



NOTE OF MEETING

Thursday, 13th October, 2022 7.15pm

Online Zoom Meeting

Present: Susan, Rob, Rod, Margaret, Freya, Elaine, Rosie, Fabian
Apologies: Adam, Stephanie, Richard

1. Approve July minutes

The July minutes were approved.

2. Projects

- **Conservation work fundraiser/grant - gloves**– In August, Susan received the good news that we had been successful in our application for £5000 from the Bristol City Council Climate and Ecological Emergency Community Grant Fund, to be used over the next two winters for conservation work on Troopers Hill. We hope to use a company we have worked with before, to limit the spread of gorse. Susan has already spent £60 of the grant on new gloves. In the grant application, we said that we would also spend £500 of our own money. The fundraiser on Go Fund Me has already raised over £250, including a donation of £50 from one individual this week, and we will continue to encourage donations.
- **Public Art** – The meeting with Bricks to discuss this further has not yet taken place, due to Covid and holidays but Rob hopes it will have taken place before the next meeting.
- **More trees and a bench on Troopers Hill Field**– Susan asked for people's opinion about having more trees and another bench on Troopers Hill Field. Susan has already spoken to the Council's Tree Officer, who she met by chance on the hill, about the possibility of having a couple more Scots Pine trees to add to the one already there. Rod asked where a new bench could be placed. Rob suggested a good place would be along the new stretch of path, near the turning circle, away from the houses. More people use the path now to exercise, and the benches are often all in use. Susan explained that we sometimes get enquiries from people about providing a memorial bench or trees. Not all follow it through as the cost is quite high, particularly for a bench at about £2,000, but some do go ahead, and it would be good to have a possible site in mind. All agreed with this plan.

3. Nature Conservation work on Troopers Hill

- **Nature Conservation work parties**–Rob reported that, since the last meeting, there had been two sessions in August, one cutting back gorse that had spread into heather, and one taking out Canadian golden rod in the triangle area. There had been two Parkwork sessions in August and

September, working on repairing the steps from the second gate on Troopers Hill Road, and Neil had led a work party in September clearing bramble and saplings from the area above Sally's glade. Last Saturday Rob led a work party removing saplings from alongside the path above the nursery. There has been a reasonable turnout at all the work parties, although it is always a bit quieter in summer, and there have been a few new recruits. The booking system was still working well. Susan has just sent out more dates for work parties in October and November.

We have also been contacted by Defra enquiring about a corporate work party, which has been arranged for November 30th. Now Summerhill Church has closed, there was an issue about where the work party could go for a sheltered lunch if it was wet and also where they could use toilets. Susan enquired at the Pied Horse pub who said that, although they don't open at lunchtime, they may be able to help with providing a room and toilets if they have enough notice. Also, a resident in Queens Road has offered access to her outside toilet.

- **Summer works from Bristol City** – Susan reported that the team from the Council did a good job of cutting back the bracken in the summer.
- **Greendown hedge and grasscut**– The Parks team also cut the Greendown hedge, quite early and quite hard. Rob has been to check it today and reported that it was greening up well. This week the team have cut the grass by Greendown, and Susan reported that they had done a good job on this too. Susan will meet up with Parks in November to plan the winter works.

4. Troopers Hill maintenance

- **Graffiti** – Just after Rob and Susan went away, there was a problem with white paint being splattered on the new bench at the top of the hill. Margaret (covering the Friends emails) picked up a couple of emails about this, including a reference to a report on Next Door, and Susan was able to send Margaret a screenshot of that report from France. Margaret reported the problem to the Council but in the meantime one local resident cleaned off much of the paint. Susan is going to follow up with the Council why they did not pick up on this issue quicker, as Margaret did not receive a response from the Council until last week, to say it was being allocated to a different team. (The request has now been cancelled.)

There has since been another incident on the same bench but Susan was able to clean it up using an old credit card. This has obviously been very upsetting for the family who provided the memorial bench. The dedication plaque was also removed from the bench in the first incident, and the family are reluctant to replace this at the moment in case it is stolen again. A local man has very kindly offered to provide a metal plaque (the previous one was plastic) and to fix it to the bench. Susan has passed this offer on to the family. Fabian asked whether this particular bench was being targeted for some reason, but Susan said that unfortunately vandalism to memorial benches was

quite common and there had been another experience on the hill, some years ago, when a memorial bench was torched.

