**September.**

Dear FODAG

I hope that it is OK to register a dissenting voice regarding the Zoo parking on the Downs. I am aware that this subject arouses strong feelings, mostly in opposition to the Zoo’s current arrangement for parking on, I believe, up to 45 days in the year.

I think that we can be more tolerant of this arrangement which does not significantly affect the Downs and which, I believe, brings benefits to the Downs. I have always been impressed by the efficient litter-clearing exercise that occurs at the end of each of the days when there is Zoo parking. They generally leave the whole area, including the pathway down to the Zoo and the area around the bus stop opposite the Zoo much better than when they find it at the start of each day.

I am aware that in one of the recent wet summers there was damage particularly to the entrance zone for the cars to the car parking area, but generally the environmental impact is not greatly significant. I have spoken with one of the retired Downs rangers who confirmed that any damage caused is rectified easily and paid for by Bristol Zoo. He affirmed that the Zoo staff actually leave the area in good shape at the end of the summer season.

I do not know the actual financial arrangements in place, but hopefully it is another essential source of income for the Downs and allows more visitors to the Zoo and also to the Downs itself. During the summer months, the parking visitors can witness the beauty of the meadow area along Zoo Banks and near the car parking area itself.

I do think that Bristol Zoo does have special status regarding the Downs as we both share the same environmental and conservation concerns. We have worked jointly with Bristol Zoo on projects and so I do not think that they are simply just another business that happens to be close to the Downs.

I do believe that any inspection will reveal that the area known as Zoo Banks (the area just above the Zoo, going from the Downs Depot area near the top of Pembroke Road to Fountains Hill) is actually the tidiest area of the Downs and this is due in part to the regular and diligent litter-picking carried out by staff from Bristol Zoo.

I have previously been approached by members of the Ramblers’ Organisation who asked if I could write a letter in my role as Walk Leader for the Downs Walking Group, objecting to the Zoo parking as it infringed on our ability to walk on the Downs. I was not sure whether this was a serious request or not. I saw no reason to write such a letter.

Again, I just think that we need to be more tolerant in these matters.

Kind regards,

Timothy Dowling, FODAG member and Walk Leader for Downs Walking Group