



## Report to the Downs Committee July 3<sup>rd</sup> 2017

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

The Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge {FOD+AG} welcomes the Lord Mayor to the role of Chair of the Downs Committee and greatly looks forward to developing a favourable working relationship during what may prove to be a challenging year.

By way of brief introduction, Lord Mayor, FOD+AG has been in existence for just under ten years. We have a strong and active membership who have great affection for the Downs and wish to support and protect this special place.

As an organisation our raison d'être is to represent without bias all legitimate users of the Downs and to offer support to the Downs Committee in the governance of this important public open space.

In addition to this function we provide useful support to officers and the operational team with more practical tasks, ranging from goat monitoring, deep litter clearance, scrub management, dead hedge construction and butterfly monitoring.

We have a dedicated website, a face book page and our own Downs app.

In April FOD+AG hosted a member's social evening at the Avon Gorge Hotel. The purpose of this event was to meet our members in a convivial atmosphere and to use the opportunity to canvas our member's opinions on a wide range of Downs issues.

Much of the evening was given over to:

{a} A general discussion on the mayors proposed cost neutral budgets for all Parks by 2020.

{b} The potential impact on the Downs if required to generate significantly more income.

{c} The future management of the Downs.

Our members expressed deep concern and urged that we seek assurances from the Downs Committee that everything possible is being undertaken to protect the Downs and its future.

At the last Downs Committee meeting in April FOD+AG raised grave concerns about future income generation for the Downs. Of particular concern was whether the Downs would be expected to generate income for the rest of the city's parks and open spaces. As a volunteer organisation dedicated to the protection and preservation of the Downs we would find it difficult to support income generation without independently verified, transparent and detailed accounts.

Our members also raised concerns about travellers on the Downs, Zoo parking, more litter bins, barbecues and overnight parking on Downs roads.

In May FOD+AG were in attendance at the Redland May Fair and later this month will be at Cycle Sunday supporting an event that provides training, education and an opportunity for children of all ages to experience traffic free cycling on the Downs highways.

Last month and throughout the Summer FOD+AG volunteers in conjunction with the Avon Gorge Wildlife Project will be involved in numerous walks and talks around the Downs.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> June a party of intrepid FOD+AG volunteers clambered to the top of the Gallery above the Portway to deal with an invasive plant that tends to shade out more delicate specimens. The plant is known as Alexander's *{Smyrniium Olusatrum}* and is an annual task undertaken by volunteers.

In September FOD+AG members will be at the Peaceful Portway event. This is a regular event that is timed to follow major sporting events on the Portway. Peaceful Portway retains the necessary road closure until evening and is an opportunity to host community inspired activities and demonstrate the beauty of the Avon Gorge when it is traffic free.

At the last Downs Committee meeting FOD+AG reported that alternative funding for the Haven information panel had been sourced. FOD+AG volunteers worked closely with BCC City Design team to approve a final layout and the information panel was installed at the Haven on June 22<sup>nd</sup>

This is the final part of an important restoration project and was completed during the Havens centenary year.

FOD+AG would like to thank BCC Officers Don Norris and Sarah Tyler for their help and support with this project.

FOD+AG are also exploring with our partners how best to formally celebrate the completion of this flagship project.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> June FOD+AG members attended the quarterly Parks Forum meeting. The Forum links all our local Friends groups and works with the City Council to bring about the best possible outcomes for our parks and open spaces.

Much of the discussion at the meeting focused on future funding for Parks and to that end the Forum has launched an online petition to 'Protect our Parks' This calls upon the City Council to

withdraw the current budget plan and to work with the Forum and others to develop a realistic alternative.

After lunch FOD+AG members will be joining the open top bus tour and will be pleased to discuss any Downs related issues with members of the Committee.