



## Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge

JULY 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.

FOD+AG would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Lord Mayor on his appointment and to welcome him to the chair of the Downs committee. The year ahead may prove to be a difficult year. The challenges are numerous as we all seek to recover from what will hopefully be the aftermath of the pandemic. As a volunteer organisation we commit to redoubling our efforts to ensure the continued preservation of our precious public open space.

Like many volunteer organisations the restrictions imposed by the pandemic has meant that many of our regular activities have had to be adapted or curtailed. However, we have not been entirely moribund during lockdown. We have managed to continue with assisting with the goat monitoring, refurbishing the dead hedges around Circular Road, deep litter clearance forays, developing our social media footprint and ongoing maintenance for the recently established bedding scheme at the Thomas Memorial. With the help of our junior volunteers, we have even managed to repaint the iconic White tree.

We are now in the process of rebuilding our extensive programme of planned events and activities with walks and talks plus a range of projects in conjunction with the Avon Gorge & Downs Biodiversity Education Manager Mandy Leivers.

The Downs have played an important part during the pandemic and continues to do so. Many citizens have turned to the Downs for physical and spiritual relief. Unprecedented numbers have flocked to the Downs to enjoy fresh air and the wide-open spaces. Disappointingly a few have abused the privilege of enjoying the Downs. The Friends group have received numerous concerned comments about litter and rubbish left by inconsiderate visitors.

Many have complained about the damage caused by indiscriminate use of portable barbecues. The resulting damage is long lasting and all too evident across the Downs.

As an organisation we have contacted local supermarkets and asked that they behave more responsibly and consider displaying signs about correct use and disposal.

We have also had numerous comments about a general and increased disregard of the Downs byelaws and in particular vehicles driving deep into the Downs to 'set up camp'

FOD+AG would support any initiatives to revisit how the Downs can be better protected and the byelaws more effectively enforced.

In the interests of better-informed representation FOD+AG has reached out to several neighbouring Society's and Associations who share our concerns and aspirations for the Downs. We have formed informal alliances to share information and support one another.

FOD+AG are pleased that the dispute with the Downs for People group has finally been resolved but remain disappointed that it needed a costly court case to bring it about. Time will tell if the financial burden resulting from defending the action brought by Downs for People will impact negatively on the Downs.

The Friends group would urge the Downs committee and the City Council to take a more holistic approach in the way that the Downs and Avon Gorge are managed going forward. Finance and income generation will be critical and it is our belief that the Downs and Gorge are eminently 'marketable' and perfectly able to sustain itself and even make a contribution to all our public open spaces.

Large events are plainly a part of the strategy but alternative visionary initiatives should be considered. Much could be achieved without compromising the conservation status of the Downs and Gorge.

Robert Westlake

Chair

FOD+AG

