

# Britain in Bloom South West Pride in Parks Award 2023

## Troopers Hill Local Nature Reserve

Author: Susan Acton-Campbell, Chair, Friends of Troopers Hill, 30th June, 2023

Troopers Hill is a designated Local Nature Reserve in St George, east Bristol, extending over 21 acres (8.4 hectares) of acid heath and grassland on a pennant sandstone hillside overlooking the River Avon. This wild and romantic site supports rare plants and wildlife and provides local people with a space for relaxation and recreation.

This document takes the Britain in Bloom South West Parks and Open Spaces Assessment criteria and gives evidence of how those criteria are met by Troopers Hill Local Nature Reserve.

### 1. Community

In the 20 years of Friends of Troopers Hill's existence we have held around 160 events, excluding conservation work parties and Walking for Health walks. We have raised over £300,000 for works and activities on Troopers Hill. This makes the site attractive for further investment by grant funders and encourages Bristol City Council, the landowner, to use their resources to follow the Troopers Hill conservation management plan. The Friends work in close partnership with Bristol City Council.

We only undertake projects that have a high level of backing from the local community and carry out consultations using questionnaires, both paper and online, before major initiatives. The work we have been doing has been directly by the thoughts expressed in a consultation carried out in 2002 that led to the formation of Friends of Troopers Hill and supplied a community wish list for the group to follow.

A summary of the responses to the consultation and the actions taken over the following 20 years can be read [here](#). The projects undertaken ranged from raising over £90,000 for a play area, more than £60,000 for paths, protecting the site with metal estate fencing and establishing a nature conservation management plan, agreed with Bristol City Council, defining the works to be carried out by volunteers, Bristol City Council staff and contractors.

Having met all the items on that wish list that continued to have public support we carried out another survey in October-November 2022 to set new objectives. The new survey contained the same questions as the original survey, plus some new questions. The results of the survey can be read [here](#). Quoting from that report "It would seem from this survey that by continuing to provide events and working with Bristol City Council on nature conservation, litter removal, maintenance and monitoring, we will be meeting the wishes of most of those people who have replied to our survey".

The Friends usually hold 5 or 6 meetings a year, locally advertised and open to all, to discuss plans for the future and review what has been done. This year we have a mix of physical and Zoom meetings, using Zoom for the time of dark cold evenings. We also hold 3 "drop in" gazebo sessions through the year, offering chalk to budding artists to ensure we have face to face contact with people using Troopers Hill.

A free emailing list is maintained and updates sent to our followers. The Friends of Troopers Hill maintain an informative and regularly updated website [www.troopers-hill.org.uk](http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk) plus "@troopershill" Twitter and Facebook pages. There are clip frames on welcoming signs at the Hill's entrances that are used to share news and promote forthcoming events and activities. This year we were delighted to start publishing a paper newsletter "Super Trooper" inspired by some local children who produced their own newsletter. This has been another way of engaging people's interest, particularly at public events and via local business venues. Our 2<sup>nd</sup> issue was published on Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> July, see [www.troopers-hill.org.uk/newsletter.htm](http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/newsletter.htm)

A record of all volunteer nature conservation work parties on Troopers Hill is maintained on [www.troopers-hill.org.uk/workp.htm](http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/workp.htm) and links are posted on Facebook and Twitter. Two to three work parties are held per month. Work parties are another opportunity for sharing news and feedback on possible plans.

Funding has been found to pay for ParkWork <http://www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/parkwork/> to carry out conservation work on Troopers Hill for up to ½ a day a month. This scheme provides training and skills development for those people needing additional support to secure permanent employment. Volunteers from the general public can also come to these sessions. Recently we have worked with ParkWork restoring steps in the adjacent woodland.

Our free events are made as varied as possible to appeal to many tastes while always carrying the message of the importance of the site and the need to care for it. This year we have run walks covering lichen, history and birds. Sadly our astronomy event had to be cancelled due to the weather but the Bristol Astronomical Society will be with us taking and sharing solar observations with the public at our family-focused Bugs and Beasties event in August. July will feature our first sensory walk led by someone with a visual impairment and we are planning a fungi walk for autumn. Details of future and records of all our previous events can be accessed via <http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/events.htm>.

Since the play area that we raised £80,000 to create was opened in October 2016 on Troopers Hill Field, we have seen larger numbers of families, particularly with young children, visiting the Hill. In addition to the young boys that were already seen on the Hill we now have visits from more girls. This became even more popular during the pandemic.

