

# THE DOWNS COMMITTEE

Clifton and Durdham Downs (Bristol) Act 1861

## Agenda

### 11. Public Forum (Pages 3 - 5)

To consider items of Public Forum sent to the Downs Committee. Interested parties can submit a written statement of approximately one side A4 to the Downs Committee by sending it to Democratic Services by no later than 12pm on Friday 12<sup>th</sup> November.

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## **Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge**

**November 2021**

FOD+AG welcomes the opportunity to update the Downs committee on our most recent activities and some of the events planned for the coming months.

FOD+AG remains committed to its core values to represent legitimate users of the Downs and to support the City Council and the Downs committee in the good governance of the Downs and Avon Gorge.

The Friends group wishes to thank the Downs committee for the opportunity to contribute to last months Strategic Review. We are encouraged by this initiative and remain optimistic that the opinions expressed by the various attendees will lead us to a positive outcome. We look forward to the next stage of the process.

Due to the persistence of Covid 19 infections we have regretfully decided to postpone our planned AGM. This is to reduce the risk to our members as we come up to what may be a difficult winter. To ensure we can continue to function as an organisation for the coming year the official business of FODAG will be conducted electronically. We hope to reconvene with members early in the new year.

We continue striving to increase our membership and reach out to a wider audience. In addition to our well-established quarterly Newsletter, we now offer a monthly news bulletin, we have a popular website, we are on Facebook, Instagram and on Twitter. The Downs app. commissioned by the Friends group provides a wealth of information about all aspects of the Downs and Gorge.

Our volunteers have been out and about across the Downs on regular deep litter forays. Most recently the area cleansed of deep-seated litter and rubbish was the woodland from the top of Bridge Valley Road back towards the Observatory. Further expeditions are planned for the winter.

In the coming months we plan to carry out works to the Victorian steps, the Haven and seasonal work to the planting scheme at the Thomas memorial. We

have also agreed works with the Downs supervisor to repair the 'dead hedges' along Circular Road.

## Downs for People public forum statement: request for information under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004

### I Summary

1.1 *Downs for People* is dismayed that the Downs Committee is still refusing to provide information about our High Court challenge and its earlier handling of licences for zoo parking. The public has a right to know how much of its money was squandered on an unnecessary court case and why. Councillors have a duty to be open and accountable. The Committee's incompetence and secrecy need to be examined in the current governance review.

1.2 We made a second formal request for information under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 on 8 November. If we do not receive a satisfactory reply to that, we will follow the prescribed procedures: we will seek an internal review and then, if necessary, refer the case to the Information Commissioner.

### II Background

2.1 In our public forum statement at the Committee's September meeting, we warned that we would make a formal request for information under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 if the Committee did not publish a report with its legal briefing on our court case. The Committee decided not to publish anything, so that *Downs for People* made a formal request on 27 September for the legal briefing and other information.

2.2 The Lord Mayor replied on 18 October refusing our request. He claimed that all the information we had sought was either not environmental information or did not exist. The Committee considered the matter closed.

2.3 On 8 November we wrote seeking clarification of this response. We explained that we were baffled by the suggestion that the report on the court case was not 'environmental information' given the Information Commissioner's guidance. In our view, all issues affecting the management of the Downs were environmental. We repeated most of our requests for information. We reminded the Lord Mayor that councillors on the Downs Committee were expected to adhere to the Nolan principles of openness and accountability. The Committee could not declare the matter closed unilaterally.

### III Conclusions

3.1. It is disappointing that the Downs Committee has learned nothing from our court case. It is continuing to ignore our warnings about legal requirements and to withhold information. The current review of Downs governance must lead to an end to this behaviour. Meanwhile *Downs for People* will continue to pursue its information requests.

*Downs for People, 10 November 2021*