

Bristol City Council

Minutes of the Downs Committee

15 January 2024 at 2.00 pm



Members present:

Bristol City Councillors: Kye Dudd, Paul Goggin (Chair), Steve Smith, Christine Townsend, Andrew Varney.

Society of Merchant Venturers: Mike Bothamley (Vice-Chair), Robert Bourns, Fiona Francombe, David Freed, David Powell.

Officers present: Steve Hunt (Events Officer), Kevin Jay (Finance Manager – Growth & Regeneration), Anna Stevens (Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Biodiversity Engagement Manager), Steve Gregory (Democratic Services), Caroline Duckworth (Treasurer SMV).

1 Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions made.

2 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Philippa Hulme, Councillor Paula O'Rourke, Mark Burchfield (SMV), Bevis Watts (SMV), Jonathan James (Head of Natural and Marine Environment, Parks), Ben Skuse (Area Parks supervisor), Sharon Radnedge (Parks Commercial Manager), Harriet Shannon (City Events & Festivals Manager).

3 Declarations of interest

None declared. Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Philippa Hulme, Councillor Paula O'Rourke, Mark Burchfield (SMV), Bevis Watts (SMV), Jonathan James (Head of Natural and Marine Environment, Parks), Ben Skuse (Area Parks supervisor), Sharon Radnedge (Parks Commercial Manager), Harriet Shannon (City Events & Festivals Manager).



4 Minutes of last meeting

Resolved: That the minutes of the previous meeting on 13 November 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

Noted that the Events & Finance Sub Group had not met prior to this meeting.

7 Public Forum

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

Questions

One question was received from Robert Westlake – Friends of Downs and Avon Gorge regarding the apparent lack of action concerning the van dwelling community around the Downs. The Chair intimated that he hoped this would change for the better when the City Council returned to managing the city by committee later in the year.

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

Statement 2: Peter Weeks

Statement 3: Adam Chivers

Regarding statement 1 and comments about the van dwelling community on the Downs, the committee agreed that Bristol City Council's Gypsy, Roma & Travellers team (GRT) be approached to see if they could give professional advice about the issues raised. An invitation to be extended for the team to attend a future meeting of the Downs Committee, perhaps with an Avon & Somerset Police representative. Area Parks Supervisor to also liaise.

8 Downs Advisory Panel report



The Committee noted that since the November meeting of the Downs committee DAP had not received sufficient significant enquiries to justify convening a full meeting of the Panel. Enquiries received were often about subjects that the Panel had already discussed and reported on, in particular' anti-social behaviour associated with the caravan and van dwelling community and more recently a complaint had been lodged with the Ombudsman against Bristol City Council for the de facto over-riding planning for the encampment on the Downs based upon its permanence.

Members welcomed the work that DAP was doing and acknowledged the importance of giving DAP feedback from the Downs committee about progress on any of the recommendations that DAP had made. One way to enable this was that in future, the Committee inform DAP that any recommendations made by T&F working groups should be sent, in draft, to the DAP for comment and feedback. This was agreed.

Members also noted that the Panel was currently fielding enquiries about:

- 1 The back-to-back music events planned for later in the year and concerns raised about the impact on Neighbours and biodiversity.
- 2 The future of the North Car Park.
- 3 Remarking of downs footpaths.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

9 Downs Management Report

Noted that an update report was not available for this meeting.

1 Downs Events Report

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The Events Officers introduced the report and drew members attention to the confirmed events for 2024, as set out in paragraph 2 of the report. No events had taken place since the last Downs Committee.

There had been one complaint citing concerns about potential noise from the proposed Massive Attack concerts, due to noise from Forwards Festival reaching further last year. The complaint was received on the 6 December and was responded to on the 13 December.

RESOLVED – That the Events report be noted.

1 Downs Finance Report

1



The Committee received the Forecast report for 2023-24. The key outcome was the forecast deficit had increased by (£19k), due to a slightly higher pay award and transport related costs.

Gross income for 2023-24 was currently forecast to be in deficit by £24k, expenditure was forecast to overspend by (£141k), resulting in a net deficit of **(£165k)**, for P6 the deficit was (£146k).

Expenditure pressures were forecast to occur from out of hours working, pay awards, and higher premises costs including, buildings R&M, grounds maintenance, cleaning, and energy costs.

Income pressures were forecast to occur from changes to several income generating events and potential lower attendance. For the financial year, 2024/25, the Events Team had been working with current and new providers to improve the income position.

Expenditure also needed to be addressed given the significant overspend and it was recommended that a review of the service be implemented to mitigate the deficit and trim expenditure.

