay meadow creation on Clifton Downs/ restoration of former Zoo car park beside the Ladies Mile Road

Site overview (0.58 hectares)



#### Current status

The former zoo car-parking area is a flat area adjacent to and southeast of the Ladies Mile Road on the Downs. The area under discussion is an uneven sward with frequent upright brome and less frequent perennial rye-grass and red fescue interspersed with smaller patches of lower grassland. There is compaction and some bare patches caused by the several years of parking cars, and possibly also by several incidents of illegal car rally behaviour on summer evenings during 2021, involving multiple vehicles racing and turning at speed on the area.

A vegetation monitoring survey (attached) indicates that the grassland in the area continues to be a nature conservation value due to the presence of several plant species characteristic of limestone grassland. The grassland in the area has stabilised, retaining ecological interest but showing some evidence of damage.

#### Proposal

The Bristol City Council team (Becky Belfin, Ben Skuse, Rosie Jackson) and WBCA ecologists have visited the site. It has been agreed that restoration would be valuable in this area, for several outcomes:

- 1) To strengthen the biodiversity and ecological value of the site after several years of being used as a temporary car park
- 2) To provide WBCA volunteers the opportunity to mobilise and learn about this special environment
- 3) To provide a number of school children with the opportunity to learn about grass meadows and their creation/maintenance
- 4) To decrease the likelihood of repeated car rally activities on the spot, as the area will be less inviting if covered in relatively long hay meadow grass

To achieve these outcomes, it has been suggested that the area should be managed as a meadow, so left uncut until July 2023 and then hay cut.

Thereafter the area should be harrowed by an agricultural contractor) to help de-compact the ground, and prepared for receiving green hay. (This will need funding – based on work done this year, a day rate for hiring the tractor and harrow would be approx. £700 – to be discussed whether this comes from Downs Committee coffers or from support via WBCA).

During the summer of 2023, seed could be collected by hand for growing plug plants which could be planted out the following year by volunteers/school children. There will be a cost for someone to oversee this and look after the developing plants. We propose to do this in collaboration with the University of Bristol Botanical Garden, who are a partner in the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project, or with Grow Wilder, or through the BCC plant nursery.

During 2023, the Downs team will use their equipment to harvest green hay from more species-rich sections of meadow on the Downs, and deposit it on former car park area immediately prior to below action. Volunteers/school children will help distribute the green hay across the area being restored. During the autumn of 2023, volunteers and school children can plant seed collected/plug plants grown during the year out into the meadow.

## Zoo Banks - grassland restoration

Site overview (Size: ~0.12 ha)



### Current status

There is an area of grassy open land between the road and the trees, on the edge of the Downs, opposite the main entrance to the former Bristol Zoo Gardens site. The main areas of the banks are sunny, and free-draining, and a quick survey shows that the bank is already fairly species-rich (with indicators of chalk soils such as ladies' bedstraw, salad burnet and kidney vetch). There is already a good population of yellow rattle. Other species seen; ribwort plantain, ragwort, birdsfoot trefoil.

However, where the banks become steep and fall away to the road, the BCC cut and collect machinery are unable to get in, and as a result, the arisings are usually left on site. This has meant an increase in nutrient level, and a reduction in the grass/flora diversity of the site.

### Proposal

The focus of this intervention would be to improve the unshaded areas of the banks, and restore the steep edges of these, opposite the former Bristol Zoo Garden site entrance. The following actions are proposed:

Autumn 2022

- Volunteers rake off any thatch from meadow area, as well as dropped material on banks where not heavily shaded. The Downs team to collect raked up material and remove from site.
- Volunteers/school children could undertake some wildflower plug planting if Grow Wilder have suitable stock (e.g. appropriate species and from seed harvested in the West of England).

### July 2023

- Downs Team cut and collect as usual, but slightly earlier (mid-July)
- Volunteers rake off any thatch from meadow area, as well as dropped material on banks where not heavily shaded. The Downs team to collect raked up material and remove from site.
- Volunteers/school children prepare the site for receiving green hay, through scarifying the ground using rakes.
- The Downs team use their equipment to harvest green hay from more species-rich sections of meadow on the Downs and deposit it on Zoo banks immediately prior to below action.
- Volunteers/school children help distribute the green hay across the scarified area.