At the same time as the vandalism on the bench, there were letters painted on the chimney. The same local man took it upon himself to clean these off, and Susan has expressed our gratitude to him.

- **Flag** - Susan reported that the flag has shredded again and needs replacing. We have one new spare and one slightly used spare, so Susan will ask the same local company to quote for two more spares, and will ask for donations to fund them. The flags are not too expensive. Rob explained that more expensive flags might last a bit longer, but as it is quite a windy spot they would probably still need replacing fairly frequently. Rod suggested putting the slightly used flag up first, as winter was coming and it was likely to get shredded anyway. Rob agreed.
- **Steps**– Rob reported that Parkwork have done a very good job, working around the hill repairing the steps, using timber provided by a budget from Parks. There are still some steps in need of repair, such as in the woodland.
- **Painting (benches, information boards, etc)** - Susan explained that many of the benches have lost their paint through wear and tear, and also the legs of some of the notice boards have started rusting and need rubbing down and painting. Ideally, she would like to hold some work parties to do this. Susan has checked with the Council and we would be covered for this type of work, as long as we submit a Risk Assessment. Susan asked for volunteers for this in the recent newsletter but did not receive any response. Fabian and Freya both said they would be happy to do this sort of work if they were available. Rob added that the newer notice boards are made of aluminium so they won't rust.

5.Events

Past– Susan had to cancel the Wildflower Walk as she had Covid. The Bugs and Beasties event took place on a very hot day in August so numbers attending were low, exacerbated by the fact that the balloon ascent was cancelled early in the day, but those families that came really enjoyed it. It was the first time the event had been held for a few years due to poor weather and then Covid. The Bristol Astronomical Society (BAS) were also there with their telescopes enabling solar observations and this was also popular with those who attended. Rosie commented that this was the first time she had attended a Bugs and Beasties event and she really enjoyed it, praising the enthusiasm of both Rupert and Dawn Higgins and also of the BAS volunteers.

Next– the next event will be the Drop in Gazebo on the hill this Sunday, 16th October from 2.30 to 5pm. Susan asked for volunteers to help set up at 1.30 pm and take down the gazebo at 5pm; Rosie and Margaret have both already said they could help and Elaine said she could come to take down but not set up. Susan will ring round one or two other volunteers in case someone is unable to come. Susan hopes to launch the consultation at this event. Margaret asked whether a fungi walk was also planned for this year, but Susan said it would be a fungi survey not a public walk this time.

Planning events for 2023 - Susan invited people to their house for a planning meeting, with wine, on 16th November at 7.15 pm.

Rod said that he had seen a communication from Fiona at BAS, explaining that they are getting so many requests for events that they have decided to have one central point of contact to organise this and asking people to put in requests now for events next year. Susan said that she has already replied requesting a stargazing event in February/March as usual and Solar Observations at the Bugs and Beasties event next August. Rod said that he would keep an eye on our requests.

6. Troopers Hill Survey – 20 years on

Susan and Rob had prepared a draft flyer which Susan sent around the committee and other interested people for comments. It used a photograph of an old information board. Now this has been approved, Susan plans to get 2000 flyers printed. These will give details of the link for the online survey, with a note that anyone needing a paper copy instead should contact Susan. At the last meeting Dom did a quick search and found a guide price of £42 for 1000. Susan has had an estimate of about £64 for 2,000 flyers from a local firm 'Printsetters' so will go back to them for a definite price and then ask them to print them within the next few days. These are to be delivered through the doors in streets adjacent to the hill. Susan has asked for volunteers to help with this and has already received some responses. Rob pointed out that they are trying to reach the people who don't already visit the hill. The last survey, 20 years ago, received 192 responses but Rob is hopeful this survey will get more responses as doing this online should attract more people than having to do a paper survey and put it in the post.

7. Networking

- RHS South West in Bloom – IYN and Pride in Parks– Susan said that the awards ceremony for the South West in Bloom's It's Your Neighbourhood awards had taken place that day and asked Rob to check online to see if the results had been announced yet. Rob found they had and that Troopers Hill had again been assessed as 'Outstanding'. The Pride in Parks awards will be announced in the spring. Susan thanked the group for their work in achieving this, but the meeting thanked Susan who put in all the work of applying for the awards.

