

## Friends of Troopers Hill - It's Your Neighbourhood 2015

### **1. Aims of the Project**

Troopers Hill is a Local Nature Reserve 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. Friends of Troopers Hill is a community conservation group of primarily local residents, formed in December 2003 to:

- provide a friendly community focus for people who care about Troopers Hill
- undertake practical conservation tasks
- organise public events, including walks and talks
- work with Bristol City Council Parks department to ensure Troopers Hill is properly managed.

Our constitution is at <http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/constitutionE.pdf>

### **2. Achievements since the IYN judging of 2014**

In addition to our usual activities (see section 3), we have:

- 1) Worked with 2 other "Friends" groups to apply for funding to support a number of events and create a joint leaflet of activities in our 3 green spaces.
- 2) Used funding from St George West Community First to hold a free falconry display, highlighting the position of raptors in the food chain. This was very well attended by the local community including many children. Some wonderful photos were submitted to our photography competition. Our comments book was full of praise.
- 3) Hosted a work party of 17 from Lloyds Bank for "Day to Make a Difference" cutting back scrub, maintaining paths and maintaining log seating in the adjacent Troopers Hill Field.
- 4) Arranged for offenders working their community service hours under the Community Payback scheme to come to Troopers Hill to carry out work to control the spread of broom and gorse.
- 5) been granted funding so we can out another audit of the dog fouling problem on Troopers Hill, followed by holding a Family Fun Dog show in October to encourage responsible dog ownership and then following this with another audit to see if behaviour has improved. More information on [www.troopers-hill.org.uk/cleanup](http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/cleanup).
- 6) been delighted for Troopers Hill to receive national recognition in David Goode's book "Nature in Towns and Cities", part of the New Naturalist Series, where he described Troopers Hill as an example of a Local Nature Reserve that is there for the community as well as being important for nature conservation.
- 7) welcomed another visit from geography students from Bridgwater College. Troopers Hill features in a Geography 'A' level textbook they use.
- 8) given a talk and Powerpoint show to Summerhill Academy year 3 children to support the visit they had taken with teachers to Troopers Hill to learn more of its history, geology and ecology.
- 9) Supported local parents with their desire for a play area in Troopers Hill Field. Friends of Troopers Hill and the parents have carried out a survey to prove a play area is wanted followed by a design consultation. A design brief is being written. Grants will be sought to complete this project which is expected to cost of the order of £75,000.

### **3. What we have achieved since we started**

In December 2003 paths were obscured under vegetation, large quantities of litter had accumulated, and, most importantly, scrub was invading the acid grass and heathland that justifies the Local Nature Reserve classification. Maintenance visits took place only for brief periods every 6-8 weeks.

Now the site is well managed according to an annually updated 5-year management plan <http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/plan.htm> agreed with Bristol City Council. 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.

The site has achieved Green Flag status each year from 2007/8 to 2013/14. Bristol City Council no longer has staff resource to support the process so in 2014 we entered the Britain in Bloom South West Parks and Open Spaces scheme and received a gold award.

We organise monthly Saturday work parties and some Sunday ones, mainly addressing encroaching scrub and litter picking. Bristol City Council undertake machine-based maintenance, while Friends of Troopers Hill continue with manual tasks that would not otherwise be practicable, e.g. removing brambles growing in and around broom plants, and pulling out bracken amongst the heather, etc. Over 50 different local people have volunteered at our work parties.

In 2006, to preserve a boundary, 20 volunteers planted an 80-metre hedge of native species. Local residents were consulted about hedge management: the majority favoured cutting over hedge-laying. Volunteers hand-pruned the hedge annually until December 2012 when it was sufficiently mature for an annual flail cut by Bristol City Council.

We have 526 members on our free membership list, 602 Facebook 'friends' and 484 Twitter followers. We maintain an informative and regularly updated web site [www.troopers-hill.org.uk](http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk) and publish a quarterly newsletter which is, for the most part, either e-mailed or hand-delivered to recipients. The website is often a first point of contact for students seeking further information about Troopers Hill. Notices and details of all the activities are posted on the site. Our meetings are open to all. We focus our publicity locally, encouraging people to walk, cycle or use the bus.

We are proud to have founded a Walking for Health group, the St George Strollers, which celebrated its 4th anniversary in May 2014. The Strollers celebrated their 100<sup>th</sup> walk on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> July. More than 110 people have attended these walks.

In addition to work parties and regular meetings, we have organised over 120 free public events since 2004, including guided nature, history and geology walks, concerts, dog shows, tai chi classes, star gazing and craft activities for children and families.

Since 2003 Friends of Troopers Hill have raised over £100,000 for different projects. We work closely with Bristol Parks, are members of the Bristol Parks Forum, and are represented on the St George Neighbourhood Partnership.

Troopers Hill is a venue for educational visits by primary school and 'A' level pupils. The site provides study material for University undergraduates, Ph D students and this year was used for collecting bees for a DEFRA/Natural History Museum project. As a result 4 species of bees new to Troopers Hill were identified bring our total of bee species to 75.

***In July, 2015, David Notton, Senior Curator (Hymenoptera) for London's Natural History Museum wrote, "it was great to visit a site which is so obviously valued and actively conserved".***

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

We will continue with conservation work and promoting Troopers Hill, particularly via events. We aim to attract new members from the local community who will contribute to the care and promotion of the Local Nature Reserve. Better dog control and reducing dog fouling will remain a priority.

Next year we shall seek funding to remodel the entrance at the foot of Troopers Hill using designs already funded by an earlier grant. A listed historic chimney stands at the entrance, representing the local coal-mining heritage. The plans include a base for cherry-pickers for chimney maintenance. An existing interpretation board contains details of the historic structure. We also need to replace the deteriorating wooden fencing to continue to keep out motorcycles.

We predict that resource cuts to Bristol Parks staffing and services, that have already started, will present a challenge for the years ahead.