

NOTE OF MEETING

**Thursday, 13th November, 2008 7.15pm
Wesley Memorial Church, Bryants Hill**



Present: Susan (Chair), Rob (WPO), Jude (Treas), Kit (Memb Sec) Pauline, Roy, Maureen, Gill, Val, Peter, Helen (minutes)

Apologies: Fabian (Cllr) and Claire (BCC)

The group approved the minutes of the previous meeting with one minor amendment. There were no outstanding actions other than those to be addressed in the current Agenda.

Issues and thank yous to be passed to CPM

Bristol City Council had installed a new sign at the milestone on Summerhill Road, indicating the public footpath to Troopers Hill.

A new welcome sign had been put up at the entrance to Troopers Hill from the Field. It had been part funded by YANSEC and partly by Bristol Parks. The existing sign would be removed. Two more, similar signs were planned for the Greendown and lower chimney entrances.

It was suggested that the path through the woodland between the Nature Reserve and Lamb Hill (past 'Little Elizabeth's bench' could benefit from some resurfacing given that recent rain had washed down quantities of mud, making the steps slippery. Alternatively perhaps measures could be taken to channel the runoff of rainwater away from the steps.

A large muddy puddle area had developed by the gate at the entrance to Summerhill Terrace. Rob explained it is intended that gravel will be supplied to fill in the depression. It was noted that the Field becomes badly waterlogged at this time of year.

There was a report of a motorbike on the hill on Tuesday 11 November. It was also noted that the bars of gates leading to the Field can be forced. Chair said that the gates had been fixed, but there may be a need for strengthening the bars. Gill described the arrival of workers who had contemplated repairing the play area surface in the Field but in the event had not done the work.

Rob said he was due to meet Claire on 21 November 2008 to discuss scheduling winter works, and the timing of the replacement fence and gate at Greendown. The gate supplied at Green Down in the recent repair would be transferred to the Lamb Hill entrance. At the meeting they would also discuss the programme of winter works.

A senior Arborist from the Council had assessed the trees overhanging Troopers Hill Rd but had not recognised that any works were necessary to the trees or that they posed any health and safety risks. Susan reported that she had replied to Claire's report of the Arborist's comment by asking Claire to bring to the Arborist's attention that there had been an instance of a load on a vehicle becoming dislodged from contact with the overhanging branches.

A response was awaited to FOTH's question about the supply of replacement trees for those which had been removed from Troopers Hill Field. Prospective locations were discussed, given that there are currently no trees giving shade other than those near the border with the allotments, the desirability of maintaining a large open area for informal recreation, and the practicalities of mowing the grass. It was suggested that planting trees near Summerhill Terrace entrance might take up water and alleviate the soggy ground problem without impacting on the use of the area for play. It was recognised that the suitability of the soil conditions might influence the location of any new trees.

Work parties completed since the last meeting

On the mornings of Saturday 4th October and Saturday 1 November areas were cleared of bramble at the top of the steps from Troopers Hill Road. Rob reported the gratifying discovery that many new broom plants could be seen growing where previously bramble had dominated.

Next work parties

Saturday 6th December at 10am, to remove bramble from an area near lower chimney. To be followed by a festive celebration at Chair and WPO's home from 3.30 pm.

Feedback on Events

- Avon Valley Walk, Sunday 5th October

Despite bad weather about 13 people had turned out in their waterproof gear. The walk was constrained to the northern side of the river. A visit to the historic Bath House was granted by kind permission of the land owners.

- Dog Show, Sunday 12th October

The show was described as a resounding success, having drawn many people with numerous dogs. The classes, being free, had attracted long lists of entries. There was some debate over whether to charge for entry in future, and it was decided that retaining free classes would be likely to encourage more children to participate. At least 7 dogs were micro-chipped during the show. The Field was left clean afterwards. FOTH's sale of refreshments made £48 and there had been donations in addition to this. Congratulations were expressed, chiefly to Kit, and everyone else who had lent assistance and enabled the event to succeed. It was acknowledged that the fine weather had encouraged people to stay at the show for a long time. Kit said he would prefer to use a louder public address system, but recognised the need to adjust the volume of commentary to avoid causing nuisance to nearby residents.

Action: Rob to put answers to dog breeds quiz on the web site.

- Owl Prowl, Thursday 16th October 7pm

Kit reported a turn out of about 30 people for a pleasant evening, including an interesting talk by expert Ian McGuire, who led a walk through the woodlands and 'Sally's Glade'. An owl was heard in the far distance, but none seen until Ian introduced his own owl at the end of the walk. He observed that owls frequent old woodlands and there are not enough suitable old trees in Crews Hole woodland. More important than nest sites for owls is their food chain. The LNR habitat is not currently suitable to support food requirements for many owls, and to alter the habitat to address this would require a different approach to the current management plans. It was mentioned that, historically, there had been many more owls in the area. The meeting speculated why there were fewer birds of prey in general these days than hitherto. The growth of trees in the last 40 years may have made the area less attractive to raptors.