The Bristol Astronomical Society (BAS) supported the site to receive a "Dark Sky Discovery Site" designation [www.troopers-hill.org.uk/DarkSky/](http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/DarkSky/) meaning that this is a good place to visit for star and planet watching, relatively protected from light pollution and with a good horizon. BAS work with us providing an annual winter star gazing event and a solar observation session in August. Sadly weather conditions were not good enough for a star gazing session to be provided this year but we are looking forward to a solar observation session in August.

We are particularly proud of our audio trail, put together by our volunteer Kit Elliott, a professional cameraman and sound recordist, which makes Troopers Hill come alive even to those who cannot visit it or see it.

The accessibility of Troopers Hill, by virtue of its rugged nature, is limited but is to the level approved of by the Bristol Physical Access Chain, a local group who assess accessibility. We were

delighted to follow their suggestions to improve and add to signage along the wheelchair accessible route. Recently, following an initiative from the charity, Your Park – Bristol and Bath, we completed and had reviewed an accessibility guide to the site so that anyone planning a visit can see what is there and whether it will meet their needs and interests. This can be read on <http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/visiting/index.htm#access>.

Details of all Troopers Hill trails, which also include a tree trail and a woodland trail, can be downloaded via [www.troopers-hill.org.uk/trails](http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/trails).

We have supported the national “Future Proofing Parks” project involving young people in green spaces. As a result of the “Young Rangers” <http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/young.htm> initiative we have an Instagram account and ran a successful art competition as well as having welcome assistance at our work parties. Two of the “Young Rangers” are now at university, one is on our committee and both attend our work parties when they are back in Bristol.

Local schools used Troopers Hill Local Nature Reserve as a learning resource, from the youngest (Summerhill Infant School) to 6<sup>th</sup> formers; most recently we hosted an extremely successful visit on Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> June from 4 secondary schools of the Olympus Olympic trust. We received very positive feedback from the lead teacher (see photos at the end of this note). Undergraduates and postgraduates from Bristol University and the University of the West of England also use the site for their research.

Our group has been awarded a level of "Outstanding" in the RHS "It's Your Neighbourhood" scheme for the years 2012-22. A summary of our aims and achievements on Troopers, produced for the IYN judge can be read on [www.troopers-hill.org.uk/iyn](http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/iyn)

## **2. Maintenance and Development**

All work on Troopers Hill follows the new 10-year management plan, dating from 2019 [www.troopers-hill.org.uk/plan.htm](http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/plan.htm) developed for the site by Wessex Ecological Consultancy with input from Bristol City Council in partnership and Friends of Troopers Hill. This plan links to the relevant sections of the UK and Bristol Biodiversity Action Plans. The latter is supported by bodies including Bristol City Council, Avon Wildlife Trust and Natural England. Regular photographic and species surveys are funded by Bristol Parks and ourselves, and/or are performed by students as part of their studies. The site achieved Green Flag status each year from 2007/8 to 2013/14 when Bristol City Council stopped applying as they had no staff resource to support the process.

In accordance with the Management Plan maintenance of the site aims to balance the use of the site for recreation while protecting its natural beauty and its diversity. For example, while vegetation is cut back from paths to keep them clear this is not carried out too vigorously and it is accepted that occasionally visitors may have to brush past taller vegetation. There is no set interval for cutting path edges; it is done when needed. The aim is for the site to be accessible but to look natural.

Some visible evidence of the success of our work was a visit for some months from October last year through to March this year, of a male Dartford warbler, which attracted bird enthusiasts from a wide area. 84 species of bee have been found on this site, the latest, the Variable nomad bee

(*Nomada zonata*) this spring. This bee has only been recorded in this country since 2016 and only just over 100 recorded sightings have been recorded via the National Biodiversity Network. It was the first record for Bristol. One of the news items about this find can be read [here](#).

Our most recent invertebrates survey, carried out by entomologist, David Gibbs, gave a very healthy result with a good range of species for such an urban site including a moth, *Dasystoma salicella*, that has not been recorded in this country for over 10 years.

The role of Community Park Keeper disappeared within Bristol City Council towards the end of 2014. The Friends of Troopers Hill have worked closely with the Parks team to ensure that good quality maintenance has continued, following the Site Management Plan, under the new structure. We are extremely pleased with the provision of resource in these difficult times but we are concerned about issues such as an ageing work force and continual budget cuts.

