

BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL

Downs Committee

21st November 2016

Title: Report of the Activities of the Avon Gorge and Downs Seasonal Education Officer

Officers Presenting Report: Mandy Leivers, Avon Gorge and Downs Biodiversity Education Manager

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RECOMMENDATION

That the report be noted.

Summary

To present the Report of the Activities of the Avon Gorge and Downs Seasonal Education Officer 2016 and to inform the committee about the funding strategy for the Seasonal Education Officer post in 2017.

The significant issues in the report are:

- 2016 has been a successful year with regards to the education programme on the Downs. The Education Manager and Seasonal Education Officer have worked with a wide range of people from across the city.
- It has been announced that whilst Bristol City Council will continue to provide funding for the Avon Gorge and Downs Biodiversity Education Manager from the Downs Committee budget, they will not be funding the Seasonal Education Officer post in 2017.
- It has been decided that the education programme should be reviewed and that the partners in the Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project should be consulted to determine the future direction of the programme.
- New sources of funding are being explored for the Seasonal Education Officer post.

1. Policy

Not applicable

2. Consultation

Internal:

Becky Belfin, Nature Conservation Officer, Park Estates

Sarah Tyler, Client and Operational Co-ordinator – Central and North, Park Estates

Ben Skuse, Area Supervisor Downs, Blaise, Kingsweston Estates

3. Context

The Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project was launched on 23rd October 1999. It is a partnership of Bristol City Council, the Downs Committee, Merchant Venturers, Bristol Zoo Gardens, Natural England, the University of Bristol and Bristol Zoological Society. We also work with the National Trust, Forestry Commission and other landowners on the North Somerset side of the Gorge, as well as the Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge.

The aim of the project is *'to secure the future of the outstanding wildlife interest of the Avon Gorge and Clifton and Durdham Downs and to raise awareness and understanding of this unique location and its importance to people and wildlife'*.

In September 2001 the Project employed a full-time Avon Gorge and Downs Biodiversity Education Officer (now manager). The programme developed and grew, so every year since 2008, a Seasonal Education Officer has been employed to assist the Avon Gorge & Downs Biodiversity Education Manager in

- *'developing and delivering a programme of education, interpretation and promotional work to encourage greater public involvement, understanding and enjoyment of the wildlife interest of the Avon Gorge and Downs and their management'* and
- *'meeting anticipated demand over the peak spring and summer period and to increase the number and diversity of people participating in education events and activities.'*

From 2011 – 2016, the Seasonal Education Officer has been funded from the Downs Committee budget. The funding is the equivalent of a 6-month full-time post but to ensure the busy season is covered, the Seasonal Education Officers have been employed on a part time basis (30 hours per week, 4 days a week) from mid-March to the end October.

To date (28th October 2016), 95,480 people have taken part in walks, talks, courses, children's and family events, formal education sessions, play scheme sessions and community involvement projects. A wide range of interpretative materials have also been produced, including nature trail leaflets, information panels, a website, rare plant displays and a mobile app (developed in conjunction with FODAG and UWE). The site and its wildlife have been well promoted at community events, via the project's Facebook page and Twitter accounts as well as through the media with newspaper, magazine and on-line articles, radio interviews and appearances on local and national TV. The achievements of the project have also been recognized through a number of awards, including the National RHS Britain in Bloom Conservation and Wildlife Award.

The education programme has contributed towards the delivery of actions and objectives in both the Avon Gorge and the Downs Management Plans.

4. Summary of achievements in 2016

A full copy of the 'Report of the Activities of the Avon Gorge and Downs Seasonal Education Officer 2016' can be found in the appendix. It's been a busy and productive season. Over the last eight months we have engaged with 9,220 people through the education programme, including:

- 1,773 school children and higher education students who visited the Downs for education sessions.
- 352 playscheme children who visited us for sessions.
- 5,461 people who visited the 'Be fantastic, save wildlife from plastic!' tent over the Bristol Festival of Nature weekend. A further 160 children were taught by us at the festival schools' day.
- 917 people at family, community and children's events.
- 718 people who have been on one of our guided walks, talks or courses.

