

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

NOVEMBER 2021

As we hasten headlong into winter and towards the end of the year it would seem an opportune time to reflect on what has been an extraordinary twelve months, much of it influenced by the longer-term effects of the Pandemic. We can only hope that the worst of it is behind us and life as we knew it will slowly return.

The Downs has played its part in helping our citizens to cope with the mental and physical challenge of surviving successive lock-downs and isolation. The wide-open spaces and fresh air have drawn many additional visitors to the Downs. The Downs supervisor has reported an estimated increase in footfall of 40%. This only emphasises the importance of all our open spaces, none more so than in the last year or so.

There is a down-side to the extra numbers, areas of precious grassland have been trampled as visitors seek to self-distance and the Downs operational team have dealt stoically with unprecedented levels of litter and discarded rubbish. Downs events have come and gone, repairs and reinstatement to the precious greensward have been undertaken and a myriad of football pitches prepared for the season. On your behalf I pass on our thanks to the Downs supervisor, Ben Skuse, and the Downs team for their continued diligence in ensuring the Downs remain Bristol's jewel in the crown.

Important Information for Members: You may have seen from the monthly news bulletin that the committee after much deliberation has decided to postpone this year's AGM. This decision was taken against the background of escalating Covid infections and we would be irresponsible in exposing our members to unnecessary risk. The safety of all our members is paramount. The committee will take all necessary actions to ensure that we meet our constitutional responsibilities and that the organisation continues to function effectively. We will ensure members are kept fully informed. The Lord Mayor confirmed that the Downs Committee would undertake a review of its strategy and governance, looking at questions like what they want to achieve for the Downs, how it should be funded

FOD + AG

Friends of the Downs + Avon Gorge

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Picking blackberries on the Downs Photo: Derek Catterall

and how the Committee should make decisions about events and developments. This will lead on to a review of how the Downs operates and interacts with the City Council and other stakeholders to achieve those aims. We have offered numerous suggestions to the Committee and we are hopeful that this will be part of an evolving process allowing FOD+AG closer contact with the Downs Committee. Your FOD+AG committee has reviewed the Action Plan that members endorsed at the 2019 AGM. The original five-year plan detailed our forthcoming priorities and the purpose of the review was to measure how we as an organisation had met those priorities. I am pleased to report that despite the negative impact of Covid many of those priorities have been met or progressed. The plan will guide us through what may be turbulent times for the Downs.

Earlier this year Caroline Baker one of our committee members decided to step back from the FOD+AG committee. Caroline played an active role in organising many FOD+AG events and on your behalf, I would like to thank Caroline for her years of dedicated service to the organisation. Whilst I am doing thankyou's, I would also like to thank you, the members, for your continued support.

Robert Westlake

Membership

We have included a FOD+AG leaflet and a joining form with this month's magazine.

Can you please pass them on to your friends or family.

We are trying to attract more people to join. We welcome both active and non-active members as increasing our membership gives us a greater voice and more accurately represents all those who care about the Downs and it's future.

Members get a regular monthly update on projects and how to join in, a regular quarterly Newsletter, and a programme of walks, talks and events.

FRIENDS OF THE GORGE & AVON GORGE 2020-2025

Challenges	What are the factors	Actions	Priority	Measures
Political	Ability to maintain our core conservation principles.	Enhance relationships with other user groups and develop new ones. eg. Natural England, National Trust, Botanic Gardens, University, etc. Liaise with other groups such as 'Downs for People' & 'Respect the Downs'.	High	Sharing of information. Agree common interests. Shared expertise. Maintain contact with other user groups.
	Limited influence on those responsible for the governance of the Downs.	Explore future working relationship with City Council, Downs Committee & Downs & Avon Gorge steering group.	High	Seek consultative status. Closer alliances as partners.
	Threats to Downs budgets to become cost neutral.	Support for new business model for Parks.	Medium	Active participation and promotion of Parks Forum to deliver new business model.
	Lack of awareness of wider political changes.	Regular communication with Downs users and wider public to update on issues affecting the Downs.	Medium	Regular bulletins to members. Information leaflets. Downs surveys. Improved use of social media.
	Promoting positive role that open spaces play in physical and mental wellbeing.	Support for national and local initiatives to raise awareness of importance of public open spaces.	Medium	Support for Parks Forum vision for public open spaces to become a statutory obligation.
Economic	Increased commercial development of the Downs.	Monitor appropriateness of any building proposals that may impact negatively on the Downs.	Long	Consider FODAG sub-group to comment on planning applications and seek consultee status. Seek members views.
	Static membership.	Initiatives to grow our membership and increase sphere of influence.	High	Seek to increase membership year on year.
	Pressure from increased event activity to generate Downs income.	Monitor event applications. Suggest alternative income streams.	Medium	Seek members views and provide feedback to Downs Committee.

ACTION PLAN 2020-2025

Challenges	What are the factors	Actions	Priority	Measures
Social	Communicating with members and wider public.	Improve social media reach. Improved engagement through public events, regular bulletins, articles to local journals.	Medium	Develop FODAG website, facebook and app. Meet & Greet Downs users on site. Publish information/ leaflets & distribute. Contact editors of local journals.
	Making the Downs more accessible to different groups i.e. people from disadvantaged backgrounds, citizens with physical or mental impairment, displaced persons and ethnic minority groups.	Continue with active support of 'Your Downs' group. Explore partnerships with other organisations.	High	Identify target groups. Contact organisations working with target groups.
	Improving young people's need to better understand their environment.	Encourage volunteer activity on a range of projects targeting young people.	Low	Work with volunteer coordinator.
	Awareness of how public open spaces impact positively upon mental and social well-being.	Include this area when researching with user groups on their experiences and include in future publications and literature.	Medium	Reinforce whenever possible the positive importance of public open spaces.
	Embracing new technology. Impact of solar & wind power.	Create subgroup to consider possibilities and alternative solutions.	Long	Form working group to look at options for future innovative solutions.
	Dark Sky status. Sustainability projects to enhance our green credentials.	Threats to dark sky from current and future developments.	Medium	Watching brief to monitor threat.
	Sustainability projects to enhance our green credentials.	Research alliances with other groups with a shared interest.	Long	Identify affiliates and develop an agreed strategy.
	Support for operational team.	Liaise with Downs supervisor to ensure best practice and coordinate volunteer activity.	Medium	Engagement with Downs supervisor & volunteer coordinator.

