



## **NOTE OF MEETING**

**10<sup>th</sup> September 2015. Methodist Church, Summerhill**

**Present:** Susan (Chair), Rob (WPO), Kit (Memb Sec), Margaret (Cttee) Fabian (Cllr) Keith, Rod, Kevin, Helen (minutes)

**Apologies:** Norman (Treasurer)

The minutes of the previous meeting in July 2015 were approved with no amendments. Introductions followed.

### **Issues and thank yous for Parks staff**

- Some of the steps on the Hill had been backfilled to address wear and tear and appeared improved as a result.
- Winter works 2015/16: in light of the overrun of the 2014/15 winter works, Chair was planning a meeting later in the current month with Bristol Council Parks officers to discuss plans for the forthcoming winter works.
- Future maintenance management plan update: Discussions were due in early October with Tom Penn (the park groups liaison representative) with the aim of updating and agreeing the management plan.
- Site Flag: The current Green Capital flag would cease to be current at the end of this year and resource constraints prevent Bristol Council entering any sites for the Green Flag (although the Pride in Parks award is still relevant). The meeting discussed a proposal for creating a FOTH flag to be flown at Greendown. Design preferences were mentioned and it was acknowledged that the FOTH logo tended to limit the options. It was proposed that a social media discussion could be opened to invite ideas, and, to be inclusive, the flag should be presented as a Troopers Hill flag rather than a FOTH banner. Fabian suggested the words, 'Welcome to Troopers Hill'. The planning implications of an additional flagpole were discussed, along with the mechanics of removing the flagpole in the event of local opposition to the flag.
- The bed at the entrance to Greendown had not been maintained, it was resolved to ask the Council to keep the vegetation neatly cut.
- The dog waste bin near Malvern Rd is due to be replaced with a bin released from another park where 3-compartment recycling bins have been installed but no date was currently available. It is also hope one of these released bin can be put at the 2<sup>nd</sup> entrance up Troopers Hill Rd, the last entrance with a bin. The Council had arranged extra bin emptying during school holidays and on the Balloon Fiesta weekend.(welcomed)
- No progress had been apparent in relation to fencing at the third entrance on Troopers Hill Road.

### **Community payback**

A team from Community Payback had cut back the edges of the accessible path and repainted the bench near the top chimney. In addition, they had created runoff channels at the side of the track on Troopers Hill Field.

A group from Parkwork (a project funded by the innovation charity, Nesta, offering experience to young people not otherwise in training, employment or education) had been asked to improve the steps between Crews Hole and the woodland path. A donation from Beeses to FOTH provided funding for timber. Work had started and progress was reported as satisfactory. It was proposed to divert the existing but unusable public right of way to follow the route of the new path.

### **Troopers Hill Field**

- Chair reported progress on the prospective play area. She had obtained 3 quotations for play facilities for children under-5 and 5-11 years old, and intended to apply for two grants. The details of designs and quotes were on display during and after the meeting. It was confirmed that the play facilities would not intrude on the area between the football goals. Parents and the Committee were invited to comment on the draft grant applications. Chair had met Clive Smith (Landscapes)

about project management, to ensure compliance with Council standards. The eventual tender for the work would be run by Bristol Council.

- A tree survey was due and a consultation was under way regarding a proposal for seven new trees which, unless memorial trees or otherwise sponsored, would be planted as whips.
- Rob reported that the grass had been cut at about the same frequency as last year though Parks intended to reduce the frequency. Kit requested a cut about a week before the Dog Show if appropriate.
- To address the worn patches of grass at the football goals, it had been suggested that alternative sockets would be provided at other points on the Field into which the posts could be padlocked in rotation. There had been no progress so far on this proposal.
- It was recognised that the dip in the ground near the slide was probably intractable given that it might be the site of a natural spring – so not worth introducing a drain - and the existing drains were only effective over a limited area.
- It was noted that the use of weed killer on the Field (to save strimming) had possibly contributed to ground erosion near the metal bench, Chair intended to report concern about the use of herbicides so close to the Nature Reserve.
- Arrangements had been made for refuse to be collected at the Summerhill Road entrance to the Field, so that vehicles did not need to be driven over the grass to the bin.

### **Work parties and other works**

– The meeting agreed that in future the preferred nomenclature would be, '*Conservation Work Parties*' to give prospective participants a clearer idea of their purpose and likely activities.

Following Susan's publicity initiative, numbers of volunteers had increased to some extent.

Since the last meeting:

- On Saturday 1st August, a small party removed bracken at the end of the Gully.
- On 5th September, eleven volunteers including two who had not attended previously
- Attendance had been variable on the Sunday work parties – there had been a low turnout for Sunday 19th July working to remove saplings near Sally's Glade On 16th August seventeen people (including children) cleared bracken from the steps above entrance E
- Susan intended to identify more Sunday dates later in the year and Rob would consider child-friendly activities such as bracken and sapling eradication as well as patches of broom that need to be managed.
- thanks principally to the dog walkers who collect litter, the opportunities for volunteers to undertake litter picking were limited.