Through our evaluation process we have received excellent feedback from both schools and playschemes. 100% of groups said that they were 'very likely' to return, and we have three bookings for 2017 already.

5. Education programme review and funding strategy for the seasonal education officer post in 2017

In July 2016, it was announced that whilst Bristol City Council would continue to provide

funding for the Avon Gorge and Downs Biodiversity Education Manager from the Downs Committee budget, funding for the Seasonal Education Officer post would not be available in 2017. It was decided that the education programme should be reviewed and that the partners in the Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project should be consulted to determine the future direction of the programme. New sources of funding should also be explored for the Seasonal Education Officer post.

The 'Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project Education Programme Review (2001 – 2016)' report was completed in October and circulated to the steering group members. It is clear from the report that having two members of staff is critical to the effective functioning of the Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project education programme.

Since 2008, the employment of Seasonal Education Officers has increased our capacity sufficiently to enable us to promote our education programme to schools from across the city (rather than just focusing on those closest to the Downs). This has proven to be very successful with 10,911 children and university students coming to the Downs for 566 formal education sessions.

Most schools have multiple classes per year group and will only allow the visit if all the classes in the year group can come. With two education officers we can teach two classes simultaneously. Because of coach costs, whole day visits, where groups experience multiple sessions are increasingly popular (the two classes are taught a different session in the morning and then swap sessions in the afternoon).

Since 2008, 2,841 children have come to the Downs for 171 play scheme sessions. The employment of Seasonal Education Officers gave us the capacity to work with these groups (we did not offer sessions for these groups prior to 2008). Our evaluation indicates that the majority of these children had never been to the Downs before their sessions with us.

From evaluation form feedback, and in discussion with group leaders, many have expressed their appreciation of the project's work. The high quality and low cost environmental education we provide is seen as increasingly important, particularly for those groups that are based in less affluent areas of the city, and who may not otherwise get out exploring the natural world. The wealth of positive feedback demonstrates that the project continues to progress from strength to strength and has maintained a reputation for high quality outdoor learning.

Since 2009, the Seasonal Education Officers have had the role of recruiting, inducting and co-ordinating volunteers in the peak season. The number of volunteers working with us shot up in 2009 and since then, 166 people have either volunteered or completed a work experience placement with us, contributing 6,469 hours of their time. We wouldn't be able to run the education sessions and community events without volunteers and wouldn't be able to support the volunteers properly without the Seasonal Education Officer.

For a Seasonal Education Officer to be in post for the 2017 teaching season, we need to know by Christmas if the funding will be in place. This is so that the post can be advertised in January, interviews take place in February and the applicant is in post in March. The Bristol Zoological Society's Fundraising and Development Department have agreed to take on the task of finding the funding. They have advised us that the deadlines for grant making trusts / charities are simply too tight for our timetable and so the best approach for 2017 is to go for corporate sponsorship. Once funding for 2017 has been found we can prepare a longer-term funding strategy for future years.

The future direction of the education programme will be discussed at the next Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project steering group meeting.

Public Sector Equality Duties

- a) *Before making a decision, section 149 Equality Act 2010 requires that each decision-maker considers the need to promote equality for persons with the following “protected characteristics”: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. Each decision-maker must, therefore, have due regard to the need to:*
- i) Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Equality Act 2010.*
 - ii) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to --*
 - *remove or minimise disadvantage suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic;*
 - *take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of people who do not share it (in relation to disabled people, this includes, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities);*
 - *encourage persons who share a protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.*
 - iii) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to –*
 - *tackle prejudice; and*
 - *promote understanding.*

Appendices:

Report of the activities of the Avon Gorge and Downs Seasonal Education Officer 2016

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

Background Papers: None