FRIENDS OF THE GORGE & AVON GORGE ACTION PLAN

Challenges	What are the factors	Actions	Priority	Measures
Legislative & Policy	Policies & Position papers.	Create Policy review group to develop, re-view & update FODAG policies and position papers to reflect current trends.	Medium	Subject to annual review from FODAG committee. Provide feedback to membership
	Changes to legislation that impact on the Downs and Gorge.	Support changes to legislation that enhances the visitor experience, i.e. better management of travellers, van dwellers, parking issues and bye law enforcement.	Medium	Monitor/comment keep up to date on proposed changes to legislation.
Environment	Impact on Downs ecosystems & bio-diversity from a variety of activities including parking, jogging, formal & informal sport, travellers, van dwellers and major events. Impact of climate change Impact of deteriorating air quality.	Organise surveys on a range of activities to establish scale of problem. Consult with interest groups and organisations with shared concerns.	Long	Impact surveys including professional input. Establish contact with likeminded bodies. Keep watching brief over life of Action Plan. Measure and monitor where practical.
	Cycling on the Downs, its impact and the implications of the Place & Movement study.	Publicise FODAG agreed policy for the Downs.	Medium	Seek representation on Place & Movement study. Acknowledge the popularity of cycling as a leisure and commuter activity. Feedback to members.
	Downs physical assets.	Undertake a survey of all Downs assets including fountains, monuments & structures.	Long	Carry out survey. Contact relevant BCC officer with responsibility for listed items.

The Action Plan was created to help focus the committee on the challenges we face as an organisation founded to support The Downs. It tries to give priorities as to what our immediate as well as our long term goals should be and helps the committee judge what we have managed to achieve as well as an idea of what still needs to be done. To ensure the Plan best suits the needs of FODAG we will continue to keep it under review'

FOD+AG - PRESENTATION TO DOWNS COMMITTEE

This is the presentation delivered on the 20th October. The specific questions posed by the Lord Mayor are shown in red our responses in black. It should be read in the context that our intention was to demonstrate that there were alternative ways to fund the Downs other than more and bigger events.

Q1. What criteria do you think we as a committee should consider when we make decisions about what happens on the Downs?

The criteria the committee's decision-making processes should always consider is simple. It is 'What will deliver the best possible outcome for the special environment, is it sustainable and what will be the impact on the Downs and it's users.'

Q2. How do you think the Downs should be funded? For example, this could be from general taxation, events income, rentals or anything else you can think of.

It is our contention that the Downs should be funded from a variety of sources including general taxation, however we contend that the Downs is eminently 'marketable' and this could be achieved without compromising its iconic status.

FODAG takes the pragmatic view and as an organisation we acknowledge that increasing income is crucial to ensuring that the Downs and Gorge can flourish.

The Downs is one of the few outdoor venues with the potential to generate significant income. It is a valuable asset and with careful management could yield more.

Events are important and the Downs has proved it can attract high profile events. Maybe we could consider a levy on all tickets sold on top of the licence fee. £2.00 for instance included in a £50.00 concert ticket would seem a reasonable price to pay.

If Events were more lucrative for the Downs maybe there could be fewer. Over reliance on events could be interpreted as short sighted. Alternative income streams should be considered.

There are other possibilities, maybe we should look at how similar venues are run and learn from these organisations.

Maybe consider retaining the services of a professional marketing company or ask the current owner of the Observatory Tower or the organisation behind Team Love what they would do to put the Downs on a sound financial footing.

Could we consider the dressing rooms next to Café Retreat, dank, dark, outdated and in need of critical investment? Could the whole site be demolished and redeveloped with a commercial partner to provide a revamped dual sex dressing room, state-of-the-art fitness centre, bigger café and quality public toilets, but more importantly a regular income?

The current café and separate toilet block could both be offered for additional commercial enterprise or possibly an education facility or the long-awaited visitor centre.

The provision of catering outlets for the Downs is always going to be contentious; perhaps we could be a bit more ambitious as to the type of fare on offer and consider alternative Downs locations.

There are options.

There is little provision at the Downs for people with disabilities or for the less mobile. A concession that provided for hire off-road all terrain mobility scooters would cater for this population sector.

Would there be any interest in a concession providing horse drawn carriage rides around the Downs. This could be very popular with visitors, particularly if sections of Downs roads were closed during the middle part of the day.

There are modern telescopes that relate to the viewer the history of what they are actually viewing. For example, units sited near the Observatory Tower or Sea Walls could look out across the city and up and down the Gorge whilst simultaneously providing a pre-recorded commentary. The fee can be set to best suit the location, usually one to two pounds.

Could the Downs be managed with its own Charitable Trust, and able to raise capital and seek grant funding or explore the possibility of seeking philanthropic donations, endowments or legacy gifts.

Some of what we are suggesting this evening may seem a step too far for the Downs, even fanciful. The Friends group have other ideas that

time prevents us from sharing this evening but the point is that there are alternatives. The blinkers should be thrown off and innovation embraced.

Q3. What is on your shopping list for the Downs? If you could wave a magic wand what would you like to see over the next 5-10 years?

- A cogent business plan for the Downs.
- Creation of a collaborative body or focus group to work with and sit alongside the Downs committee.
- A rethink of the events strategy.
- The completion of the Seawalls café and toilet block.
- A Downs Committee fit for purpose in the 21st century.
- An appropriate use found for the North car park that will recover lost income when the zoo departs.
- A partnering arrangement with a high-profile institution or organisation.
- The water tower complex considered as a commercial hub.
- An aspiration to regain Green Flag status.