The budget for 2024/25 would remain the same as 2023-24 but this was forecast to result in a deficit of around £169k if current expenditure trends continued. Lost income from the north car park should be mitigated from new events if the anticipated fees were received in line with expectations.

If an income of £395k could be generated, it would not cover the estimated expenditure of £564k. The budget was £169k less than forecasted spending levels. Unless further income could be generated or costs significantly reduced, the shortfall would not be made up.

Expenditure pressures for employee costs, premises R&M, cleaning, and grounds maintenance were expected to continue.

Members welcomed the report and requested that further breakdown be provided in future where income and expenditure was described as 'other'.

RESOLVED – That the Forecast report for 2023-24 be noted.

1 Downs Community Engagement report

2

The Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Biodiversity Engagement Manager gave a detailed summary of activities of the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife learning and community engagement programme for December 2023.

The Project Manager gave a detailed summary of the work of the Project -



In 2023 the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife engagement and learning team's aim was 'to encourage awareness and understanding of the unique Avon Gorge and Downs and its importance for wildlife, people and local habitat.'

The focus was to understand who was engaging with the project and why, how the project was benefitting these people and how they were responding to the wildlife of the Avon Gorge and Downs.

Arising from this the project had been able to identify the main target audiences and to understand and gauge where its resources were best focused to achieve the most successful outcome for the people of Bristol.

The result was that Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife (AGDW) continues to provide free engagement sessions to primary school aged children, welcoming new schools who had not previously visited the site or the project as well as the local schools who had regularly visited in past years.

Changes have been made to many of the programmes to offer a full day option for a more in-depth engagement with the wildlife and some new programmes added which includes an option to pond-dip and learn about freshwater habitats and wildlife in conjunction with University of Bristol (UoB) Botanical Gardens.

The numbers recording system has been changed so that children attending two sessions over a single full day visit are recorded only once and not twice, as previously and the range of formal learning target audience had been increased by implementing a weekly pre-school age plus adult session from September onwards. This allows children from age two to four to learn about, engage with and develop a love of the natural world. These factors are also taken on board by their attending adult which again increases the audience.

A pilot A level curriculum day session with a geography / biology group was held in November where sampling was carried out on the Downs. The success of the day allows an offer to secondary schools and colleges the opportunity to enjoy curriculum focused field work, which leads to an increase in the range of formal learning for the target audience.

Members welcomed the report and the activities achieved to date and thanked the Project Manager for all the hard work that had gone in to the project.

RESOLVED – That the Downs Community Engagement report be noted.

1 Parking Task & Finish Group report

3

The Committee received a report from the Parking Task and Finish Group which had considered parking on roads on the Downs and the impact of the closure of the Zoo north car park and its future potential. In



conclusion the Group had made for recommendations for the Downs Committee to consider and decide upon. These were –

1. To ask the Council to apply and enforce a 3-hour parking limit on the roads around and within the Downs.
2. To pursue a long-term aspiration to close Circular Road to vehicles, other than emergency vehicles and those transporting people with disabilities and school parties, to improve the general amenity of all Downs users.
3. That the North Car Park be retained in the long-term as a car park for Downs visitation in accordance with the terms of the Court Order which settled Mrs Carter's litigation.
4. To task the Finance and Events sub-committee with negotiating and concluding a management agreement with a commercial operator for the period until the Downs Wildlife Hub is operational.

After discussion members were broadly supportive of the recommendations but were not sure about whether to pursue a 3-hour or 2-hour parking time limit or a hybrid of these to allow for public attendance when football games were taking place on the Downs. It was considered that the Council was best placed to advise on this and to amend recommendation 1 accordingly.

On being put to the vote there were in eight favour and two abstentions. Therefore, it was -

RESOLVED –

- 1. To ask the Council to apply and enforce a parking limit on the roads around and within the Downs, the Council to advise the most appropriate time limit.**
- 2. To pursue a long-term aspiration to close Circular Road to vehicles, other than emergency vehicles and those transporting people with disabilities and school parties, to improve the general amenity of all Downs users.**
- 3. That the North Car Park be retained in the long-term as a car park for Downs visitation in accordance with the terms of the Court Order which settled Mrs Carter's litigation.**
- 4. To task the Finance and Events sub-committee with negotiating and concluding a management agreement with a commercial operator for the period until the Downs Wildlife Hub is operational.**

1 Any Other Business

4



Sea Walls Toilets - regarding planning permission for the proposed development, if it remained within the existing footprint, it was understood that only change of use would need to be approved, however this would need to be further checked and confirmed.

1 Date of Next Meeting

5

Monday 11 March 2024, 2pm at City Hall.

Meeting ended at 3.35 pm

CHAIR _____

