

Statement to the Downs Committee on behalf of the climbing community

I am Chair of the South-West Area of the British Mountaineering Council, the body that represents the climbing community. We are responding to the recent report to the Down Committee "Report of the Parking Task and Finish Group 15 January 2024". We consider that this report completely overlooks the needs of 'communities of leisure', and consequently is insufficiently researched to provide a sound basis for its recommendations.

We understand from Democratic Services that this report was prepared without any input from Bristol City Council officials. It therefore seems that there is no evidential basis for the conclusions, and surely this puts these proposals at risk of challenge. We further consider that the proposals are a disproportionate response to the perceived problems.

In particular we strongly oppose the first recommendation of the T&F Group to enforce a three hour parking limit on the roads around and within the Downs. There is already a TRO in place for a five hour parking limit on the Circular Road, which climbers have operated within for many years. Three hours is not sufficient to undertake climbing safely.

There a large number of climbers in Bristol. Like birdwatchers, who are similarly impacted by this proposal, we need equipment to go climbing. We also need equipment to undertake conservation works on the cliffs of the Avon Gorge. Access from the top of the Gorge is essential for our activity. There are climbs of all grades of difficulty, and climbers select their climbs according to their abilities, but they would not feel that they could undertake their chosen route safely if they were under time pressure.

Also the aspiration to close the Circular Road to traffic is surely in contradiction to all BCC aspirations to enable greater access to Bristol's parks, particularly in respect of improving the physical and mental health of the citizens. The closure of the Circular Road can only act to deny access to those who are dependent on the car to reach their leisure opportunities, and reinforces the privileged status of those living in areas within walking distance of The Downs.

We therefore strongly urge you to consider the reservations of the Downs Advisory Panel, and set aside recommendations 1. & 2. We instead ask you to support our long-held aspiration that there should be a full and proper review of the Avon Gorge so that access for all is enhanced to the general benefit of Bristol and its visitors.

Colin Knowles 01/03/2024