To stand still will not be enough, we need ingenuity, ambition and the determination our antecedents demonstrated when they first acquired the Downs. We have the canvas, it is now time for some fresh and imaginative brush strokes. Thank you Lord Mayor.



PROBLEMS ON THE DOWNS

BBQs

The FOD+AG Committee wrote to local retailers pointing out the damage caused by the use of disposable barbecues on the Downs. They strongly recommended the placing of warning signs next to stacks of disposable barbecues and pointed out that it is illegal to use these barbecues anywhere on the Downs apart from the barbecue area and asking, in the interests of all, to consider discontinuing the sale of disposable barbecues.

Following a campaign led by Hannah Mitchell from Penrith, the Co-op has agreed to withdraw the sale of disposable barbecues from 130 of its shops within a one mile radius of national parks.

FOD+AG member, Maria suggests:

‘I have an idea re disposable barbecue issues. Why not find a small but particularly badly scorched area in the region opposite the water tower. Put a 1m high fence round it with a notice saying something like. ‘This is the damage caused by disposable barbecues. Please do not ruin our beautiful Downs. Use the designated barbecue area or use a heat resistant stand’. If the fence is high enough and the notice large enough people should be inquisitive enough to go up to it to see what’s going on.’

Litter Bins on the Downs

If you have been regular user of the Downs during the last twelve months you may well have noticed a significant increase in the amount of discarded rubbish and litter, especially around the litter bins and particularly early mornings before the Downs rangers have got round to completing the mammoth task of removing it all. A disproportionate number of man-hours are dedicated to the daily chore of managing rubbish and litter. Hours that could be much better spent in protecting and preserving our precious open space. To combat the problem additional bins have been located at Downs litter grot-spots, but even this extra capacity has on busy days and weekends failed to keep up with the sheer volume of discarded items. You may well have witnessed the eyesore of overflowing bins



surrounded by a mountain of discarded rubbish, none of which can be recycled, all of which goes direct to landfill.

There is a perplexing phenomenon that has baffled park keepers for many years in that a site blighted with litter tends to get exponentially worse and bins only work if they can be used. When they start to overflow, they can contribute to the litter problem. Studies show that litter leads to more litter. If a bin is full, people are more likely to dump their rubbish next to it.

At the September meeting of the Downs Committee members responded to concerns raised by Ben Skuse, the Downs supervisor, to this problem and debated solutions. Even more bins could be used but what might that achieve. It would only put us in a race to the bottom as the number of bins and the time needed to service them all would create an even bigger problem.

The chair of the Downs committee suggested asking the Council's litter wardens to see if they could help and dissuade some of our less environmentally aware citizens to act more responsibly and to back it up with spot penalty's. The proposal to remove bins was discussed and divided the committee some in favour of a short sharp shock approach.

Merchant Venturer, David Powell, supported by Peter Rilett said: 'If



there are no bins, it will encourage people to think "well I've got to do something else with my rubbish" but Councillor Clark said the amount of rubbish on the Downs was an 'absolute disgrace' and she was not 'particularly optimistic that the public would take it home with them if the bins were removed.'

FOD+AG member and City councillor Geoff Gollop, who represents Westbury-on-Trym and Henleaze, said local residents would suffer if the bins were removed. The committee instead agreed to take extra steps to persuade people to take their litter home with them, with a view to reducing bins in the future, and to ask the council to send litter wardens to the area to issue fines.

It may be of interest that two Somerset Country Parks have removed bins from their land and have stated it had helped to reduce litter by more than 80%.

Ham Hill Country Park removed their bins two years ago after experiencing problems with littering. It said by encouraging people to take their rubbish home, rangers now spent less time clearing up after visitors and it has proven to be a resounding success. Cotswold Water Park in Gloucestershire also removed bins as a pilot scheme in the summer and said it, too, had seen a steep fall in

littering. What do FODAG members think? Let us know your views and we can give feedback to the Downs Committee as they grapple with this perennial problem.
Robert Westlake

Durdham Down after Breaking Bread left

We will be looking out for the repair and re-instatement of the site in due course.

And after the Circus left, this skip was awaiting collection...



RICHARD BLAND'S FAVOURITE TREES

I had the pleasure of several walks on the Downs with Richard. I found his knowledge of the natural world astounding. Sadly he passed away in December 2018. Richard was possibly Bristol's leading naturalist and ecologist. He was an active member of several scientific and environmental societies in the city including FOD+AG, Bristol Naturalists Society and Bristol Tree Forum. Richard was a fountain of knowledge and frequently gave up his time to support and inform a wide range of projects throughout the city. He was the 'go-to-guy' for people from Bristol City Council, Avon Wildlife Trust, Forest of Avon Trust and many others when information was required on rare trees, habitats, local effects on the environment and any aspect of natural history across the South West.

In response to the City Council's aspiration to achieve Green Flag status for the Downs Richard, along with a small group of equally passionate individuals, formed the Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge. Needless to say, with considerable input from the group the award was achieved at the first attempt.

Richard's considerable contribution to the Downs over the past eleven years cannot be overstated. He conducted literally hundreds of fascinating walks and talks, had an encyclopaedic knowledge of the history of the Downs and Gorge and knew more about the Downs trees and plants than anyone.

Richard served as a FOD+AG committee member from the beginning and worked tirelessly to ensure the Downs remained as a premier destination. We have lost a true gentleman from our organisation but can take comfort that when we walk across the Downs his legacy will be all around us.

1. **Bhutan Pine** a Victorian favourite from Afghanistan and found by the Water Tower toilets. ST 5720 7494, (emerge oils banks).
2. **Silver Maple** planted c.1950, fast growing. ST 5726 7494, (achieving strain smiles).
3. **Beech** with a girth of 480cm, largest on the Downs, planted c.1850. ST 5727 7494, (guess union bend).

4. **Wild Cherry** a superb specimen, north of Clay Pit Road. ST 5736 7542, (attend mint tables).

5. **Large Leaf Lime** a girth of 480cm, probably 240 years old, and the oldest tree on the Downs. ST 5739 7539, (ranked pouch test).

