

THE DOWNS COMMITTEE

Clifton and Durdham Downs (Bristol) Act 1861

DRAFT Minutes of the Downs Committee – 12 June 2023

Members present: Cllr Paul Goggin (Chair), Cllr Kye Dudd, Councillor Philippa Hulme, Cllr Steve Smith, Cllr Christine Townsend, Patrick Despard (Vice-Chair), Jonathan Baker, Mike Bothamley, Robert Bourns, David Freed, Bevis Watts

Officers present: Ben Skuse (Area Parks supervisor), Kevin Jay (Principal Accountant), Steve Hunt (Events Officer), Stefan Edwards (Senior Events Officer), Anna Stevens (Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project Manager), Steve Gregory (Democratic Services)

1. Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Apologies for Absence

- a) Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Jos Clark, Cllr Katy Grant, Cllr Paula O'Rourke, Mark Burchfield.
- b) The Committee was advised that Councillors Jos Clark and Katy Grant would be standing down as members of the Downs Committee in accordance with current membership protocols.

3. Declarations of Interest

None declared.

4. Minutes of the Last Meeting

Resolved - That the minutes of the previous meeting on 25th April 2023 be approved as a correct record.

5. Action Tracker

The Chair ran through actions from the previous meeting. Further updates were included arising from issues raised during discussion at the meeting.

6. Matters Arising from the Events and Finance Group

The Minutes of the meeting were noted.

7. Downs Advisory Panel

The Committee was advised that the first meeting of the Downs Advisory Panel (DAP) had met on 9 June 2023. DAP was fully committed to assisting the Downs Committee by working in close partnership around all the many issues that required solutions.

Issues that were most pressing included –

- a) Anti-social behaviour on the Downs and the frequent disregard of bye laws, this could possibly be mitigated by ‘out of hours’ patrols, Downs Committee assist with funding.
- b) Van dwellers on the Downs and the risk factors associated with gas bottles, litter, and waste.
- c) Completion of a Downs Management Plan.

The Chair thanked the DAP representative for the update and added that it was important to include all age ranges for support of the Downs and signposted the Youth Parliament as one potential mechanism for inclusion. In addition, a serving police officer on DAP would be particularly helpful, it was noted that currently a retired police officer was already a member of DAP.

The Chair said that, as a member of Avon Fire Authority, he would approach Fire Officers for their opinion regarding the risk faced by gas bottles on the Downs. Another member felt that the risk of fire from barbeques posed a greater risk of fire on the Downs, and this should be given priority.

Members noted that attempts by FODAG to restrict the sale of mobile barbeques had been made in the past with limited impact but might be worth trying again given the current heatwave being experienced.

8. Public Forum

Public forum questions were received as set out below, the questions would be replied to after the meeting as soon as possible or an update would be provided at the next Downs Committee meeting as applicable.

Questions were received from:

Robert Przemioslo – Questions 1 and 2

David Redgewell – Questions 1 and 2

Gordon Richardson – Questions 1 and 2

Regarding DR (Q1) about facilities on the Downs, changing rooms/toilets, members were advised of the substantial costs associated with any upgrade of approximately £1.5m and this had delayed ambitions to commence work despite a significant contribution from the Football Association. It was noted raising funds was a key role of the proposed Downs Coordinator. There were also significant barriers to achieve improvements because the Downs Act prohibited building on the Downs.

A supplementary question was asked regarding Q1 by DR about the outcome of a meeting with the previous LM and representatives of the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The government was keen to support the changes to the facilities on the Downs, but the meeting failed to garner any progress.

The following public forum statements were received and noted by the Committee.

Statements received from:

Statement Number 1: Robert Westlake – Friends of Downs and Avon Gorge

Statement Number 2: Susan Carter – Downs for People

Statement Number 3: David Redgewell (Disability Equalities Forum Trustee + South West Transport Network) and Gordon Richardson (Bristol Disability Equalities Forum).

Regarding Statement No.3 and WECA as Transport Authority not assisting with funding of cycle tracks, the Chair advised that it would be helpful to engage with WECA to progress this.

9. Downs Management Report

The Area Parks Supervisor summarised his report drawing members attention to the key points in particular -

- i. Alternative sites would be considered for the Funder World event as the Water Tower site was left in a poor state after this year's event. Noted that the organisers had contributed towards soil repair costs.
- ii. Works to improve the drainage situation at the Clifton playground had taken place and it was hoped that this would see an improvement in the usual muddy conditions that the playground suffered from across winter.

RESOLVED – that the Downs Management report be noted.

10. Downs Education Report - Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project

The Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project Manager gave a detailed summary of the report.

Members welcomed the work that had been done to date in particular the work with children/schools regarding litter.

Members also supported the principle of extending the Project Officer, subject to funding, at a cost of £6,346 from September to December 2023. Discussion took place as to how this might be funded, ideas included approaching Natural England for a grant, or perhaps Forestry England or National Trust. Consideration also be given to approaching Bristol University for student volunteers to support the work of the project.

Work to engage outside cities with the project work would need to be given further consideration regarding funding.

RESOLVED – That the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project Downs Education report be noted.

11. Events Report

The Events Officers introduced the report and drew members attention to the confirmed events for 2023 as set out in paragraph 2 of the report.

RESOLVED – That the Events report be noted.

12. Finance Outturn Report for 2022-23 and 2023-24

The Finance Officer gave a detailed summary of the report highlighting in particular the £75k deficit that had accrued during 2022/23.

Reasons for the deficit included –

- i. Charges for support services from Bristol City Council, including, employees regarding an agreed pay award and overtime, and higher premises costs relating to buildings repairs & maintenance, cleaning, and energy.
- ii. Loss of two events to be held on the Downs.
- iii. The Finance Officer also gave a detailed summary of the forecast report for 2023-24 highlighting a potential £145k deficit, occurring from out of hours working; pay awards and higher premises costs including, buildings R&M, cleaning, and energy costs. There was also an income pressure from changes to several income generating events and lower parking income.

Members considered options to mitigate financial losses, and these included –

- iv. Looking at the potential to access CIL/S106 money, currently allocated for 'Destination Parks' via BCC Area Committees.
- v. Adopting a more proactive approach to encourage more events on the Downs whilst being mindful of the hidden costs that more events could lead to more reparation work of the grounds. Noted that this would be a significant part of the Downs Coordinator role.
- vi. Work with DAP to consider wider partnerships with other organisations eg insurance companies to generate income streams.

RESOLVED – That the Finance Outturn Report for 2022-23 and 2023-24 be noted.

13. Any other business

A suggestion was made to perhaps avoid repetition in public forum statements/Q by providing a FAQ option for particularly significant issues on the Downs, eg the café

development. The Chair pointed out that remit of Dap was one of greater transparency so this might also mitigate duplication.

14. Date of next meeting

Monday 18th September, 2pm at City Hall.

CHAIR

Meeting ended at 12.40 pm