

# THE DOWNS COMMITTEE

## 13 November 2023

### Public Forum

#### Questions

From David Redgewell

##### Question 1

What progress is being made on the Downs to bring parking restrictions and charges as part of a Green travel plan

Between Bristol city council as Highway Authority the Downs committee and the West of England mayoral combined transport Authority mayor Dan Norris.

As most West Country tourist and area of Open space have parking policy and encourage visitors Like Exmoor National park ,Dartmouth National park Mendip Anob to Enjoy the area by Public transport walking and cycling.

As the Down is very accessible by sustainable Transport and Public transport by both First group plc Great Western Railway company station at Clifton Down and Bus services across the city Region by stagecoach west and First group plc west of England buses and the Transport for Wales T 7 to Chepstow.

The city council has parking policy at the Heritage estate at Blase castle estate, Henbury Ashton Court estate and oidbury court,

Money raise could improve transport facilities cycle path walking cycle hangers.and public transport services.

Or facilities like changing rooms and public toilets as part of a transport hub.

##### Question 2

In view of the importance of the Avon Gorge and it importance to Nature conservation and the setting of the Downs and access to the via Bridhe valley road Clifton suspension Bridge and the Downs

Has the Downs committee commented on the plans for the importance of improvement to the A4 portway for walking and cycling and the proposals for new bus lanes from Hotwells along the Avon Gorge to shirehampton and portway park and ride bus and Rail interchange

Which has just opened with a Rail link to Clifton Down station with First group plc Great Western Railway company.

It's very important that routes for walking and cycling link to the portway in a sustainable way via Bridge valley road or zig zag path .

The consultant by Bristol city council and the west of England mayoral combined transport Authority. Closes 14 th November 2023.

## **Statements**

### **Statement 1**

#### **Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge**

FOD+AG welcomes the opportunity to update the Downs committee on our most recent activities and some of the events planned for the coming months.

FOD+AG remains committed to its core values to represent legitimate users of the Downs and to support the City Council and the Downs committee in the good governance of the Downs and Avon Gorge.

Early next month FOD+AG will hold its AGM. We have invited as our guest speakers' members of the Avon & Somerset Police to explain how the Downs are policed and to take questions from our members.

On behalf of our members, we would like to thank the committee for granting permission for FOD+AG to install a new notice board near to the Downs Cafe. Designed to enhance the visitor experience FOD+AG will be funding the project. In addition, the notice board will have two waterproof pouches to dispense information leaflets and a QR code to permit visitors to make donations towards the upkeep of the Downs.

FOD+AG received video footage of a car being driven dangerously at speed across the Downs. This was in broad daylight and without regard for the safety of other Downs users. The video clip has been forwarded to the Police for possible identification.

Winter litter forays across the Downs are now underway. At the end of October 20 volunteers enjoyed autumnal sunshine and removed significant amounts of litter and rubbish from the Zoo banks. The team will set forth again on 25<sup>th</sup> November.

The wooden bus shelter on Stoke Road has been maintained for many years by a local volunteer. In the past the Downs committee and Sneyd Park Residents Association have

assisted with the funding of this worthwhile cause. FOD+AG wish to get involved in urgent repairs to the roof of this unique structure. The roof is unusual as it is constructed from Cedar tiles. A specialist contractor has been asked to quote for the repairs. FOD+AG will look to arrange funding for the project.

Volunteers continue with a range of regular activities. We continue to assist with goat monitoring duties, raking up cut grass from the wildflower meadows, maintaining the flower borders at the Thomas Memorial and sweeping paths. FOD+AG would like to register our thanks to the Downs supervisor and his team for the cooperation willingly offered.

FOD+AG continues to support the Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project as partners on the Steering Group. The range of expertise available to the group or the importance of the projects undertaken cannot be underestimated.

The Downs Advisory Panel {DAP} met earlier this month and debated a range of issues raised by Downs neighbours and users and is subject to a separate report for the Downs committee to consider. On behalf of the Panel FOD+AG would like to offer its thanks to the Avon Gorge & Downs Biodiversity Engagement and Learning Manager Anna Stevens for providing a venue for DAP meetings.

**Robert Westlake**

**Chair**

**Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge**

## **Statement 2**

**David Redgewell Bristol disability equities forum Trustees**

**South west transport Network.**

Whist we are very supportive of the work of the Downs committee.

I am also aware that the Downs are a major Green space for residents of the city and county of Bristol with the Avon Gorge a major Regional Tourist Attraction but the Downs need investment in changing places for sports men and women to play football and other sports.

The changing rooms are not fit for purpose so need to raise money and government Grants .