6. **Black Pine** cross Westbury Road to the Black Pine, largest of the original Seven Sisters planted c.1880. ST 5716 7537, (year firms editor).



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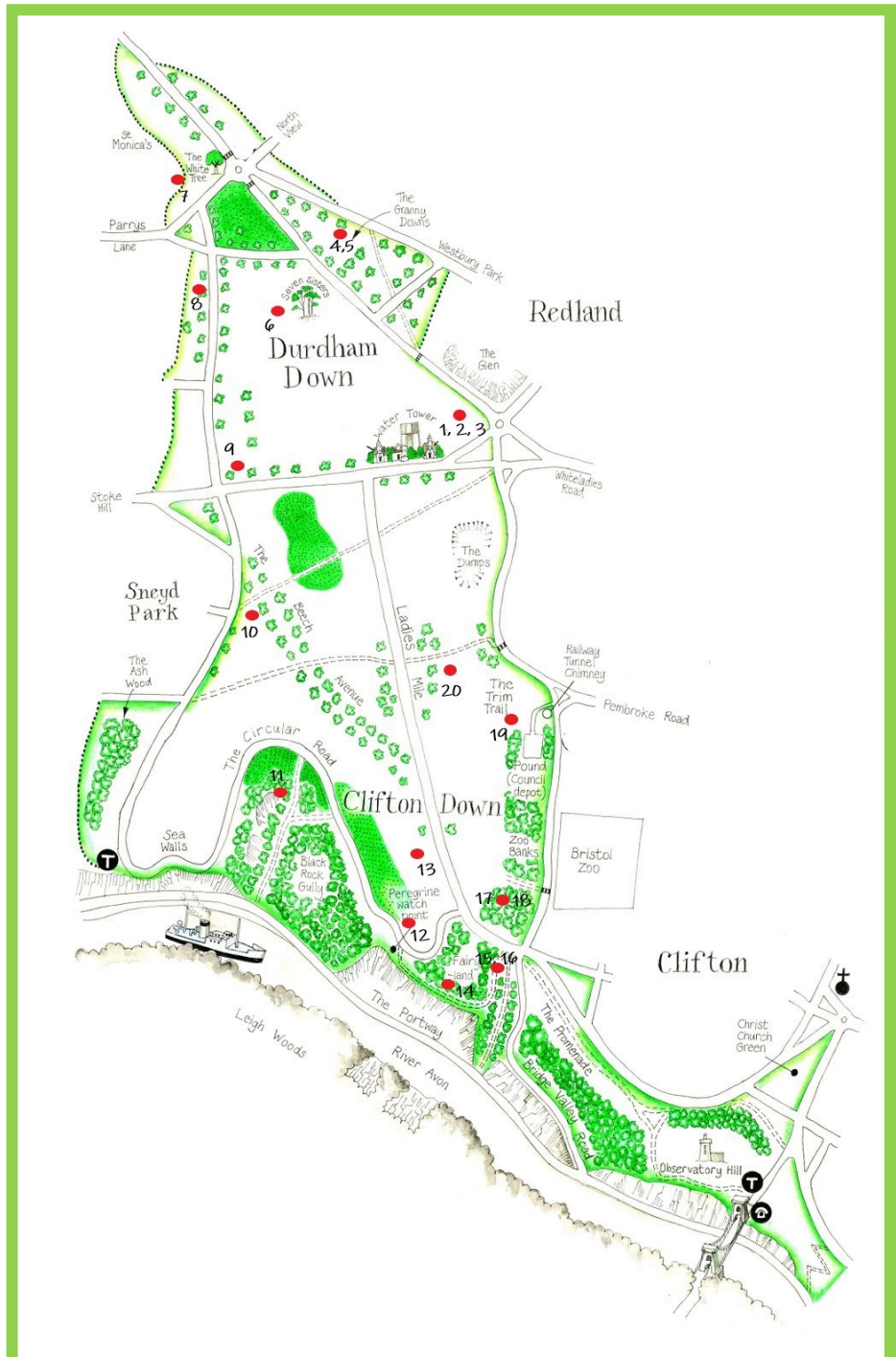
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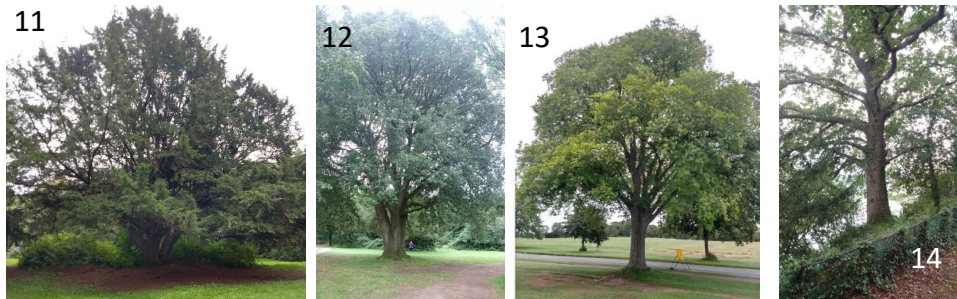
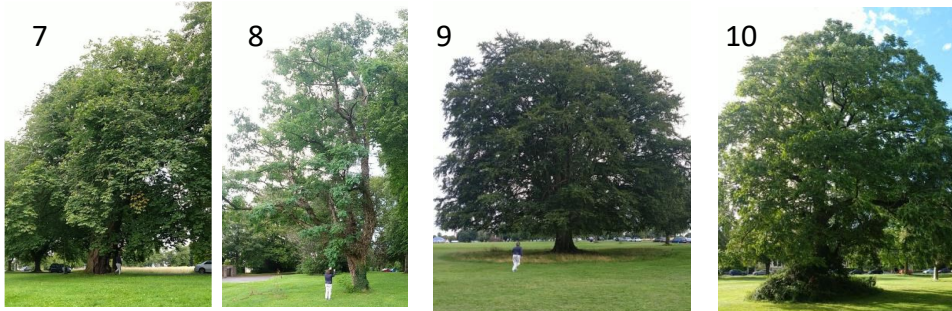
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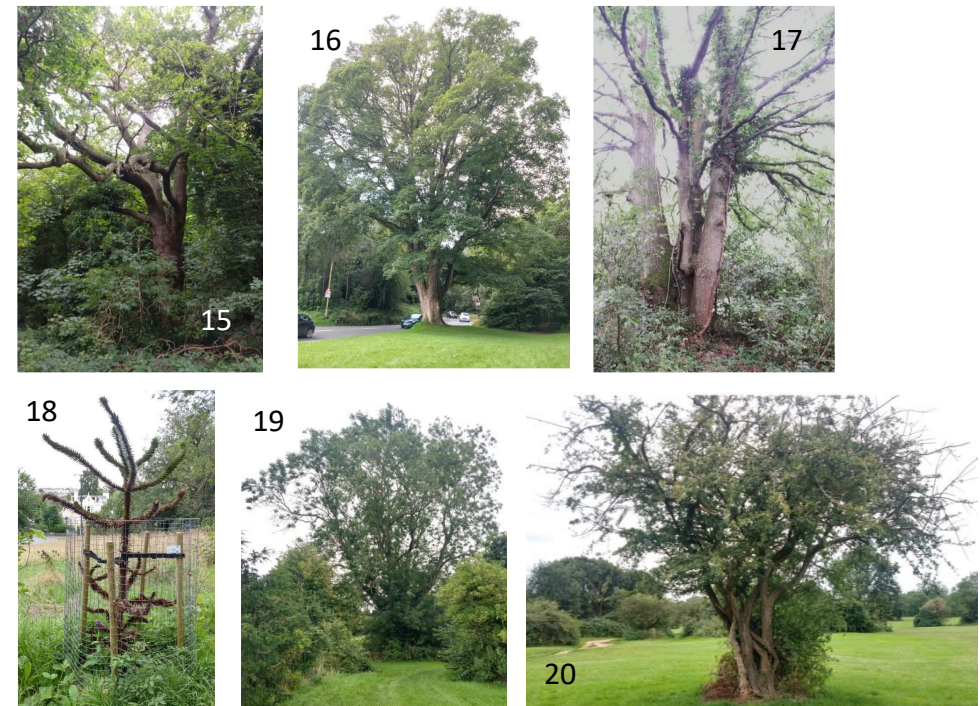
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7. **Horse Chestnut** girth 500cm, the largest tree on the Downs, but planted c.1850 on Saville Road. ST 5711 7573, (nature froth rods).
8. **Acacia** the only one on the Downs at Saville Road. ST 5685 7546, (smiles clean unrealistic).
9. **Beech**: girth 470cm, one of a line of seven Beeches planted c.1860 to define the Gloucester County cricket XI pitch, close to Stoke Road. ST 5680 7521, (fires snows just).
10. **Black Walnut** a North American tree, there were three in this avenue, close to Downleaze, one has been felled I think. ST 5660 7503. (1. barks reduce sits) (2. asking field quarrel).
11. **Yew** girth 440cm, the largest Yew I have found in Bristol at the old BBQ site. ST 5638 7447, (fats fight season).
12. **Holm Oak** girth 400cm, by the Peregrine Watch. ST 5638 7407, (exam bravo sector).
13. **Huntingdon Elm** girth 250cm, the last of the elms planted in 1880. The rest were all killed by Dutch Elm Disease. At the bottom of Ladies Mile. ST 5654 7416, (edge outer spend).
14. **Sessile Oak** unmeasurable as it is growing over the lip of the gorge, where the gorge-edge path turns on the path leading towards the Peregrine Watch. ST 5636 7389, (secure goals units).



