



Friends of the Downs & Avon Gorge
March 11th 2024
Public Forum Statement.
Downs Committee.

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 users of the Downs and to support the City Council and the Downs Committee in the good governance of the Downs.
Friends of the Downs & Avon Gorge.

This coming weekend will see the Friends group undertake the final deep litter clearance operation of the season. The timing ensures that our activities do not disturb early nesting birds and will be confined to more open areas around the Seawalls. At the last FOD+AG committee meeting a decision was made to avoid a particular area of the Downs known as Fairyland. This area is a well known sex haunt with the problems that can sometimes be associated with this activity. In particular, significant amounts of sex litter was collected by our volunteers. The FOD+AG committee reluctantly decided that in the interim our volunteers should not be exposed to this type of detritus. In a more positive vein, FOD+AG has been in touch with the Terrence Higgins Trust with a view to seeking advice and practical assistance. We have also liaised with the Downs supervisor to see if it was possible to seek assistance from the Probation Service.

Last month we laid to rest FOD+AG founder member and Hon. President Jack Penrose. In 2007 at the behest of the Downs committee Jack and a few other like minded lovers of all things Downs set up the first FOD+AG committee.

As an organisation we would like, subject to the approval of this committee to acknowledge Jack's contribution to the Downs by planting a tree in his memory. We will liaise with the Downs supervisor as to location and species.

The Friends group and the Downs Advisory Panel {DAP} are delighted that an appointment of a Downs Commercial manager has been made. Representatives of FOD+AG and the DAP would be pleased to offer assistance with this very important role.

April sees the return of Butterfly monitoring. This allows the Downs to be divided into transects for the purpose of important data gathering which is then fed into a national database.

Also in April our popular Walk & Talk featuring the great houses of the Downs returns and in May a Wildflower Walk with renowned botanist Neil Talbot.

The FOD+AG committee discussed the recent report from the Parking Task & Finish Group and were generally supportive, however concerns about the implications of closing Circular Road at some point were raised. Comments have been forwarded to the DAP for further debate.

In order to ensure that the citizens we represent are clear about FOD+AG's position on a range of important topics our committee has agreed to prepare a series of position statements. The aim is to keep Downs users informed and assist us as an organisation to be fully transparent and to remain focused.

Towards the end of last month FOD+AG volunteers set about maintaining the flower beds at the Reverend Urijah Rees Thomas memorial fountain at the top of Whiteladies Road. This biannual activity included collecting debris from the turfed areas, pruning and tidying the plants and shrubs, some new planting and removing large amounts of leaves and weeds from the borders.

Cabinet Report - Downs committee members may well be aware of the recently circulated 51 page report about managing van dwellers on the Downs. The Cabinet report recommends the setting up of a Council led Officer Task force to discuss, review and report back to the Council at some unspecified date in the future.

This appears to be a clear case of prevarication and kicking the problem into the long grass because it's too difficult to tackle.

We have had five years to discuss and debate, we know what's needed and that's for the Council to use the powers available to them, take action and to bring about a satisfactory resolution.

On behalf of Downs users and near neighbours FOD+AG sent a public Forum Statement for consideration by the Cabinet.

It was strongly opined that the Cabinet report spent a disproportionate amount of time highlighting the plight of the homeless in Bristol and of the welfare needs of those who live in roadside encampments.

It even details support organisations for van dwellers but fails to fully acknowledge the impact of van dwelling communities on their near neighbours and the detrimental impact to the environment.

Where is the support for those long-suffering citizens and charge payers who feel disappointed and let down by those who should be protecting their rights.

Robert Westlake

Chair

FOD+AG