



REPORT TO DOWNS COMMITTEE HALF YEARLY WRITTEN SUMMARY JULY 2015

A yearly report will be presented to the Committee in November when questions will be welcomed.

SECTION I FOD+AG

FOD+AG (Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge) are an independent volunteer group recognised by Bristol City Council. Our group, which now has some 185 members, was formed in February 2008 in response to a City Council initiative. We have our own constitution and all legal and liability matters are covered by the City Council.

Objectives. FOD+AG is established to initiate, promote, support and conduct activities that will:

- Preserve, conserve and enhance the overall and several distinct environments within the Downs and Gorge for the benefit of all legitimate users of the area and
- Deepen users' knowledge and understanding of the history, natural history and evolving social demands of the area.

The basis of our policies is education and knowledge leading to self policing and working with other groups with similar aims.

In addition we are preparing our own position papers and policies to guide our activities, The first two are on Cycling and Social behaviour

SECTION II ACTIVITIES – since January 2015

Walks. We have co-operated with the Gorge and Downs Project in two walks for the "Five ways to health" organisation, and one as part of the Bristol walking festival, and one as part of the Portway Sunday. Other walks have been organised in association with various interest groups.

Deep Litter Collection. On the last weekend of each winter month we collect litter for two hours from the depths of scrub. This has involved 60 members and removed 45 bags of litter in the last season alone.

Dead Hedge Building. In co-operation with Mandy Leivers and the Downs team we have spent three mornings building five sections of dead hedge to direct runners clear of the meadows.

Adopt-a-thorn. Fifteen individuals have adopted 47 hawthorn trees, and over the winter have removed ivy, and cleaned the areas around the trees.

Goat monitoring. Nine members on a rota check the Goats in the Gully every weekend.

Butterfly transects. 2015 is year 6 of our monitoring of the size and diversity of the Downs' butterfly populations for UKBMS, involving a team of 8 registered

plus another 12 assistant monitors walking our 2 standard transects each week between April and October to count, identify and record all butterflies observed.

Botanic garden meadow monitoring. Since 2012 two members have monitored the plants in the experimental limestone plot in the Botanic Gardens every fortnight between March and October.

Goat enclosure plot seeding. English nature asked FOD+AG to try to improve the plant diversity on the grass plot at the top of the enclosure. A complete plant survey was done in 2014, seeds of 25 species were sown in August 2014, a few plugs were put in in March 2015. The success will be monitored and further sowings attempted.

SECTION III ACHIEVEMENTS

The conservation of the Victoria Steps. This is a project we selected for the Green Capital Year. Phase 1 of the project to reconstruct the 1880s path down the Gully has been completed with the help of The Public Rights of Way dept and funding from the Downs Committee and the Merchant Venturers Charity.

A pedestrian bridge over Bridge Valley Road. This UWE project was initiated by FOD+AG, and after a great deal of work a planning application was submitted to the Bristol City Planners. After constructive comments from the planning department further work will be carried out and the application resubmitted.

The **"Your Downs"** initiative is a collaboration between FOD+AG, the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project and the Bristol City Council Downs Team. Through the initiative we aim to widen the audience, visiting, enjoying and learning about the Downs

Publicity. Articles about the Downs are placed every month in the free magazines BS6, BS8 and BS9. 34 have been written to date.

Newsletter Produced quarterly and distributed to members.

SECTION IV THE FUTURE

To come

An up-graded web site

An App, in association with UWE

Areas of Concern e.g.

The criteria for new uses other than income

The access opportunities for all including working with other User Groups

Anti social behaviour including litter

Built environment

Over the coming months we will be looking forward some 20 to 50 years hence. At first this may seem a long time in the future but looking back the same number of years it was 1995 and 1965.

Already we have found that, in many ways, Bristol is not unique.

Jack Penrose Chair FOD+AG June 2015