Cycling on the Downs.

**Introduction:**

It cannot be discounted that cycling as a pastime and as a preferred mode of transport is an ever growing phenomenon and accepted that cycling as a lifestyle choice should be supported and encouraged.

The obvious health, wealth and environmental gains cannot be ignored and any initiative that aspires to achieving better places and spaces to live and enjoy should of course be supported.

**Background:**

In 2008 The Government appointed Bristol as the first cycling city in the UK. Large match funded grants with a total investment package of 23 million pounds was allocated and dedicated to creating more cycling lanes, better facilities and training for children.

Of the eight CORE cities Bristol has the highest number of citizens travelling to work by bicycle. Figures supported by the 2011 Census indicate that 7.8% of us take to two wheels for our daily commute; this figure could be as high as 20% by 2020. Many thousands more enjoy recreational cycling on a regular basis.

There can be little doubt that as a means of healthy sustainable transport and a popular recreational activity cycling will continue to grow.

**Current Position:**

The Downs Committee through existing bylaw powers prohibits cycling on any part of Clifton or Durdham Downs. This applies to greensward as well as made up footpaths. There are however two exceptions with shared paths adjacent to the highway at Stoke Road and Westbury Road.

The rapid rise of cycling to commute or for leisure purposes has brought a significant increase in cycling activity on the Downs. This is despite the bylaw which over the years has been impossible to enforce. Many cyclists choose to ignore the prohibition. This has led to conflict between pedestrians taking a leisurely stroll and cyclists sharing narrow footpaths. One exception is the broad footpath that follows the Promenade, where some cyclists speeding down the slope are perceived as intimidating.

Cycle provision across the City forms part of the National Cycle Network. The result of considerable investment over several years has seen a rapid expansion of new routes. However this has not been the case in the North West of the City with only one signed cycle route. It is acknowledged that North West Bristol is poorly served in terms of cycling provision. This in part is due to logistical considerations {difficult topography] and the policy of the Downs Committee to prohibit cycling on the Downs.

In 2014 Sustrans presented a report to the Downs Committee suggesting improved cycling options for consideration. The aim of the report was to stimulate debate on a way forward for the future.

In November 2015 Downs Committee members were asked to consider options presented in a report titled Move and Place Strategy. The purpose of the report was to inform members of various options for sustainable transport around the Downs.

Essentially three options {a} {b} & {c} were offered for consideration, all of which to a greater or lesser degree will have a significant impact on the landscape characteristics of the Downs. At this stage funding for any of the proposed options had not been identified. There is also an option to do nothing.

There is a view that all three of the proposed options lean too heavily in favour of accommodating provision for cyclists and not enough consideration given to other users of the Downs.

**Summary:**

It should be recognised that the Downs is for the legitimate enjoyment for all our citizens and acknowledge that cycling is for many an enjoyable pastime and a sustainable mode of transport.

The Downs Committee do need to resolve the issue of cycling on the Downs but should act with caution to ensure that the iconic landscape of this special place is not compromised. Visitors should be able to escape frenetic urban living and enjoy the peace and tranquillity of the Downs.

Initiatives like Cycling Sunday that seek to train young people to become safer/better cyclists should be encouraged.

Temporary road closures and appropriate traffic calming measures should be explored.

Consideration for a bike hire scheme to be implemented on the Downs together with provision to improve access for people with disabilities.

The Downs Committee should be mindful that the implementation of any new scheme that is weighted in favour of cycling will lead to loss of greensward and sets a precedent for further incursion into the fabric of the Downs.