



## Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge

September 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.

The Friends group welcomes the committee's announcement of the Downs Strategic and Governance Review of the Downs. The Downs faces a challenging time ahead and a rethink on how best to face those challenges would seem most timely. As a volunteer organisation set up by the Downs Committee we feel well placed to contribute to the forthcoming debate.

Following the Covid 19 restrictions imposed in 2020 we are pleased to report that we are now able to offer a range of Downs related events and activities, with more planned for the winter. Our winter projects will include, maintaining the herbaceous planting at the Thomas memorial, deep litter forays, conservation work at the iron-age fort, dead hedge renovation, goat monitoring and maintenance of the Victorian steps.

Last month FOD+AG held a Downs Open Day near the Downs café. Committee members mingled with patrons and passers by to explain the many facets of the Downs and the volunteer work of our organisation. An additional benefit to the day was that we managed to recruit several new members

FOD+AG members and neighbours to the Downs have asked that we pass on concerns about an unauthorised car meet that took place on Downs roads last month. This event was well publicised on social media sites and appears to have been an anniversary event to a similar meet organised in 2020. Reports of loud engine revving, excessive speeding, and dangerous spinning of vehicles on the greensward. Police were obliged to close off Downs roads and issue a dispersal order to those assembled. FOD+AG have written to the Police and Crime commissioner asking if there had been any previous intelligence of the meet, how it was policed on the day, if any miscreants were charged, was any

evidence gathered and what action can the police take to prevent any future occurrence. To date we have not yet received a response.

As previously reported to this committee there seems little adherence to the Downs byelaws with many choosing to disregard rules designed to protect the Downs and allow legitimate users to enjoy our precious open space in peace and a degree of safety. Without any effective enforcement during evenings and weekends we conclude that this situation is likely to deteriorate even further.

Earlier this month FODAG representatives were pleased to meet on the Downs with the Lord Mayor and Councillor Denyer to discuss possible initiatives in dealing with the subject of illegal barbecue use and the resultant damage to Downs turf. We look forward to an ongoing dialogue with the Downs committee and remain hopeful that a solution to this difficult problem can be found.

In November FOD+AG are planning to hold an AGM. This follows the cancellation of last year's event and will give our members an opportunity to raise Downs related concerns, review our five year Action Plan, elect a committee and listen to guest speakers.

Robert Westlake

Chair

FOD+AG