15. **Common Oak** an almost invisible veteran oak, girth 400cm, age 150 years, close to Bridge Valley Road. ST 5652 7391, (nails charm trace).
16. **Sycamore** superb double trunk tree, c.130 years old found at the top of Bridge Valley Road). ST 5655 7391, (closet gain acid).
17. **Turkey Oak** girth 500cm, on the western edge of the Downs bank. (Lucombe Oak). ST 5655 7404, (traded globe sprint).
18. **Monkey Puzzle** girth 200cm, planted c.1920, opposite the Zoo entrance. (*deceased 2017*) ST 5669 7404, (loft custom kept).
19. **Ash** A superb veteran with a strong lean, girth 420cm. The largest tree on the Downs close to the Pound. ST 5689 7436. (torn locked goats).
20. **Hawthorn/Elder/Ivy** Intertwined Hawthorn and Elderflower trees with Ivy cut off towards the bottom. (near western crossing path on way back to Water Tower) ST 568 745. (major suffer pots). This last was added to make the 20.



The eight-figure ST Grid References should enable each tree to be found individually. For example, on the web, go to UK Grid Reference Finder and enter the ST reference, and a map of the site comes up. Alternatively, you can see details and tree locations at Trees of Bristol. The what3words address is accurate to 3 metres. To use the what3word address, download the app on to your phone, and input the 3 words using voice recognition or typing. If the result shows a location nearby it's likely that you have inputted the location information correctly. Use navigate and then compass mode to guide you to the tree!



Left: Roger Mellors and Dave and Serena Jones following the Tree Trail.

Below: Using the what3words app.

I would like to thank a few people, Chris Wallis from The Bristol Tree Forum for a detailed map and advice. (They have an excellent website).

Dave and Serena Jones for providing the

what3words locations for the trees and finally Roger Mellors for confirming that I had the right trees in the right place!

My knowledge of trees is improving slowly, (a while ago I didn't know my Elm from my Elbow... long may this learning process continue!

Derek Catterall



THE GRANNY DOWNS, double dose!

Spring into summer, as it were, 2021:

The Granny Downs is a small territory. I love small territories and if you look long enough in them, beauty will come to you.

