

**BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL**

**DOWNS COMMITTEE**  
**29<sup>th</sup> March 2010**

**Report of:** Director of Neighbourhoods

**Title:** Clifton Camp Hill Fort

**Ward:** Clifton

**Officer Presenting Report:** Cellan Michael - Parks Estates Manager

**Contact Telephone Number:** (0117) 9639174

**RECOMMENDATION**

***That the Downs Committee endorses the proposed scheme of works to manage Clifton Camp, subject to gaining statutory approvals and the Public Information/Feedback project.***

**Summary**

The adopted Downs Management Plan includes proposals to remove trees and scrub from the Iron Age Hill Fort at Clifton Down Camp in order to restore and conserve the Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM) which English Heritage regard as 'at high risk'.

The removal of trees and scrub anywhere in the Downs has been controversial, and therefore any plan for works to protect the ancient monument, needs to be carefully communicated to the public in order that the aims and potential benefits are clear and understood.

The approach to protecting the fabric of the iron age hillfort needs to be planned very thoroughly so that the impact on wildlife and landscape is minimal. All the necessary consents are also required from English Heritage, Natural England and the Forestry Commission.

**The significant issues in the report are:**

- *The adopted Downs Management Plan includes proposals to remove all the scrub and manage the remaining trees growing on the iron age hillfort to reduce the risk of them being blown over in strong winds.*
- *Following consultation, the phasing and eventual outcome of the project needs to be agreed with the three national agencies whose consent is required before the works can proceed.*
- *It is acknowledged there is a level of public concern about the removal of scrub and trees on the Downs and the proposal below is set within the context of such concern*
- *The protection of Clifton Down Camp provides an opportunity for interpretation of the Downs' ancient history, which should have educational benefits if planned and managed effectively in partnership with English Heritage and other key stakeholders.*

## **Policy**

### **1. The policy for the management of the Downs is that enshrined with the Downs Act**

2. The Downs Committee has a custodial responsibility for Clifton Down Camp as a Scheduled Ancient Monument under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979. Inclusion in the Act gives substantial protection to any monument or structure.

3. For Scheduled Ancient Monuments specific consent from the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport is required for any works:

resulting in the demolition or destruction of the monument or any damage to it;

or, for the purpose of removing or repairing the monument or any part of it making any alterations or additions to it;

or any flooding or tipping operations on the land on which the monument stands.

It is an offence under s.28(1) of the 1979 Act to damage or destroy the monument.

## **2. Consultation**

### **Internal:**

1. Richard Ennion - Natural Environment Co-ordinator
2. Helen Hall - Nature Conservation Officer
3. Bob Jones - City Archaeologist

### **External:**

1. Rob Iles - English Heritage
2. Chris Westcott - Natural England

## **3. Context**

Proposals to protect the iron age hillfort at Clifton Down Camp were part of a wider consultation during the drafting of the Downs Management Plan. As a result of the consultation and following discussions with Natural England and English Heritage, the Downs Committee adopted the Management Plan in 2007 to include the following actions:-

7.3.3: Remove all scrub growing within the boundary of the scheduled ancient monument know as Clifton Down Camp, an Iron Age Hillfort;

7.3.4: Check the condition of all trees growing within the Iron Age Hillfort annually and maintain them to reduce the risk of them ever being blown over in strong winds.

#### **4. Proposal**

In order to deliver the management plan objectives, officers were requested by the Downs Committee to clarify what the work to protect the SAM would entail and how the public would have an opportunity to comment on the project.

Following further meetings with English Heritage and the internal consultees identified above, the proposal for the work to protect the SAM is set out below. It is worth stressing that the proposed scheme is not a 'clear felling' operation and will retain the current high canopy.

#### **5. Works Proposed**

1. The site would be divided into six management compartments
2. Undergrowth below 10cm in diameter would be cleared from two non adjacent compartments each winter, for 3 years. (i.e. Year 1-3)
3. A further 3 year programme of clearance work would be undertaken of trees up to 25-30cm in diameter. (i.e. Year 4-6)
4. The understory of tall herb/low scrub would then be coppiced on a rolling three year cycle. (year 7 onwards)

This proposal would protect the earthworks from the development of significant new root systems, whilst retaining the large trees that have already caused all the damage they are likely to. It would be appropriate habitat management and would not be detrimental to the SSSI. Finally, this work would also make the earthworks more visible than they are today, providing an opportunity for education and interpretation.

The above proposal is seen as a pragmatic solution to the balance of protecting a SAM, effective habitat management, respect of the current use and character of the site, producing an acceptable aesthetic result and providing an opportunity to enhance people's appreciation of the past.

#### **6. Public Information/Feedback**

Officers would like to run a programme of information and feedback in late spring, similar to the one conducted for the Avon Gorge Management Plan. This would include a programme of on site guided walks (supported by English Heritage), a leaflet/feedback form, explaining the work, including artists impressions of how it will look and information on the council's website. This work would be supported by the council's Consultation and E-participation Officer.

## 7 Other Options Considered

The above proposal sits between the poles of complete non-intervention and the removal of all trees from the earthworks. Neither of these are viable options for reasons already considered by the Downs Committee and which have led to the objectives set out within the Downs Management Plan

## 8 Risk Assessment

The major risks of this project are detailed below.

That the hillfort remains on the 'at risk' register of English Heritage and the Downs Committee does not deliver against its obligations for the ancient monument.

There is a risk that the public will object to the works to protect the hillfort, which impacts on the reputation of the Downs Committee and ultimately leads to members deciding not to proceed with the restoration plans. This will represent a waste of the committee's resources used for the consultation.

The action taken to mitigate these risks is:-

*The risks are mitigated by strong communications explaining the rationale behind the proposal and the benefits to the community and environment of protecting the hillfort, its habitats and important aspects of its current character. The statutory responsibilities of the Downs Committee can be fully explained to demonstrate a long term and responsible custodial role is being taken.*

## 9 Equalities Impact Assessment

*No Equalities Impact Assessment is proposed for this project.*

## 10 Legal and Resource Implications

### Legal

The Clifton and Durdham Downs ( Bristol ) Act 1861 provides that the Downs should remain as a place for the public resort and recreation of the citizens and inhabitants of Bristol, and that a committee should be appointed to manage them. The recommendations of this report are within the powers conferred by this statute.

The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979. Part 1 of the Act provides for protection of ancient monuments by way of their entry on a

schedule maintained by the Secretary of State. Once a monument is scheduled any works to it require written consent of the Secretary of State, which can be granted either unconditionally or subject to conditions. Such consent can be modified or revoked subsequently.

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Section 28E of this Act prohibits the owner or occupier of a site of special scientific interest from carrying out works to this without the written consent of Natural England, which may be subject to conditions and for a limited period. Such consent can subsequently be withdrawn or modified. Natural England must give reasons for any refusal, conditions, time limit, or withdrawal or modification, and there are rights of appeal.

The Forestry Act 1967. Section 9 of this Act requires a licence granted by the Forestry Commissioners for the felling of growing trees subject to various exceptions relating to such matters and diameter, and topping and lopping.

***Legal advice given by: Frances Horner, Senior Solicitor***

## **11 Financial:**

### **(a) Revenue**

*The five year programme of work to coppice vegetation as outlined in the proposal would be undertaken by the Downs team and would require approximately two weeks each winter.*

**(b) Capital**                      *Not Applicable*

### **Land**

The land is under the control of the Downs Committee.

### **Personnel**

**Appendices: none**

## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985**

**Background Papers:**       None