

NOTE OF MEETING

Thursday, 29th September, 2016 7.15pm

Summerhill Methodist Church, 5 Air Balloon Rd

Present: Susan (Chair), Rob (WPO), Rod (Bristol Astron. Soc), Mary, Stephanie, Margaret (minutes)

Apologies: Norman, Fabian, Kevin, Nicola

1. Approve July minutes

These were approved.

2. Issues and thank yous for Parks staff

- Winter works 2016/17: Rob has not been able to speak to Tom Penn yet about winter works and Greendown steps. Ideally the winter works will start in November. The hedge on Greendown has been cut. Mary asked whether there was a problem with Japanese Knotweed on the hill. Susan confirmed there is an area of this, and that the Council manage it.
Action: Rob to speak to Tom Penn about winter works.
- Preventing wear and tear on refurbished steps: Rob still waiting to hear back from Tom Penn following his request to contact the contractors about the erosion on the steps. When he does he will ask that they include Greendown steps, as discussed at last FOTH meeting.
- Action: Rob to ask the contractors, via Tom Penn, to include Greendown steps
- Future maintenance and management: The photographic survey has now been done and, once Rob has the report, he will talk to Becky Belfin at the Council about future maintenance and management.
- Management Plan update: The 5 year Management Plan is due for review in March 2017 and, as reported above, the first step of a photographic survey has now been done. This was paid for by Bristol City Council. Once the report has been received and Rob has discussed any changes needed with Becky Belfin, they will then draw up a new plan. Rob expects that there will not be a lot of change from the existing plan.

3. Work parties and other works

Rob reported that the work party on 17th July (Sunday afternoon) removed bracken from among the heather, and saplings and bracken on an area above Troopers Hill Road. Some of the people from Street Goat helped and took some saplings and bramble away to feed the goats. Stephanie asked whether the saplings could be given away. Rob explained that they are cut down rather than being dug out as this would cause more erosion to the hill.

The work party on 6th August took out some broom above the nursery. Rob explained that normally we would protect broom, but now it is spreading too much so some has to be removed to allow the grass and heathland to thrive.

The work party on 3rd September was shortened by rain, but managed to take out some of the bracken at the entrance to the gully. There was also a Monday evening work party in August, called at short notice, to deal with an area of Himalayan Balsam. This will need to be added to the Management Plan.

Work parties before the next meeting: Saturdays 1st October and 5th November. Rob reported that Community Payback are coming over the next two weekends and will be clearing, firstly, broom above the nursery and then broom above Sally's Glade. Rob added that the Street Goat people will help take some of this broom to feed the goats on the allotment.

- Attracting more people to work parties/survey of good dates/times: Susan will be sending out a survey to ask people when would be the best days and times for work parties. Some people with families have said that Saturday mornings are difficult as children are doing other activities then. In the past evening work parties have been tried but not very well attended. Sunday afternoons have also been tried, sometimes with good turn outs. Rob added that, with further cuts happening at the Council, the Parks department may not be able to do as much as they do now and there may be a need for the work parties to take on some of that work.
- Corporate work parties: Susan reported that we have not had any requests for corporate work parties recently, but this was not a problem as, although they do useful work, they are also very resource intensive. Mary asked which groups we had had in the past. Susan said that previous groups had included Lloyds Bank (3 times), Defra, Badminton School and MOD
- New Little Elizabeth's Bench: Susan reported that we had now reached the target needed to pay for a new bench. Parks have confirmed that the bench is in the process of being ordered. Mary added that it would be good to save up for a wooden top for the bench at a later date.

Susan reported that there was now a surplus of money for the bench as a cheque for £50 from the Avon Local History Association had been received after the target had been reached. The Association are happy for the money to be used for another suitable project on the hill, so Susan proposed that the money be used for a plaque which could be attached to the post opposite the bench. The post already has carvings related to her book, 'Scenes in our Parish', so the plaque could just add Elizabeth's name and dates, and title of her book. This was agreed.