Some of the bluebells here are hybrids but there are a few true bluebells which bend to the fluid arc. One is good enough for me: as Hopkins wrote: *I do not think I have ever seen anything more beautiful than the bluebell I have been looking at. I know the beauty of our Lord by it.* Hopkins also believed that if we look long enough at a beautiful natural thing, it looks back at us. This is not the same as mindfulness, and it really works. There comes a point when the focus seems to change to the thing looking back at us. I promise! I find it works especially well with yellow flowers. And the Granny Downs is a joy of dandelions at the moment. So is there any wildlife benefit to this kind of looking? I think so. I was looking hard and long at a white bluebell on the Granny Downs, the focus changed so it was looking at me and it was then I noticed the faint blue shade on the inside.

3rd May: as I pass, a dunnoek flips out of the bush, grabs a fallen horse chestnut blossom and a fluffy feather and dashes back into the bush. I am left wondering. I do recollect reading that starlings sometimes bring blossoms to their mates on the nest but have never seen evidence of this. Also the Granny Downs is a wonderland of blackcap song this morning.

5th May: catch brief glimpse of bluetit throwing itself back in the bush. These birds become very secretive in nesting season. Recently a friend contacted me to say she had seen something very strange, two adult birds at her feeder and one of the adults feeding the other!! What was going on? This is courtship feeding, of course, a bit like a loved one buying us lunch.

The Granny Downs is fast becoming Bristol's most gloriously fragrant arboretum with the horse chestnut trees in full bloom, the hawthorn blossom, the laburnum, the copper beech and every other glorious tree. There's also the apple and cherry blossom.

Birds flying with a purpose and much faster than usual. And they will really up their game when the swifts arrive! Come to that, where are

the swifts?? Was a time when they arrived reliably on 4th May.

14th May: couple of swifts, that's a start, and the daisies, the daisies! So many intensely red rimmed.

18th May: the buttercups shining in the sun!! Yellow is just the right colour for spring. Richard Jefferies wrote about all the different shades of yellow. I might try to make a yellows shade card one day. My favourite yellow is spring cinquefoil. A few years back, I found this on the Granny Downs but not this year. It grows elsewhere on the Downs and the late, great Colin Trapnel once observed it on the zoo banks on Christmas Day.



Yellows aconites by Clay Pit Road

Now the pink hawthorn is out, the colour of blotted lipstick! I once did a little research into which flower opened first in the morning, buttercups or daisies (like most flowers, they close petals at night to preserve the pollen). Of course, it depends on the light, but it was daisies by a few minutes. Linnaeus was fascinated by the sleep of

plants and spent many a night observing them. He was interested in what caused the motion of plants in general. I'm interested, too, in plants that stay awake all night and are pollinated by night flying moths. I must stop diverting and get back to the Granny Downs!

20th May: mad wind and today is the day the roads are confetti lined with fallen blossom. This actually happens every year but it always surprises us.

27th May: and it's boiling hot and here are two crows sunbathing, wings widespread. Later, go for another walk on Granny Downs and my goodness, it's too beautiful to be true ... it really is a heavenly part of the Downs, laburnum, pink and white hawthorn and the mellow afternoon sun.

30th May: and the buttercups and daisies are gold and silver shadows under the lime trees. Also high growing cow parsley clustering around the base of the limes and this ash. Narnia in spring-time! Crows are drinking the dew from the buttercups. It's such a pretty sight, delicate, the stems stay upright.

And now young starlings are hurtling after their parents first on the ground and now in the sky ... the parents are scarpering as fast as they can!

8th June: and a cloth of gold covering Durdham Down and part of the Granny Downs. I walk through the buttercups of the Granny Downs and my shoes are covered in golden pollen. In Ashton Court, skylarks race through buttercups to get to their nests (they always land some way away from their nests) and the birds are turned to gold too.

12th June: and plate sized blossoms of elderflower, and summer begins.

Granny Downs from gold to golden: summer into early Autumn 2021.

16th June: blackbirds singing early morning and evening. Their broods need to hear them sing and their songs seem simpler, and slower, especially the evening one. Am I being fanciful? My interest in science but my background in poetry used to make me hesitate until my brother (who did physics at Oxford) said that science is one way to describe the universe, poetry is another.

17th June: some rain last night and the song of the blackcap carries on this refreshed air. Also here's a sudden sharp lemonade burst of wren song.

Blackbirds seems to be singing all day. And in the light of this, I continue my research. Edmund Sandars who wrote the best birdbook in the world, says that blackbirds often spoil their song in June and July with a squeak at the end. I am desperate to hear this. Sandars thought this a most regrettable finale. My son thinks he has heard this incongruous squeaking.

Horse chestnuts a cathedral of baby conkers! The winds will thin them out. Also, around the horse chestnut trees, a fairy ring of baby trees where the conkers have germinated. What a miracle that such a magnificent tree should start as a conker.

Have recently solved a Granny Downs mystery. A few months ago I was perplexed to see a squirrel falling from a tree, holding a banana. I hope my comma usage is appropriate here. Where on earth, I wondered, would a squirrel get a banana?? This week, I visited a friend in Caxton Court on the Downs to see a squirrel at their kitchen window and hear how squirrels would take bananas and other fruit if the window was open.



Two photos from Jeff Hurren. Left, Comma butterfly and above, Goat's beard.

26th June: Ah, that all surpassing scent of the lime trees, those exquisite blond ringlets. This alone would make a trip to the Granny Downs worthwhile!

2nd July: The leaf cover makes the Granny Downs darker: the only blossom now is the bramble and I hope to see small copper butterfly on it.

Ah! The weather changes, black clouds, bit of thunder and suddenly the swifts are lower and butterflies leave what flowers there are and make for cover. Magic moment even if we pay for it by the hail!

