

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

### **November 2017**

**Introduction:** The Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge welcomes this opportunity to update the Downs Committee on our recent activities, achievements and our proposals for the future.

FOD+AG remains committed to our Terms of Reference to fairly represent our members and all legitimate users of the Downs and whilst retaining our independence will actively support the Committee on a range of initiatives.

### **ACTIVITIES & ACHIEVMENTS.**

**FRESHERS FAIR:** At the September meeting of this Committee we reported that it was our intention to have a stand at the Fresher's Fair. This proved to be a very successful event for FOD+AG. On the day we had over 150 inquiries from new students and seven joined us for a Sunday walk.

**DEEP LITTER CLEARANCE:** At the end of September our regular winter deep litter programme recommenced. This time volunteers tackled the Granny Downs area and removed all manner of items concealed within the shrubbery. This included numerous disposable barbecues, the usual tin cans and bottles, a TV set and other assorted electronic components.

On a more positive note FOD+AG are pleased to report that the overall volume of deep seated litter appears to be reducing.

**SOCIAL EVENING:** Towards the end of September FOD+AG held a social evening at the Café Retreat. The evening, despite the inclement weather was extremely well attended and provided a convivial atmosphere for our members to mingle and to meet with the FOD+AG committee.

It was also an opportunity to canvass our members for likely candidates to stand for committee. The outcome was that three nominees have agreed to stand and if successful will go some way to improving FOD+AG's aspiration to improve its diversity.

**IVY REMOVAL:** Last month a group of FOD+AG volunteers led by Richard Bland carried out an experimental exercise to remove ivy from around forty significant specimen trees. The

Ivy although important for birds and mammals, particularly in winter was threatening to overwhelm some important trees and in some cases bringing about their collapse. A further exercise is planned for later this winter.

**PARKS FORUM:** In October FOD+AG members attended the quarterly meeting of the Forum and actively supported the petition that prompted last week's debate at full council.

**THE HAVEN:** Volunteers continue with regular cleaning duties, removing leaves and cigarette butts. The Haven remains the regular shelter for a homeless person but we ensure that our activities do not conflict with his.

**THE REVEREND URIJAH THOMAS MEMORIAL:** FOD+AG have received an inquiry from Reverend Burnett and the Elders of Redland Park United Reform Church about the Thomas Memorial which is located on the triangle at the top of Whiteladies Road. The impressive structure which is Grade 2 listed comprises a now redundant drinking fountain and a clock tower and is within the purview of the Downs Committee. The Church Committee is urging action to carry out repairs to the memorial with particular attention to the lettering before it is lost forever.

Newer members to this committee may be interested to learn that there are more than twenty listed and non listed buildings and structures around the Downs and that most of them are the responsibility of this Committee.

FOD+AG are keen to support any initiatives that seek to restore and preserve important Downs assets and have recommended that in the first instance the Church needs to contact this Committee.

**VICTORIAN STEPS:** Throughout the winter months volunteers will continue with ongoing maintenance to the restored steps. This includes minor repairs, removing fallen branches, leaves and debris and ensuring that the runoff of rainwater from Circular Road is diverted away from the steps.

**GOAT REVIEW:** In October the FOD+AG volunteers that undertake weekend welfare checks on the animals met to review our own role and to assess the overall success of the project. In conjunction with the Downs Supervisor some minor changes were agreed to further improve the service and to undertake a review and updating of the current risk assessment.

The volunteer monitors who have been involved with the goat project from the outset agreed that it had been a great success; however some concerns were expressed about the future of the scheme and whether the Downs and Avon Gorge Wildlife Group who had not met for some time were still fully committed to the project. It was agreed to contact the Group and seek reassurance that this very worthwhile project was still on course.

FOD+AG are pleased to acknowledge that the group are now planning to meet next month.

**CHRISTMAS STAR PARTY:** In December FOD+AG will be supporting the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife project and the Bristol Astronomical Society at the Downs Christmas stargazing party. The event is a wonderful opportunity to learn more about our winter constellations.

Telescopes will be available along with refreshments, stories and star related singing.

**BUTTERFLY MONITORING:** The monitoring of our local butterfly population has been a long standing FOD+AG undertaking. Aably led by Martin Collins valuable data has been collated and is fed into the national picture.

**BRIDGE OVER BRIDGE VALLEY ROAD:** FOD+AG are pleased to reaffirm support for the proposed bridge over Bridge Valley Road. Members may be aware of the recent decision by the Planning Inspectorate to overturn the Council's decision and permit the proposal to go ahead. The classical bridge when completed will provide safe passage for pedestrians and connect two parts of the Downs currently divided by fast flowing traffic.