- New geology interpretation board. Susan reminded the meeting that, earlier in the year, a grant had been received from the Council for £1,000 for a new geology interpretation board. However the full cost for the type of board we would like, similar to those already on the hill, is over £2,000, so Susan had applied to the Geologists Association for a further £1350 and was pleased to report that the application had been successful. It will be installed near the chimney where there is already another board.

- Plans for fencing on Troopers Hill Road. Susan explained that quite a lot of the fencing on Troopers Hill Road was rotten and needed replacing. It was important to do this to prevent motorbikes getting on to the hill as this had been a problem in the past. Rob and Susan have measured up and will send details to the Council who can then get quotes for the fencing. Once we have this we can then look for suitable grants.

Mary mentioned that Aviva are doing a competition for community projects and wondered if it was worth FOTH applying. Rob replied that this had been looked into but it was probably not worth FOTH applying as a small local project was unlikely to get many votes. Susan added that the best approach when raising funds was to prepare a 'shopping list' for what we wanted and then look for grants for specific items or projects.

4. Troopers Hill Field

- Play area update including celebration: Susan reported that the play area is near completion. Once the work is finished, there will be a ROSPA inspection and then the fencing can come down. The celebration event needs to take place fairly soon after that and Susan suggested aiming for the weekend at the end of half term, October 29th. Mary suggested that it would be better to hold it at the beginning of half term as the publicity would encourage its use over the holiday. The original plan of following bagpipers from the chimney may need to be altered as the scaffolding is about to go up around the chimney so it would start from the interpretation board instead.

Action: Susan to check the availability of the bagpipe band for 22nd, 23rd or 29th October.

Action: Once date confirmed, Susan to send out invitations to Kerry McCarthy MP, local councillors and others who wrote supporting letters, and local clubs.

- Football posts: Rob reported that the posts from Dundry Park have now been installed and are looking good, painted yellow.
- State of trees, further tree planting: Susan reported that the cage that had been lost from one of the new saplings has now been replaced. Susan suggested that it would be a good idea to plant some new trees near the play area to give some shade, and once the work is completed she will ask a tree officer from the Council to visit the site. Under the 'One tree per child' scheme these could be planted over the winter. These would be small trees; Mary commented that cherry trees would be nice.
- Log Play equipment: Susan reported that this equipment continues to deteriorate and is not likely to last much longer.
Action: Susan to talk to John Knowlson at the Council about what is best to do with this area.
- Hole near the slide: This will be filled in with soil dug out for the path. Mary asked if any more could be done to improve this area which gets so damp in winter. Susan said that eventually it is hoped to extend the path past the allotments.

5. Events

Bugs and Beasties Hunt on 13th August went well. More nets and pots needed for next year.

Action: Susan and Rob to buy more pots and nets, funds permitting.

Planning meeting for events in 2017: Agreed that this will be held on Wednesday 2nd November at 7.15 pm at 3 Corkers Hill. Everyone invited to attend.

Drama in 2017: this can be discussed at the events planning meeting.

Before our next meeting:

Geology Walk Sunday 16th October.

Action: Susan to publicise Geology Walk

6. Impact of Council Cuts

- What is the expected impact? Susan reported that the Council plans to make further cuts of approximately £60m next year, and another round of voluntary severances is taking place. The outcome will probably be fewer resources in Parks.
- What can be done to offset that impact? It will be important to keep up good communication with Park staff and talk to them about what needs doing on the Hill. Rob added that it was good that they are recruiting for a Head of the Parks department.
- Response to government consultation on parks: Rob has responded to this consultation, which included questions about funding. Susan asked for confirmation from the meeting that FOTH would not want to take over the running of Troopers Hill. All agreed that we would not want to undertake this.