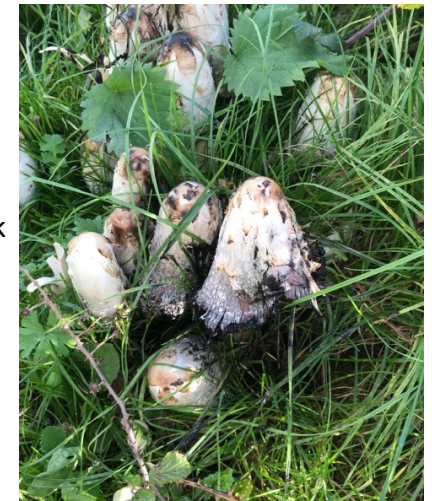
4th July: the white sheet on the ground is both daisy and white clover. White clover is said to have magical healing properties and there's so much of it here. My unique selling point is my ability to find four-leaved clovers. I will let you into my secret. Four leaved clovers usually stand just that bit higher than the others, so scan the ground and if there is not one there, move on. Also, if you find one, there will be others!

9th July: ah now look at this, a nice slop of shaggy ink cap! I resist the urge to kick it over but sometimes fungi invites this. No birds singing. How I miss that energy in the silence of my walk. And soon folk will demand to know where the small birds are and lecture me on how the large birds, especially crows and magpies have eaten them all. No one seems to believe my explanation about the moult.

Birch trees heavy laden with catkins. There are still flowers here, specifically, enchanter's nightshade (wonderful name, not so interesting flower), and herb Robert (pink, white and in between. Some of these are regarded as weeds but they look back at us as flowers.

14th July. Here I am with a magnifying glass. The blossoms of enchanter's nightshade are like pure white butterflies, a little resembling

Shaggy ink cap



the petals of the butterfly orchid. It's a member of the willowherb family. As for herb Robert, I remember our family excitement at finding the first (to us) albino plant, with yellow centres to the white flowers. We found it outside the Botanic Gardens in North Road, aided by the late great Mark Smith. It's everywhere on the Granny Downs now, and in Westbury Park, but with red centres. There are also some light pink versions of it.

17th July: goodness gracious me, I might be picking a ripe blackberry soon! Going to be a full harvest this year. Apparently 5 of them ensures our vitamin C for the day!

I'm staring at this huge horse chestnut tree. It feels like an act of worship.

25th July: some of the birch branches reach the ground. This may be another definition of summer.

I so miss the birdsong.

Geraldine Taylor



GRASSLAND AS A CLIMATE SOLUTION.

Around the world, the realities of climate change are becoming more and more stark. When the UN delegates met in Glasgow, they were considering how best to tackle this crisis, while simultaneously protecting biodiversity, which is also facing a severe threat. Grasslands may offer a unique solution. A third of all terrestrial carbon is stored in grassland soils but many are degraded. By working collectively to restore them, we can sequester carbon from the atmosphere and increase our resilience to extreme weather events. In the UK, Plantlife has been working to protect and restore species-rich grasslands, and, around the world, farmers and ranchers are working to manage their grasslands in harmony with nature.

Source: Plantlife

HISTORY OF THE DOWNS CHANGING ROOMS

The first recorded request for permanent changing facilities was in 1903 when the Bristol Rugby Combination memorialised the Downs Committee for dressing rooms. The two stumbling blocks were finance and the restriction on any building being erected on the Downs imposed by the interpretation of the Downs Act of 1861 that the space must be kept open and unenclosed. The first was eventually solved by a grant from the Parks and Open Spaces relief scheme in 1930 and the second by the Bristol Water Works Company giving land adjacent to their reservoir which had been purchased before the 1861 Act. After two years of debate involving the Kyrle Society, the Royal West of England Academy and the City Engineer, work began in March 1932 and the changing rooms appear to have been in use for the 1932 and 1933 season. Major changes occurred as a result of a joint Downs and Parks and Public Works Committees working group which recommended in July 1934 that the Downs Committee take responsibility for the actual control of games played, signing of League Tables and general supervision while the City Engineer would be responsible for marking out pitches, allocation and letting of changing rooms and storage. This was accepted with special provision for Mr Pat Lowe of High Street, Clifton, who was disabled and had for many years acted as Hon Ground Secretary to the Downs League and marked out pitches. He was to be employed for a trial period of 12 months to supervise letting of dressing rooms and allocation and marking out of pitches at £3 per week. He was a well-known local person and had special permission to drive his invalid carriage on to the Downs to watch the football on Saturday afternoons well into the 1970s. The tariff agreed was:

- Dressing Rooms per Saturday Small 4/- Large 5/- 2 teams in one room 150% of above rate. Referees and individual players 6d. Discount of 10% on annual tenancies;
- Marking out pitches Rugby 3/- Soccer with nets 6/6 without 4/- poles 1/- extra
(P Lowe charged the Downs League 6/- and 3/6 respectively)
Lacrosse 4/- Hockey with nets 4/- (1/- extra outfit) Netball cut

and marked twice per week 4/6 Tennis marking out and repairing courts 5/- per week

- Charge for storage 6/- per annum

One feature that disappeared with the new Changing Rooms was the St John's Ambulance Brigade caravan. There is a November 1922 newspaper photograph which is unfortunately too poor for reproduction and the article noted that it had dealt with 46 cases in the previous season. It was styled the 'mobile cottage hospital' and in 1924 notice was served for it to be removed as the space was required for car parking. The alternative facilities suggested by the Downs Committee were to keep a stretcher in the Gentlemen's toilets 'as in former years' which may reflect the response to a 1901 proposal for a St John's Ambulance Station. Following a petition for reinstatement of the 'Hospital Hut' it was agreed that it could be left on an agreed site for the duration of the football season. In the 1926 season it was reported that 58 cases were dealt with of which 25 went on to Bristol Royal Infirmary - no comment is made on the 20% increase in injuries over five years! A room was made available to the St John's Ambulance Brigade in the new changing rooms and their ambulance is still to be seen on the Downs when the Downs League plays. As early as 1935, the City Engineer tabled plans for extension of dressing rooms to accommodate ten extra rooms at cost of £1250, however nothing came of this before the outbreak of the Second World War. The Dressing Rooms became an ARP Gas Detection Cleansing Station in November 1939 and were used as a base for training in decontamination. Extension by adding an extra storey was ruled out in 1950 when it was suggested that premises could be built in Wesley Place and Anglesea Place. This was a resurfacing of a proposal to build changing rooms in Quarry Steps which the Bristol Playing Fields Association offered to fund in 1930. In fact the boiler house of Anglesea Place School was used as a changing room for many years and the author remembers as a small boy being puzzled how all these men could appear from a small flight of steps at the junction of Worrall Road and Anglesea Place. Other premises used were the Chapel in Wesley Place that was the base for the Durdham

Down Adult School and a number of private homes such as the Harding family of Mornington Road.

