



Report of the Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge.

March 21st 2022

FOD+AG welcomes the opportunity to update the Downs committee on our most recent events and some of the activities planned for the coming weeks.

We remain committed to our core values to represent fairly all legitimate users of the Downs and to support the City Council and the Downs Committee in the good governance of the Downs.

The FOD+AG committee met last month and debated the Downs committee's announcement of a Strategic Review. Our committee reconfirmed in a letter its support for the Downs committee and looks forward to fresh and innovative ideas as to how the Downs might be managed in the future.

FODA+AG volunteers continue to assist the Downs operational team with regular weekend goat monitoring. During a recent weekend duty one of our monitors accounted for all the livestock gathered together near the boundary but also noticed that one animal was in fact the wrong side of the wire fence. Appropriate action was taken, the Downs supervisor was notified and the animal encouraged back within the compound. It is likely that the goat slipped under a damaged area of the stock fence.

Downs committee members have in recent months supported FOD+AG in an initiative to eliminate damage to the Downs caused by indiscriminate use of disposable barbecues. A letter from FOD+AG asking for the sale of these units to be discontinued and countersigned by numerous supporters including the Lord Mayor has been sent to local supermarkets, their relevant head offices and to schools and universities.

In response to comments raised by our members about the poor condition of the Victorian steps FOD+AG made enquiries with Public Rights of Way to see if they could be of any help. The steps form part of a public footpath leading from Circular Road, through the goat compound and exiting at the Portway. In

2014 FOD+AG, partly supported financially by the Downs committee instigated a complete renovation of the path and steps. Over time the loose stone exacerbated by the steep incline has been in part washed away. Public Rights of Way {PROW} officers have indicated that there are plans to carry out significant improvements to Downs footpaths and to create new routes to improve access to and along the Portway. A PROW officer has agreed to a site meeting to discuss the Victorian steps and other paths.

Long serving FOD+AG committee member Martin Collins has been recognised by the Bath & Bristol Parks Foundation with an award. The financial award acknowledges Martin's service to the Downs, in particular his work coordinating the volunteer goat monitors, organising the deep litter forays and gathering important butterfly data. Martin has generously donated the award to the Downs.

Earlier this month FOD+AG volunteers set to work to smarten up the Flower beds at the top of Whiteladies road. Beds have been weeded, edged up and plants dead headed and tidied. There has been an excellent display of spring bulbs this year.

This coming weekend the final Downs deep litter exercise of the winter will be undertaken. The volunteers tackle deep seated litter from more remote areas of the Downs. The target area will be Black Rock Quarry, The Gully Quarry and The Gully Goat Enclosure. This activity regularly attracts up to 40 volunteers and has proved increasingly popular especially as it could still be undertaken during Covid restrictions.

A big thankyou and Job Well Done to FOD+AG vice chair Robin Haward and his band of doughty volunteers who completed the annual restoration and maintenance of the dead hedges located along Circular Road. This important project is done each year to guide joggers away from rare plants and protected grassland. Strong winds severely tested the structures but they stood firm against the storms, a testament to the durability of the structures and to the skill of the volunteers.

Robert Westlake.

Chairman