-Blackswarth Road development - planning application – Susan said that a planning application had gone in today for a development on Blackswarth Road, on a piece of land previously used by Bowland Stone, for 85 dwellings, in apartment blocks 6 storeys high. While it was not appropriate for Friends of Troopers Hill to comment as a group, as it does not directly affect the hill, Susan felt it was helpful to let people know about the application through our social media. This was agreed.

- Summerhill Methodist Church–Susan has written to them formally to thank the Church for all their help.

- Public Rights of Way– Friends of Troopers Hill has received an email from a Public Rights of Way officer to say that maintenance work is to be done on Strawberry Lane and Lamb Hill. This is good news. Susan and Rob have used this opportunity to also discuss with the officer the public rights of way on Troopers Hill. There are two footpaths that cross the hill but cannot be followed to the end. Although this will not be a priority for the team, the officer has made a note of it as an issue that will need addressing at some point, by either re-routing the paths or creating new ones.

Didac– Susan contacted Elaine at Didac to ask about using a meeting room for corporate work parties. The response was that Didac need to be careful about safeguarding as they have young people working there, but given enough notice they could probably make a room available.

Elaine (Didac) then came back to ask if there is anything they could make to help Troopers Hill, such as bird boxes. Susan said that the problem with bird boxes was finding people able to fit them up high in the trees, but she asked the meeting for any other suggestions for things they could make. Freya suggested that they could do the artwork to place near the entrance to the hill. Fabian commented that an artwork made out of wood would be vulnerable, but perhaps they could make models of artwork. Rob suggested that they could make some artwork to be fixed to the allotment fence, indicating that that is where we meet for work parties. Rosie suggested they could make some more signposts. Fabian then suggested that the artwork models could be sold to raise funds for the full-size artwork, and this led to further ideas about models of the hill, or bees, or chimney. Rosie wondered if they could produce somethings to be sold before Christmas and Freya suggested Christmas Tree baubles. Further ideas were bird boxes, bug hotels or bee hotels to be sold to raise funds. It was agreed that bee hotels would be very much in keeping with the hill.

ACTION: Susan will put these ideas together and contact Elaine at Didac.

Bee Bold Awards – this was an initiative launched by the West of England Mayor to highlight activities that supported pollinators. Susan put in an entry on behalf of Friends of Troopers Hill. We did not win an award but were shortlisted and Susan and Rob went to the awards ceremony and made some contacts there.

Community Science Events for British Science Week – Susan had received an email from Cassandra Wye, a professional story teller, about a grant for community science events next year. This could be either £500 for a specific event in British Science Week (March 10th to 19th) or £1000 for events throughout the year. Cassandra has led story telling events on the hill in the past. The events should be science based so could be about nature or stargazing, for example. Applications need to be in by 7th November.

Susan forwarded the details to Michael Malay in case he is interested in doing something either for us, or another group. Suggestions from the group were: something linked to stargazing, bugs and beasties, a bat survey walk (if applying for

events over the whole year) or if just applying for a March event, then Susan suggested a lichens-related event would be suitable.

Duke of Edinburgh awards – Susan said that every year we are approached by Duke of Edinburgh students wanting to volunteer to do something on the hill. The problem is that our work party leaders are not covered to work with under 16s unless they are accompanied by a responsible adult. Susan is attending Bristol Parks Forum this weekend and will ask other groups if they have had a similar problem.

Council Budget Cuts – Rob wanted to highlight that there is another round of cuts happening at the Council. The implications of this for Parks will be discussed at the Bristol Parks Forum this Saturday and the Council will be asked not to cut the Parks service. Fabian pointed out that the Council is in a very difficult position as the cost of living increases mean Council costs are going up as well, and a large chunk of their spending is on statutory services than cannot be cut. The only statutory requirement regarding maintenance of parks is that they have to be safe. Rob says that parks groups are aware of the difficult situation that the Council is in and acknowledge it but will put the case for Parks not to be cut as far as possible.

Susan added that another problem for Parks is that they have an aging workforce, recruitment of younger people is not going well (and there is now a recruitment freeze) and the work required to maintain an area such as Troopers Hill is very strenuous.

Bath House – Rob is organising another visit to the Bath House on Strawberry Lane, possibly on 26th November. Anyone who would like to join this should send Rob an email.

Show of Strength – Susan added that the Show of Strength Theatre Walk in St George is well worth doing.

Next meeting

Thursday 1st December 2022 at 7.15pm (AGM)