CLIFTON AND DURDHAM DOWNS: A PLACE OF PUBLIC RESORT AND RECREATION Reprinted by kind permission of Gerry Nichols



The changing rooms today

THE DOWNS IN THE NEWS

Downs for People:

Susan Carter

Follow up to the High Court challenge on Downs parking

The papers for the Downs Committee meeting on 20th September reported that the Committee had received a legal briefing on the successful High Court challenge by Downs for People (DfP). By a majority vote the Committee had concluded no further review was needed. In a statement to the Committee, DfP sought assurances that the review would be published - as Committee members had asked at the previous meeting - and that it would contain all the information we had requested earlier. The Lord Mayor (Cllr Steve Smith) said the review would not be published because it was legally privileged.

Legal privilege applies only to legal advice between lawyers and their clients and is invoked at the clients' discretion. Councillors are obliged to be open and accountable.

DfP has now made a formal request under the Environmental Information Regulation 2004 for answers to the questions we posed earlier, most of which are not covered by legal privilege. We believe the public deserves an explanation of why and how the Downs Committee and Bristol City Council squandered an estimated £420k mainly from council tax, on a hopeless legal battle that the DfP never wanted to fight.

Zoo Planning Application:

Bristol City Council Planning officers have backed plans to build 62 homes on one of Bristol Zoos car parks. Planners are recommending for approval the development of the West car park site at College Road owned by the Zoological Society. The development is described by the applicants as an 'environmentally friendly' residential scheme of mixed housing, 20% of which will be affordable. A separate application relating to the main Zoo site will be made in 2022. Not everyone is happy with these plans. Clifton and Hotwells Improvement Society spokesperson stated that 'the Bristol Zoo Gardens are too precious to be lost to housing development'. In an attempt to prevent this happening, CHIS has succeeded in having the Zoo Gardens declared a community asset. This means that the community will have the right to bid for the site if it comes up for sale in the next five years.

As near neighbours we are keen to minimise any impact on the Downs particularly with regard to additional traffic and possible parking issues. We wait with interest to see what long term plans are forthcoming for the main North car park which is owned by the Downs. Find out more at www.cliftonhotwells.org.uk

Our World Bristol

A new vision has been put forward for the site of Bristol Zoo making it a visitor attraction instead of housing.

According to Our World Bristol they plan:

'A magical garden of wonders - an oasis of learning, of global significance and international reach forged from Bristol's long established place in the world as the 'Hollywood' of natural history film-making. Making the most of the city's buoyant capacity for innovation in digital technology, its restless appetite for radical social change and its celebrated international leadership in creativity and story-telling.

Regenerating the site of the first provincial zoological garden in the world, following the 185 year old Zoo's closure, you can travel in time and space to interact in undreamt of ways with the wildest and most secret aspects of the animal kingdom and understand for the first time where humankind really sits within the complex web of Life on Earth.

Who is behind Our World Bristol?

The sponsors of Our World Bristol are:

Stephen Daldry CBE - Film Producer & Director

George Ferguson CBE - Architect and Founder, Tobacco Factory

Stuart Wood - Executive Director, boomsatsuma.

The advisers to the project are:

Prof David Bull - Vision Institute, University of Bristol; Kalpna Woolf – CEO, BeOnBoard & 91Ways; Prof Michael Depledge CBE - University of Exeter; John Grimshaw CBE – Founder, Sustrans; Pip Rush Jansen - Creative Director, Arcadia; Lorna Knapman – Founder, Love Food Festival; Sue Lipscombe – MD, Cod Steaks; Peter Lord CBE - Co-Founder, Aardman; Laura Marshall – Director, Icon Films; Tom Morris OBE - Artistic Director, Bristol Old Vic; Alastair Sawday – Founder, Sawday's Publishing; Sir Tim Smit - Co-Founder, Eden Project; David Sproston CBE - Co-founder/ Trustee of Aardman; Steve Tompkins – Director, Haworth Tompkins Architects; Clare Wilks – Director, LDA Design. People interested in the campaign can find out more at www.OurWorldBristol.com.

Gordon Young leads a Blue Plaque walk in Clifton for FOD+AG members.



Photo: Derek Catterall

COMMITTEE:

Robert Westlake (Chair), Martin Collins, Derek Catterall, Terry Hannan, Joan Gubbin, Robin Haward, Bob Bell, Tim Clarke, Barry Horton & Luke Hudson.

SECRETARY: Jac Solomons

KEY CONTACTS:

Membership: Joan Gubbin

Articles for the Newsletter: Joan Gubbin

Please Note: Deadline for submissions for the Winter edition is 10th January 2022. Articles and photographs to: fodagcontent@gmail.com

Subscriptions: £10.00 per individual or £19.00 per household per calendar year. Please ask for a standing order.

You can apply via the website: www.friendsofthedowns.org

OR

by post: The Membership Secretary, 3 Wallcroft, Durdham Park, Bristol BS6 6XJ.

SOCIAL MEDIA:

Website: <http://www.friendsofthedowns.org> The website has further information on events and a regular blog on the Downs.

Facebook: Do please join the group on Facebook, and like/share the page to spread the word. [@fodagbristol](https://www.facebook.com/fodagbristol).

Instagram: [Friends_of_the_Downs](https://www.instagram.com/friends_of_the_downs).

Downs App: This is now working again, with grateful thanks to Emily Smithson.

Events:

Colin Butcher a FOD+AG member has offered to give an illustrated talk on UK Islands, Wildlife and Volunteering. The talk covers small selections of tiny islands around the UK coast and will take place when it is safe to do so in a few months time.