In winter, at the start of 2021 year, we were able to pay for areas of gorse, scrub and broom to be cut back in priority areas, thanks to our Heritage Fund grant and our own funds. In August 2022 we were awarded £5,000 from the BCC Climate and Ecological Emergency Community Grant which has enabled us to pay for more conservation work. This was done in the winter of 2022/23 and we have some remaining grant money and donations to do more work in the winter 2023/24.

We were delighted to hear last week that Bristol City Council (BCC) had succeeded in attracting stewardship funding. BCC's Conservation Officer is now in conversation with Natural England and Forestry England on how best that funding can be applied across Bristol. In terms of Troopers Hill it could be applied in the following areas:

- Heather management
- Ensure bare ground comprises 1%-10% of the area
- Maintain tree and scrub cover below 15%
- Managing gorse to achieve a range of ages
- Manage bracken to a level of less than 10% of the area.

We met with the conservation officer last week to discuss this and look forward reporting on this at next year's Pride in Parks assessment.

### **3. Environment**

Litter and dog waste bins on the site are emptied twice weekly by the Parks staff. All entrances have a dog waste bin. Much litter is picked up by visitors to the Hill, particularly dog walkers. Other litter picking is done by Parks staff and the Friends. Cuttings from work parties are concealed to compost at a location onsite. We have continued our relationship with a group called Street Goat who have a milking parlour and shed for a small number of goats in the allotments next door to our site. Goats love most of the cuttings we create so Street Goat members have helped on a small number of our work parties and taken cuttings to feed the goats.

Graffiti is addressed promptly but is rare. Police are advised. The Friends have graffiti removal spray provided by the Parks Department so we do not have to wait for Council staff to attend if it is a simple task. Where it is more complex we use Bristol City Council's online graffiti reporting system where usually graffiti is removed within 3 working days. A particular challenging crime was committed on the Grade II listed chimney at the top of Troopers Hill in December 2022. We worked closely with Bristol City Council, who dealt with the extremely expensive process of working with Historic England and specialist contractors to make good the damage. We worked to make the

reporting of this issue as positive as possible, emphasising the excellent work done by Bristol City Council rather than focusing on the negative aspects of the crime. One local news story about the crime is [here](#) and there is more on [www.troopers-hill.org.uk/Chimneys](http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/Chimneys)

As a Local Nature Reserve the amount of "furniture"/clutter has to be limited to be in keeping with the site, a view supported by local people. There are welcoming signs on every entrance and a number of interpretation boards. Up to date leaflets on the history, geology, wildlife and events of the site are available in paper and electronic form. Seats are available at the top of each section of steep path. In June of this year a very old memorial bench was nearing the end of its life and was replaced, with the consent of the family who sponsored the old bench, with a new bench, sponsored by another family.

Simple informative signs are at every entrance explaining Bristol Parks Byelaws. We are very pleased that, thanks to our reports of the impact of fires, Troopers Hill Local Nature Reserve is the only council-owned green space in Bristol where barbecues are completely banned. The message does seem to be working and we explain why on our website <http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/visiting/NoBBQs.htm>

In common with most green spaces dog fouling and dog control are issues. We encourage good owner behaviour through signage, Facebook and Twitter postings. We have worked with Bristol City Council's Dog Warden. Both issues do seem to be improving. More on [www.troopers-hill.org.uk/clearUp/](http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/clearUp/).

#### **4. Areas for development listed in last year's judging**

In the areas for development raised in last year's judging expressed concern that the current nature conservation management plan was coming to the end of its term. There appears to have been some confusion. The current management plan lasts for 10 years and was agreed in 2019. It is reviewed on a regular basis and is a living document.

The only other area of concern was over-use of the site would lead to a negative impact on the ecological balance. While footfall has been higher, particularly since the pandemic many people keep to paths and while some desire lines have been created, as a proportion of the whole site this has been minimal. We will continue to work to have well-maintained paths and steps to encourage their use. The lack of parking near the site is a valuable aid in restricting the number of visitors. We avoid publicising those videos made of the site where activities lead to additional wear, such as mountain biking.



## ASSESSMENT CRITERIA PHOTOS

### COMMUNITY – who comes to Troopers Hill?

#### Dog Walkers



#### Schools

**28/6/2023 – a thank you from a teacher leading a school visit – TH=Troopers Hill**

“Thank you so much for today, honestly the feedback from the students was wonderful!

Four of them were on a biology trip yesterday doing similar activities in a coastal ecosystem and they told me they enjoyed today so much more! They learned so much. Secretly this made me a little smug but I think the biology teachers in our 4 secondaries probably should get in on the TH action! :-)

We will certainly be back and I’ll share the proposed dates early to ensure you can provide the wonderful input again. The students were talking about organising a bake sale in the autumn to raise some funds for TH and I feel this is long overdue for all you have done for us.

