

## Friends of Troopers Hill - It's Your Neighbourhood 2012

### 1. Aims of the Project

Troopers Hill is a Local Nature Reserve of over 20 acres (6.8 hectares) of acid heath and grassland on a pennant sandstone hillside overlooking the River Avon. This wild and romantic site plays host to rare plants and wildlife while also providing local people with a space for relaxation and recreation.

Friends of Troopers Hill are a community conservation group made of primarily local residents who came together in November 2003 aiming to:

- Provide a friendly community focus for people who care about Troopers Hill.
- Carry out practical conservation work to help look after Troopers Hill.
- Organise public events such as walks and talks.
- Work with Bristol Parks (part of Bristol City Council) to make sure Troopers Hill is well looked after.

Our constitution can be seen on <http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/constitutionE.pdf>

The particular project we have undertaken for 2012 is the Stepping Forward Project to improve access to Troopers Hill. Details of this project can be seen on [www.troopers-hill.org.uk/steppingforward](http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/steppingforward).

### 2. What we have achieved

When our group was founded in December 2003 paths were disappearing under vegetation, large quantities of litter had accumulated on the site and, most importantly, the area of acid grass and heathland which had led to the site's classification as a Local Nature Reserve was steadily disappearing year by year as scrub steadily encroached on the site. The site had no park keeper and a maintenance team appeared for brief periods every 6-8 weeks.

Now the site is well managed following an annually updated 5-year management plan <http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/plan.htm> agreed by ourselves and Bristol City Council. This plan has links to the relevant sections of both the UK and Bristol Biodiversity Action Plans. The Bristol Biodiversity Action Plan is supported by various bodies including Bristol City Council, Avon Wildlife Trust, and Natural England. Regular photographic and species surveys are carried out on the site, funded by Bristol Parks and ourselves or carried out by students as part of their studies. The site has been awarded a Green Flag every year since 2007. In Bristol this has only been equalled by Clifton Downs.

Our group carries out monthly Saturday work parties and some evening ones, mainly addressing encroaching scrub and doing some litterpicking. The success of our initial activities and the award of a prestigious Green Flag to Troopers Hill led to the allocation of a Community Park Keeper (CPK) to Troopers Hill. The group works closely with the Park Keeper so he can carry out machinery based tasks while we continue with manual ones, many of which could not be done cost effectively by paid employees. e.g. manually cutting out bramble from around broom, pulling bracken amongst the heather etc. Over 50 different local people have helped at our work parties. We also sometimes lead work parties of volunteers whose employers give them a day per year for volunteering. This year a team came from the DEFRA Biodiversity team.

Planting is often inappropriate on a Local Nature Reserve but in 2006 20 of our volunteers planted 380 whips to form an 80 metre hedge of native species to preserve a boundary. This has been pruned every year by our volunteers.

We have over 300 members on our free membership list, 130 followers on Facebook, have an informative, regularly maintained website [www.troopers-hill.org.uk](http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk) and publish a quarterly newsletter which is either emailed or mainly hand-delivered by volunteers to our members.

At the end of this year we will have organised 97 free, public events since 2004, to attract local use and interest in the site. This figure excludes our monthly work parties, evening work parties and regular meetings.

We are particularly proud of having founded a new Walking for Health Group, the St George Strollers, who celebrated their 1<sup>st</sup> birthday this May after 26 walks attended by over 80 different people.

Notices of all our activities are posted on the site, with contact details and our meetings are open to all. We focus our publicity locally, encouraging people to walk, cycle or use the bus when they come to events. Events range from walks and talks to annual open air concerts, Tai Chi classes, family fun dog shows to promote responsible dog ownership, picnics with storytellers and craft workshops, quizzes and kite flying.

We work closely with Bristol Parks, are members of the Bristol Parks Forum, and are represented on the St George Neighbourhood Partnership.

Dog fouling has been a particular issue on the site. We have addressed this for several years by holding Family Fun Dog Shows encouraging responsible dog ownership. We have also raised money for additional dog bins. Together with our Community Park Keeper we give out free dog waste bags and this year, with much help from our Area Environment Officer carried out a specific campaign. All entrances displayed hard-hitting anti-dog fouling posters. Then different coloured spray paint was used to circle dog waste in "hot spots". This drew attention to the problem and enabled a comparison to be made over a two month period of the reduction in dog mess. Finally the site was visited a number of times by enforcement officers. Posters have been changed to different styles to continue to attract regular visitors' attention. The problem has been greatly reduced.

Our success over the years in raising over £50,000 for different projects was followed in November 2011 by gaining £30,000 of Big Lottery Funding via the Community Spaces programme. A year of work had been spent preparing the grant bid, including volunteers delivering 2,000 questionnaires to local homes. This grant was for our Stepping Forward Project to improve access to Troopers Hill. Work is now complete on steps, paths and drainage. A woodcarver is creating waymarking posts for the woodland using designs created from ideas generated at two "Family Walkshops" that we held on Troopers Hill. A new interpretation board is being created and an existing one refurbished.

A further £3,500 has just (July 2012) been granted from the same source to fund a schools project to create materials to support local schools visiting the site and an audio project which includes a series of 5 public walks through the year with experts talking about different aspects of the site, and recording audio for use in the trail. This work will be done during the year following the completion date of the Stepping Forward Project, October 2012.

### **3. What we are aiming for in the future**

We will continue to carry out conservation work and promote Troopers Hill, particularly via events. We aim to attract new members from the local community, particularly those interested in taking an active part in promoting and caring for Troopers Hill.

Once the projects described above are complete, it is likely we will look at remodelling the entrance at the foot of Troopers Hill using the designs that we paid for from an earlier grant. This entrance features one of our two listed structures, this one a chimney acting as a reminder of the history of the coal mining industry in this area. Part of the design includes a base for cherry pickers so that maintenance work can easily be carried out on the chimney. We would also like to have information displayed about this historic feature.