On the facilities for residents and Tourists we must improve the toilet facilities and cafe facilities on the Downs especially for disabled people and partly sighted people.

The committee needs to discuss the development of the sea wall toilet block and cafe with the Department for Levelling Up and the Secretary of State Michael Gove to find a way forward.

So we can have the kind of Tourism and local residents find in the Mendip Area

Or the Cotswolds or Exmoor or Dartmoor National Park.

Or closer to the Downs the facilities being developed in Staple Hill Park in South Gloucestershire County Council area and Greater Bristol.

With its cafe and toilets meeting room and changing places toilets.

For which there is government grants available.

Bristol new local plan now has policy on Development of public toilets in new developments.

Including protecting Green spaces. Including the Downs Act.

A policy which is welcome by Bristol Disability Equalities Forum and Bristol Older People Forum.

We do want to see some progress on these items it can not be right for small groups of local people to prevent developments of amenities for Residents and Tourists to the Downs

We need a Downs forum of stakeholders from across the City Region especially from Areas like South Bristol St Anne's Park, Bristolington Keynsham, Whitechurch Estate Hartcliffe Bishopsworth, Hengrove Bedminster Redcliffe, Southville Long Ashton Abbots Leigh.

East Bristol Ding Barton Hill St Paul's Montpellier

Eastville, Easton, Stapleton, Eastville Park, Fishponds Oidbury Court Downend Kingwood, Staple Hill. Bradley Stoke to name a few places not just West Bristol and Clifton.

We also want to see a sustainable transport policy for the Downs with more cycling facilities better footways

cycle and e scooter parking working with the Bristol City Council as Highway Authority and West of England Mayoral Combined Transport Authority as Transport Authority with Mayor Dan Norris. Who is developing Green travel sustainable travel plans.

And has some environmental grants

West of England Mayoral Combined Authority Committee also has a climate change journey to Net Zero target which the Downs Committee and Society of Merchant Ventures need to look at

The Downs Committee should have a meeting with Mayor Dan Norris.

On Highways and parking.

The Downs Committee working with Bristol City Council as Highway Authority and the West of England Mayoral Combined Transport Authority and North Somerset Council.

Should develop a parking policy and changing for cars and coach parking

Like the other Tourist heritage estates

Like Ashton Park Estates, Blaise Castle Estate, Oidbury Court Estate,

So a green travel plan and policy should be developed for the Downs .

Including parking charges for cars and coaches caravans ect .

Free parking for blue badger holders.

The issue of the residents buses and vans need addressing through a local Plan policy.

I terms of alternative transport the we access by Walking and cycling.

But also a bus services from Bristol city centre, Cabot circus and Broadmead shopping centre and Bristol Temple meads station

Service 1, 2, 8, 3 and 4 from the Broadmead shopping centre, city centre,park street Clifton Down station to the Downs

First Group plc west of England buses. Bus 505 to Clifton Down Harbourside Hotwells, long Ashton park and ride. And to Horfield and Southmead hospital bus station.

Stagecoach west buses Service 1, 2 to cribbs causeway bus station via Henbury 1 ,2 ,2 a to Southmead hospital bus station.

Service 3 4 ,via sea Mills Shirehampton Avonmouth Dock or Lawrence weston to Blase castle estate Henbury and cribbs causeway bus station.

First Group plc west of England buses Service T 7 Bristol bus and coach station to Park Street Clifton Down station, Downs Cribbs causeway bus station and Chepstow bus and coach station.

Transport for Wales Metro west railway Network station at Clifton Down station links to Bristol Temple meads station via Redland montpellier ,Bristol Stapleton road, Bristol Lawrence hill ,Bristol Temple meads station station to weston super mare,

And to Sea mill station, Shirehampton, Portway park and ride Avonmouth Dock St Andrews Road and Severn Beach.

The Downs is one the best connected location in Bristol city Region. For Public transport services and with park and ride site links to Long Ashton bus and Portway park and ride Metro west railway service by first group plc Great Western Railway company

The should be a green travel plan. Their needs to be more commercialisation of the Revenue from the Downs with Bristol city council Budget being in difficults with sections 114 notices being looked at .


The Downs committee with proposals

For the portway A4 Between Bristol Harbourside and the portway through the Avon Gorge to Avonmouth via sea Mills, Shirehampton and Portway park and ride site with improvement and link to Bridge valley road and the zig zag path.

Should comment on these plans for walking cycling links to the Downs and Bus priority measures to Portway park and ride site interchanges between Buses and Trains services to Clifton Down station.

We welcome the new visitors centre in the zoo Garden with toilets changing place and visitors centre .

