



Report to the Downs Committee April 10th 2017

This report is to update Committee members on the most recent and planned activities of the Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge.

Statement:

FOD+AG acknowledge Bristol City Council's policy for Parks and Open Spaces becoming cost neutral by and recognise that the Downs may better placed to generate income than many other public open spaces.

FOD+AG may be able to contribute to additional income generation through grant applications, {eg Lottery funding} which could be made in association with other groups concerned with public open spaces in Bristol.

FOD+AG are willing to be involved with the private sector in securing appropriate sponsorship arrangements.

Current Activities:

FOD+AG members continue with numerous activities across the Downs.

Throughout the winter members have been busy carrying out:

- Monthly deep litter clearance operations {20 members}
- Weekend goat monitoring {six hours}
- Refurbishing dead hedges, {41 hours}
- Maintenance to the Victorian steps, {20 hours}
- Last month FOD+AG members gathered to plant three Tulip trees near Claypit Road. They replaced three Chestnut trees that had died and were purchased by FOD+AG as part of the ongoing tree replacement programme.

FOD+AG committee member Richard Bland will again be leading numerous walks around the Downs this spring and throughout the rest of the year.

Richards's insight into the flora and fauna of the Downs ensures a large and faithful following.

The FOD+AG website continues to be regularly refreshed and provides a forum for citizens and visitors to the Downs to comment on a wide range of Downs related issues.

Members may recall that at the January meeting FOD+AG reported that an application for a grant from the Neighbourhood Partnership had been frozen. This was funding required to complete the Haven restoration project and was to supply and install an information panel. I am pleased to report that the funding for the project has now been secured with a generous donation from The Redland and Cotham Amenity Society and from FOD+AG's own resources.

In February FOD+AG hosted an evening to discuss the management of scrub on the Downs. Forty members attended and we are grateful to FOD+AG committee member Martin Collins and the Downs supervisor Ben Skuse for leading the discussion.

Our members and the Education Officer Mandy Leivers met in February to agree a programme of activities and guided walks for 2017. The working group meets regularly and is known as "Your Downs" and aspires to attract diverse groups who would not normally come to the Downs. 'Your Downs' reaches out to all sections of the community across the City and gives them the opportunity to enjoy the splendour that is the Downs and Avon Gorge.

At the end of January FODAG members attended the Mayors cabinet meeting to present statements in support of the Education Officers position and to absorb the scale of the proposed cuts to services including the Parks budget.

Our members also attend the quarterly Parks Forum meetings. This group is made up of Friends Groups citywide and is an opportunity to share ideas and discuss common problems.

FOD+AG supports the Parks Forum view that a cost neutral Parks Department by 2020 is not achievable and are greatly concerned that the larger parks and estates including the Downs could be seen as cash cows expected to support smaller parks and open spaces who are without the capacity for income generation.

FOD+AG have grave concerns that the only criteria that the City Council will use; is to how much income the Downs generate with little regard for its iconic status.

It is a long held view of FOD+AG that until there is a commitment to complete financial transparency it will not be possible for the Downs Committee to plan effectively for the future governance of the Downs.