Next work parties before the next meeting:

- On Saturday 3rd October more work was planned to clear bramble and saplings amongst the broom above entrance E. The meeting discussed the prevalence of bramble versus bracken in that compartment.
- 7<sup>th</sup> November – a litter pick might be required after Bonfire Night

### **Events**

Since our last meeting

- The St George Strollers 100th Walk had taken place on 13th July, finding 10 dragon references in St George and pausing for tea and cakes in St Aidan's church.
- The evening walk looking at the Heathland habitat had been poorly attended in general but had resulted in meeting some of the individuals responsible for compiling the Green Map which would be launched at St George Library on Tuesday 8th December).
- The last St George Strollers walk to be funded by the grant from Sovereign Housing would be delivered shortly and a monitoring report compiled. Leaflets and programmes had been delivered to the Weavers Mill residents publicising a series of quarterly walks, but the residents had not participated in the activities on offer.
- Bugs and Beasties (Balloon Fiesta) had been a successful event and Chair expressed thanks to all who had helped. The crowd was probably the largest seen on the Hill at one time. The extent of the attendance had been captured by a drone (link to the video is on the Troopers Hill web site). The solar observations, run by the Bristol Astronomical Society (likely to be repeated next year) and an art installation project in a geodesic dome had proved popular. The occasion provided a good view of the mass balloon ascent at the Balloon Fiesta. Because

of parking congestion, next year's publicity should emphasise that people should probably not come by car.

- It was noted that such a large (informal) gathering to see the balloons required no event licence, while other smaller events were required to apply for licensing.

Action: Rob to raise the issue at Parks Forum

- a small number of barbecues had been lit but in the absence of a byelaw prohibiting fires on Nature Reserves it had been difficult to ask them to be extinguished. Rob mentioned that neighbourhood scrutiny was looking at bye laws.

Action: Fabian to enquire and report back on progress of the byelaws.

- For the St George in Bloom Open Day on 18<sup>th</sup> July FOTH put up a gazebo and displays on top of the Hill to showcase the work parties, which might be worthwhile doing again on some future occasion to raise awareness of FOTH activities.
- Exploring St George – on Sunday 6 September, FOTH held a walk, led by Rupert Higgins, looking at lesser known green spaces in St George including urban wild flower meadows and cherry trees. The event formed part of the Bristol Green Capital year and had been funded via the St George Neighbourhood Partnership. Rupert Higgins had agreed to compile a report on improving the ecological value of the green spaces.

Before our next meeting:

- The Lichen Walk on Sunday 4th October, was an additional programme item that had been funded via Green Capital and the St George Neighbourhood Partnership.

Action: Margaret to post details on the VOSCUR web site.

- The Family Fun Dog Show was planned for Sunday 11th October, registration from 1.30pm onwards. Prizes had been funded through the St George Neighbourhood Partnership Wellbeing grant. Quite a few volunteers would be needed for duties including the arena, a tea tent (free tea and coffee), information point, a display of the play proposals (possibly by interested parents). The publicity arrangements were discussed and Susan proposed to conduct a before-and- after dog fouling audit.
- The Fungi Foray on Sunday 1st November would be led by John and Doreen Bailey, who had kindly agreed that their fee could be donated to the Justin Smith Foundation. The meeting agreed that any donations collected on the day would also be given to the Foundation.

Action: Susan to arrange a planning meeting for next year's events before 12 November.

The AGM had been set for 3 December and would incorporate a review of the year. Helen will have resigned and Norman has (provisionally) agreed to remain as Treasurer for the time being. Anyone interested in joining the Committee or in standing for those posts would be welcomed.

## **Networking**

- the Local Nature Reserves celebration was discussed. A leaflet would be produced describing each of the LNRs. Ruth Coleman would be contacting secondary school geography students to visit the Hill and the celebrations could include a visit from the Mayor.
- Beeses had promised a donation from their Beer Festival proceeds which should be forthcoming as soon as their accounts are finalised.
- Facebook friends and Twitter followers remained on a rising trend, numbering more than 500 in each category.

## **Assessments for awards**

- an announcement was expected soon from It's Your Neighbourhood (RHS South West), about the level of award
- The Hill was supposed to be assessed during August for a Pride in Parks award but judges had been unavailable. Susan will re-arrange. Awards will be in March 2016.
- Rod was taking forward the Dark Skies Discovery site application. Dark Skies maps are available online. One of the assets of the site is a good unobstructed horizon to the south allowing views of the moon and planets, unusual even in rural areas. It was recognised that more visitors at night would be beneficial for perceptions of personal safety on the Hill. There were already sites at Durdham Downs and Victoria Park, many of the sites were urban and had light contamination, yet were usable for astronomical purposes. The formalities of the application had yet to be completed. The necessity for another site visit would determine progress on the application.

**Newsletter.**

An advertisement for a new editor had appeared in the most recent edition. Kit explained that he currently intended the next (Christmas) edition to be the last issue of *The Hill*. He invited anyone with other suggestions to e-mail him. Rob commented on the need to keep the distribution list going. The use of technology was discussed and the meeting acknowledged that social media would probably be the way forward for distributing news about Troopers Hill.

Action: Rob to contribute an article on 'conservation' work parties.