But more must be to find way of bring in more money to improve the Down visitor and residents experience.

We will continue to support a fully accessible Downs with fully disabled access but hope 2024 ,2025 will start to see investment in sports changing room, Cafes and toilets  and a parking policy.

The Down must attract some private sector investment into facilities for the residents and Tourists.

**David Redgewell Bristol disability equities forum Trustees**

**South west transport Network.**

**Gordon Richardson Bristol disability equities forum.**

## **Statement 3**

### **Downs for People**

***Summary: While we sympathise with the Committee's financial difficulties, Downs for People is unable to agree that Bristol Zoo should continue to use the North car park after the end of this year. Such use would be unlawful, and no compelling case has been made for it. If the site cannot be restored immediately to amenity use, any profits from car parking should go directly to the Downs Committee.***

Background

1. At the Downs Committee meeting in September, *Downs for People ( DfP)* agreed to discuss extending the zoo's tenure of its North car park beyond the end of December. This is the limit set in the court order which ended our High Court challenge to zoo parking on the Downs. Robert Bourns suggested the order could be amended if we agreed.

2. Councillor O'Rourke invited us to a meeting, saying:

*"The Zoo has suggested that its current parking licence might be extended until the end of June 2025. This is so they can provide parking for the more than 400 staff and students who will continue to occupy the Clifton site until at least the end of March 2025 (the end June date is suggested to accommodate slippage in this time frame).*

*The T&F Group would like to be able to recommend this to the DC, as it would give more time to consider properly the long-term use of the NCP, as well as delivering important income to the DC and saving the costs that the DC would otherwise incur in making the NCP secure against trespass.*

*It would also be a useful service to residents, as the alternative would be a big increase in on-street parking and congestion, especially at school drop-off and collection time. “*

3. DfP representatives met Cllr O’ Rourke and Robert Bourns on 1 November. Robert Bourns said that amending the court order might be difficult. He suggested that an extension of time could instead be achieved by a 'deed under hand'. DfP asked to see an example of where this had been used in a case such as ours. If a deed proved possible, we would consider if we wished to proceed with one. In the absence of any agreement, we would expect the Downs Committee to stop allowing use of the car park for non-Downs uses on 31 December.

4. Although we have not yet seen an example of a deed under hand, we decided to consider the issues now, given 31 December is fast approaching.

Consideration

5. In reaching a decision, we have been very aware of the **need to generate income for the Downs**. Cllr O’Rourke said the zoo had offered £45k to £50k for an eighteen-month extension. This is a small proportion of total expenditure on the Downs.

6. The financial benefit cannot outweigh the **fundamental unlawfulness** of what is proposed. Parking on the Downs can only be provided for those using the Downs. A deed under hand might remove the threat of action for contempt of court from failure to follow the terms of the court order. It cannot make zoo parking lawful.

7. Apart from that, we are not convinced that the reasons given justify an extension:

- **use by higher education staff and students.** The zoo's reported suggestion that the 180-space car park is needed for higher education staff and students is hard to believe. The students come from a number of institutions and there are unlikely to be many on site at the same time. Most higher education students do not have cars. Indeed, the travel plan prepared for the zoo's last planning application for parking showed 85% of the students used 'active travel' options. The zoo gave them permits only in exceptional circumstances. Students were not allowed to use the car parks at peak times even if they paid. The zoo seems unlikely to want to pay for them to do so now. There is plenty of on-street parking on the roads nearby or on the Downs.

The zoo car park has been well-used by others since the zoo closed. It is possible that the zoo wishes to offer paid parking to all (as Michael Bothamley suggested at the last Downs Committee meeting). The zoo made substantial profits from parking when open to visitors.

- **need for more time.** Both the Downs Committee and the zoo have known since May 2021. that parking must end this year The Committee set up a Task and Finish Group on parking which produced proposals some time ago on how the car park might be

managed. Closure of the car park at the end of December (to everyone or to all but Downs users) should be straightforward. We cannot see what will be gained by delay. An extension for another eighteen months is more likely to encourage inertia. There might well be a request for a further extension at the end of that period. Parking on the grass off Ladies Mile started as a temporary measure and lasted over fifty years.

- **service to local residents.** The surrounding streets are much less congested than those around most schools in Bristol. Clifton College may have been making use of the zoo's car park for picking up and dropping off its pupils for decades. This does not justify its continuing to do so.

#### Conclusions

8. *Downs for People* has therefore decided we cannot agree to extending the zoo's use of the North car park beyond the end of this year. Ideally the site should be restored to amenity use. Any parking that remains must be clearly for Downs users only, with the profits going to the Committee.

**Downs for People**

**9 November 2023**