



Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge

January 25th 2021

Statement to the Downs Committee.

FOD+AG remains committed to preserve, conserve and enhance the overall and several distinct environments within the Downs and Gorge for the benefit of all legitimate users and to support the City Council the Downs Committee and the operational team in the good governance of the Downs and Avon Gorge.

Following City Council guidelines planned volunteer activities continue to be disrupted by the Covid-19 crisis, but despite the lockdown measures currently in place we have been able to continue with our programmed deep litter clearance. Sixteen intrepid volunteers turned out in early January to clear targeted areas. Careful organisation and stewarding allowed the work to continue within the guidelines. Disappointingly large amounts of discarded items were recovered and this is a depressing reflection on those members of the public who are careless of the Downs and the damage that they do out of sheer laziness.

Volunteers have also been able to resume regular week-end goat monitoring duties.

The Pandemic has seen the Downs at their busiest as fellow citizens flock to the wide-open spaces to enjoy exercise and fresh air. The Downs have and will continue to be a precious life-line to many and demonstrates the real value of all our precious public open-spaces.

Due to current restrictions, we have been unable to hold our traditional AGM. We have however, with the agreement of our members put into place contingency plans to ensure we can continue to operate effectively. The current FODAG committee will continue to serve for the coming year and will meet remotely until the restrictions are lifted.

In the interests of balance and for us to gain a better understanding we have approached representatives of the Downs van dwelling community. They have indicated a willingness to engage with us in on-going dialogue to explain their position. FODAG will continue to support the Downs committee and the City Council as they seek to resolve this difficult situation. The van dwellers representatives have submitted an article for our quarterly Newsletter that seeks to redress negative perception of their life-style.

Next month FODAG will be offering a Zoom lecture, our guest speaker, esteemed local photographer and author Yealand Kalfayan will be presenting an illustrated Zoom talk on 'The Butterflies of the Downs and Beyond.'

After a prolonged absence due to technical issues, we have now managed to reinstate the Downs App. This is a valuable and informative free app. that contains a wealth of information for locals and those from further afield.

Like many Bristolians FODAG were sorry to hear the news that Bristol Zoo was to leave its traditional home. We have enjoyed a close working alliance with the zoo, from organising joint events, working with the Downs Education officer, work on the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project and veterinary help with the Goat Project. We are hoping that this valuable partnership will not be compromised in the future.

Our members have asked what plans the Downs committee may have for the future of the Zoo's North Car Park once the zoo vacates the Clifton site. FODAG sees this as a prime Downs asset and perhaps a once in a lifetime golden opportunity to do something really innovative with this location.

Robert Westlake

Chair –

Friends of the Downs & Avon Gorge