It was suggested that FOTH might build owl boxes for owls to nest in, possibly involving the Scouts and the participants in FOTH's Bird Box Bonanza in February 2006.

- Fungi Foray – Sunday 2nd November

The event had been well attended, 26 species of fungi were identified in total, of which not many were found in the woodland, they included a rare fungus called entoloma clandestinum (57 occurrences in the UK) and red-listed in Switzerland. The expert, Justin Smith, had compiled a report and habitat management recommendations including late season mowing of grassland and maybe patch mowing in areas around the Chimney (long grass) in the late summer so that fungi appear. Grazing by sheep or goats could produce a similar effect. The removal of litter and dog waste would assist in preserving the soil pH. It was suggested that FOTH could arrange a one-day course to introduce volunteers to fungal identification, alternatively Justin was offering guided walks on bryophytes, lichens, wild flowers and trees.

Action: Chair to consult Justin on the appropriate time of year a bryophytes and lichens walk and survey.

Feedback from Green Flag judging

Rob reported that the Desk assessment (management plan and other paperwork) scored in the range 20-24 (same as last year) against a pass mark of 15. The Field assessment (pass mark 42) had attracted a higher score (60-64) than last year (50-54). It was commented that Rob and Susan clearly play a key role in the Community Involvement element of the scheme, FOTH being one of the most active and effective community groups that the judges had encountered. The Newsletter was praised as being outstanding, and the web design and management also attracted positive comment. The constructive partnership between the 'Ranger' (Julian) and Rob was mentioned as being particularly productive.

The judges also remarked upon the bench close to entrance A (Troopers Hill Field to Troopers Hill) not having been repaired since the previous judging and that some of the timber on the steps was rotting and in need of repair. In addition, they commented on the environmental cost of removing cut vegetation from the site, and this generated some debate about the feasibility of on-site composting. The judges' suggestion that the benefits of CCTV to the site might be worth exploring was considered undesirable, not least because of the practical implications of electricity supplies and arranging for viewing.

Planning for Annual General Meeting

It was proposed that the 2008 AGM should follow a similar format to the 2007 meeting, with a show of photographs and a video with music about Troopers Hill. Publicity arrangements were discussed, together with suggestions for attracting more people to the meeting. The merits of a Saturday afternoon meeting (with an exhibition) in a future year were considered. It was agreed that the business part of the agenda should not be emphasised. A minority were in favour of dividing the AGM into two separate events – one entertainment, one business. The proposed date for 2009 could either be Saturday 12 December or the afternoon of Sunday 6 December 2009 at 3 pm.

Next year's events.

Chair circulated the prospective plans that had emerged from the planning meeting on 21 October. She reported that Rupert Higgins has confirmed availability for the Bugs and Beasties event. Informal approval had been obtained from Dunderidge Park representatives for use of their legacy money as proposed for educational projects.

The meeting approved the use of money donated by Beeses for that purpose as well. Publicity for the events would be the same as last year, for instance publication in Park Life, Posters, web site, etc.

Concern arose about FOTH's ability to manage event bookings given that Bristol Council would not provide this facility in future. Jude offered to take bookings made via a daytime telephone number and e-mail, operating a reserve list and encouraging notification of cancellations. There was considerable discussion of how to manage directions and impart information concerning suitable clothing and footwear. It was suggested that a telephone answering message could provide the necessary details.

Action : Chair to pursue arrangements with the Wind band. To contact the Bristol School of Tai Chi to discuss sharing of involvement and handling arrangements with FOTH in the event that grant was forthcoming for 2009 Tai Chi classes.

Networking

- St George Neighbourhood Partnership

Rob and Susan had attended the Partnership's most recent meeting. The local issues included a 30mph speed limit along Crew's Hole Road where it did not currently apply, and that the Neighbourhood Partnership should do as much as possible to publicise the green spaces plan to discourage sale of desirable green spaces. Chair briefly explained that some of the funding to improve the maintenance of certain green spaces could be derived from the sale of other less valued sites. There would be future publicity drawing attention to the St George phase of consultation in due course. Rob showed the proposed design for a play area in St George Park. Council have invited the public to identify and recommend parcels of land for specified re-development. For further information see the Council web site. <http://www.bristol.gov.uk/ccm/content/Environment-Planning/Parks-and-open-spaces/bristol-parks-and-green-space-strategy.en>

- Leaflets were made available on the forthcoming telephone vote competition for grant to Meadow Vale community centre to expand its use by young people.

- The Allotment society would be holding a a craft fair at the allotments in December.

- A management plan was being drawn up for Avon Valley Woodlands. FOTH members were made aware of the meeting on 19 November 2008 to discuss the future of path alongside the river Avon between Conham and Hanham.

Newsletter

The next newsletter would be published in December.

Action: Rob to contribute an article (content tba)