

Proposal to the Downs Committee – update February 2023

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. (What3Words: <https://w3w.co/diner.boats.rated> -

Google- <https://www.google.com/maps/dir/?api=1&destination=51.465246,-2.625585>

The area under discussion is an uneven sward with frequent upright brome and less frequent perennial ryegrass 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.

The Bristol City Council team (Becky Belfin, Ben Skuse, Rosie Jackson) and WBCA ecologists visited the site in late 2022. It was 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

Progress so far

Avon Wildlife Trust specialists have selected a seed mix (St Catherine Mixture EM18) which is approved by the Council team and entirely consistent with the native flora in the Avon Gorge and on the Downs. This has been chilled for five weeks, a pre-requisite for germination. Ben Skuse has organised for the council to break up/de-compact the ground with machinery in the last two weeks of February. On Friday 3rd March at 11 a.m., Dan Geerah from WBCA is leading a group of 20 volunteers from Stride Treglown <http://stridetreglown.com> for a morning of work on the site, scarifying and raking by hand. This will ready the area for seeds.

In the early afternoon of the same day, two school groups of 10 pupils each (20 in total), organised by Katy Grant, will come to the site to learn about the purpose and outcomes of a hay meadow/wildflower meadow, and how sowing appropriate seeds will lead to a restored habitat on the Downs, supportive of pollinators and other small wildlife. Dan Geerah and Katy Grant have done the Council Health and Safety training and are able to manage these groups, alongside teachers from the schools.

Thereafter, 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.

Sponsorship has been provided by the Clifton Business Improvement District (BID) and by Stride Treglown.

Asks of the Downs Committee:

- 1) WBCA would like to put up temporary signs while the volunteers are working on 3rd March, explaining what is happening and for what purpose. We would want Downs Committee permission for this. The temporary signs would be small and very short-term:

Work is in progress to establish a wildflower meadow here. Want to get involved?

QR CODE (sign) / QR CODE (Donate)

Logos: WBCA, Stride Treglown, The Clifton Business Improvement District (BID), Bristol City Council, Downs Committee

- 2) Thereafter they would like approval for longer-term signs explaining for all Downs users what is happening and what the advantages of the meadow will be. We would want Downs Committee permission for this, as well as any guidance on branding and style.

The sign would be A2 in size, and have the following information on it:

Welcome to the Downs Wildflower Meadow

This site used to be used as the overflow car park for Bristol Zoo, but since its closure in late 2022, Bristol City Council and The Downs Committee both saw an exciting opportunity to restore the area into a wildflower meadow; benefiting pollinators important to our eco-structure, such as bees and butterflies, as well as visitors to the Downs.

From February 2023, a group of volunteers from West Bristol Climate Action (WBCA) are working closely with the Downs Committee and the Council - Interested in joining in?

QR CODE (sign) / QR CODE (Donate)

It is a process that will take several years, yet the local wildlife will start to benefit almost immediately.

This site is the third in a series of wildflower meadows that West Bristol Climate Action have created, with the others to be found on Clifton Hill Bank (outside the Nuffield Hospital), and the banks opposite the Old Zoo entrance.

{INSERT MAP}

A special site

This site is within 500 metres of the Avon Gorge, a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and therefore the seeds that we chose had to be native and local (this reduces the risk of “invasive” species accessing the gorge to threaten existing flora). The seeds here are from a limestone grassland near Bath, and Grow Wilder (Avon Wildlife Trust).

[more info needed on the downs?]

What will happen on the site

To give the wildflowers a helping hand to get started on this site, the site will only be cut once or twice a year, and the grass cuttings will be removed so that they don't re-fertilise the soil. A less fertile soil favours wildflowers to grow instead of the coarse grass you are familiar with seeing here.

Over time, you'll begin to notice different species of flowers come and go at different times of the year. We've sown over 80 species of native flowers so far, and each prefers different times of year to bloom and takes different amounts of time to establish.

Do you want more wildflowers?

Do you own a garden, or want to help a local area get a meadow? If so, we hope you'll copy what you see and help turn Bristol into a giant mosaic nature reserve. More information – including how to make a meadow or floral lawn in your garden, and how to volunteer to help – can be found on our website at www.tinyurl.com/cliftonmeadowinfo.



Logos to include:

West Bristol Climate Action, Stride Treglown, Business Improvement District (Clifton), Bristol City Council, Avon Wildlife Trust Logos, Downs Committee

CCA orange: RGB 242/101/34 or hex #F26522

Typefaces: Lato, Permanent Marker

WBCA green: RGB 108/184/58 or hex #6cb83a

Typeface: Lato

Zoo Banks - grassland restoration – February 2023 update

Site overview (Size: ~0.12 ha)



Progress to date

This 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. In September 2022, the Downs Committee gave permission for improvement of these sites, and some seeding of native wildflower species in the area.

During November and December, volunteers spent three days raking off thatch and arisings left from earlier mowing, and removed these. Avon Wildlife Trust supported with suitable seed mix, and in December, these were scattered. Currently the site is not roped off or signed, but WBCA would like to put up a sign here to indicate to visitors what is going on at the site. Costs for the signage will be covered by WBCA and its sponsors.