Thanks again, honestly your knowledge is amazing! I learn every time :-)





**Families, entomologists (young & old), star gazers, health walks & more**





## MAINTENANCE & DEVELOPMENT - Troopers Hill Wildlife

**Dasystoma salicella, a moth unrecorded in this country for over 10 years, presumed extinct, photographed on Troopers Hill by David Gibbs in April 2019**



**Lichen and fungi to be found on Troopers Hill - we are prouder of our waxcaps but the fly agaric does make a striking image**



**Plus the odd reptile - a common lizard that supervised a work party**



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### **Rare Nomad Bee recorded in Bristol for the first time ever**

WEST COUNTRY | BEES | BRISTOL | NATURE | Monday 15 May 2023 at 3:13pm



*Nomad Bee recorded in Bristol for the first time ever  
Credit: Susan Acton Campbell*



## Nature Conservation Work Parties - Advertised online and with local posters

We also host work parties supported by corporate and other groups

[www.troopers-hill.org.uk/workp](http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/workp)

### Thursday 22nd June 2023

More work in the area around Sally's Glade, in an area we could get to easily without tramping down to much grass etc.



2019 Management Plan Work Plan activities for this work party (ref no. indicates compartment)

5.2 Clear all, scrub, tree saplings, seedlings and most broom

### Thursday 25th May 2023

As we are unable to work in areas of scrub or thick bramble in the bird nesting season we focus on small saplings and check carefully that there are no nests in the area.

Today we worked in the area near where the duct to the chimney leaves the path.



6.3 Keep woodland 3-4 metres from path edges

6.4 Clear all patches of scrub and tree saplings in grassland not addressed by 6.1-6.3

### Saturday 20th May 2023

A small group continued the work clearing saplings and seedlings.

2.1 Clear all tree saplings and seedlings

13.2 Remove saplings, retain rowan

### Monday 8th May 2023

A planned session today was cancelled due forecast morning rain, though it actually stopped before 10am the ground would have been very wet.

### Saturday 29th April 2023

A warmer morning than recently saw us clearing saplings and seedlings from the grassland between the northern edge of the gully and the path from the top of the Hill to Greendown, this is compartment 2 in the 2019 Management Plan.

Many of these had regrown after being cut in previous years. We left a rowan tree at the edge of the gully in accordance with the management plan (compartment 13).





# ENVIRONMENT

## Litter free and appropriate interpretation



**A new path and an extra information board (geology) and since this photo was taken**



## Mining Coal and Mining Bees



**Troopers Hill** has long been at the heart of the local community. In past centuries, miners carved out a living from its rock and coal. Today, it is a much loved Local Nature Reserve with local people actively involved in helping to look after it.

**Lumps, bumps and dramatic drops**

Troopers Hill has been mined, quarried, dug, and drilled in the search for coal, sandstone and fire clay. All this activity has left us with the dramatically shaped landscape you see here today.

**A sooty smokestack**

The chimney reminds us of what a busy industrial place this once was. It is thought to have been used by a copper smelting works near the river Avon in the late 1700s.

**Welcome to Troopers Hill Local Nature Reserve**



**Key**

- You are here
- Paths
- Wheelchair accessible path
- ⊙ Entrances with dog bins
- ⊙ View points with benches
- Trail markers

**Mining bees**

Tiny mineshfts tunnelled by rare mining bees pepper the bare earth and sparse grassy areas. Keep an eye out for these unusual inhabitants as they disappear into their underground homes.

**Getting around**

We hope you enjoy exploring Troopers Hill today. Watch out for steep drops and please take your litter home with you. Dogs are welcome, but please remember to clean up after your dog.

**Find out more**

Please contact:  
 Bristol Parks [www.bristol.gov.uk/parks](http://www.bristol.gov.uk/parks)  
 T: 0117 922 3719  
 Friends of Troopers Hill  
[www.troopers-hill.org.uk](http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk)  
 Download an Audio Tour of Troopers Hill from [www.troopers-hill.org.uk/audio](http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/audio)



**A blaze of colour**

The hill is a blaze of colour in the summer months. Enjoy the carpets of purple heather and brilliant yellow flowers of the broom and gorse. An amazing twenty types of butterfly have been spotted here. Look out for common blues and marbled whites flitting about on sunny days.



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**A fascinating mix of history and wildlife on your doorstep**