7. Networking

- Beeses have given FOTH a donation of £500 from their beer festival, as usual giving an equal donation to Eastwood Farm. Mary asked how this money would be spent. Susan replied that there are no strings attached to this donation so it will be added to the general funds which cover such things as hire of meeting rooms. Rob and Susan are meeting with Norman next week to look at the accounts. They will then have an idea of how much is available to spend on events next year. Rob added that the plan is always to keep enough in the bank to cover the following year's events in case there are less funds coming in.

- One Child per Tree visit in November: John Atkinson, who runs this scheme for the Council, has asked Susan to give a talk to a group of children coming to visit the hill in November. They may also plant a tree at this visit.

- University of Bristol study of dog fouling audit: a group from University of Bristol have approached parks in Bristol to ask if they would be interested in a dog fouling audit. They would organise a soil expert to test a sample of soil to see how infected it is with toxocara. Susan asked the views of the meeting. Mary said she thought this was a good idea as it would either give reassurance, if levels were low, or could be

useful information if there was a problem. Susan's concern was what would be done with the information, particularly as not many other parks had shown any interest. It was agreed that, if information was to be published, that it should not name Troopers Hill as the site tested.

Action: Susan to find out more about how the information will be published and to stipulate that Troopers Hill is not mentioned by name.

- City of Bristol College have requested a guided walk for 18 year old students doing an entrance course on conservation. Rob and Susan are giving a two hour talk for the group on 30th September.

- Royal Agricultural University (Cirencester) have requested a visit in November for some of their undergraduates as part of a Conservation Management module.

Mary asked whether we requested donations for these visits. Susan replied that we did not ask for anything from City of Bristol College. The Royal Agricultural College asked about a donation. Susan had replied that we are happy to do talks for nothing but if they wish to donate, then £50 would be appropriate.

- Celebration event at Sikh Temple (11 Summerhill Road) – Rob and Susan have been invited to this event to celebrate the refurbishment of the temple.

Kit and Helen: Kit and Helen are in the process of moving away. Rob spoke about how much Kit and Helen have both contributed to FOTH over the years and how much they will be missed. Amongst other things, Helen was secretary from the start of the group until the last AGM and also gave a talk on the wild flowers on the Hill, as well as being integral to many of the events, while without Kit events like the Dog Show and the Falconry event would not have taken place. Kit also covered for Rob and Susan when they were away, and produced the newsletter. They will be back in Bristol briefly at the beginning of November and it is hoped to be able to say goodbye to them properly then.

8. Facebook/Twitter/website Update

Rob reported that the numbers of followers on Facebook and Twitter continue to increase (857 likes on Facebook, 635 followers on Twitter). Rod has kindly taken on the administration of the Facebook page. Rob reminded Rod that the first 140 characters of any new post on Facebook will also appear on Twitter.

Margaret will be copied in on Friends of Troopers Hill emails, as a back-up now that Kit has left.

Website: Rob said that this was not originally set up for mobile phones or tablets but this is now how many people access the website. He asked whether others thought it was still readable on these devices as to redo the website would involve a considerable amount of work. Rod said that he had no problem accessing the website on his tablet, especially if viewed in landscape.

9. Newsletter

Comments on last one and date/content for next one: Susan did not receive a pdf for the last newsletter so was unable to issue a paper version. She will ask the editor for

it again and try and get it out in time to publicise the celebration event. Other invitations can be sent out by email.

Mary asked if she could raise some other business. Susan said that normally she did not allow this and asked instead that people email her with items for the agenda before the meeting. However, she invited Mary to go ahead. Mary had two proposals for fund raising events: firstly to use Redfest to raise funds for FOTH (e.g a stall), and secondly to hold a car boot sale on the field. Rob explained that at Redfest any funds raised are expected to go to Redfest and not other groups. On the car boot sale, Susan explained that this would not be a good idea, firstly because vehicles should not be brought onto the field and secondly because it would not be popular with local residents due to the parking issue. However she thanked Mary for both suggestions and was very grateful that she was putting thought into this.

Next meeting

Thursday 1st December at 7.15pm at Summerhill Methodist Church, 5 Air Balloon Road (AGM)