

Downs Management Report – 18 September 2023

I had a brief look back at the previous report to June's meeting. I was amused to see how I talked about how lovely and lush and green things were at that time of year and to enjoy it as likely the second half of the summer would see the ground become parched with dying yellow grass and fires! Well, that was wrong!

Since then, we have had a very wet July and August, but as ever in the grounds industry this brings both positives and negatives.

Positives, lush, green, healthy grass growth growing thickly over event sites and football surfaces and great results for grass seed germination. The Sea Walls event area will particularly benefit in terms of it standing up well to all the vehicles, staging and footfall.

Negatives, whilst normally we would be thinking about parking the mowers or carrying out the last cut on the grass that has ground to a halt in dry conditions, this year we are still having to mow intensively to keep the grass in check and will have to do so for a few weeks yet.

So, every year is different, and we work flexibly with the conditions that we get. Last year I was looking at some areas of the Downs and wondering if the grass would ever recover, but it has and it does given enough rain, and we have certainly had enough rain!

So into the Autumn. We have our football pitches ready to go for the 23/24 season.

Bristol Downs League, Wednesday 6th September.

Bristol University, Student Union, Wednesday 27th September.

In terms of events upcoming, I have been involved with event organisers to make sure sites are ready. We have a new circus operator this year and a new small one-day charity event. It's important for me to pay extra attention to the new operators. Hopefully both of those will go well. Bristol University Welcome fair is an established event now and I have met organisers to work on this year's event at Parry's Lane.

It needs to be reported to the committee that this year has been a particularly difficult one in terms of travellers at the Downs. This then causes some concerns if we have events at the Downs at the same time. I have maintained regular dialogue with the associated BCC officers and event operators and work hard to alleviate concerns.

To end, unfortunately, maybe as a result of last year's drought conditions, we are still seeing losses amongst our tree stock at the Downs. The latest being a large Red Oak outside the mansion house on the Promenade. This is a shame as it was such a prominent and beautiful specimen. Once we have ground out the stump, we can look to plant another tree to replace.

Ben Skuse

Bristol City Council Parks

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