

NOTE OF MEETING

Wednesday 9 August 2006 7.15pm
Wesley Memorial Church, Bryants Hill



Present:

Susan (Chair,) Sally (BCC), Caroline (BCC), Tanya (BCC), Pete (Police), Liz R, Rob, Liz & Alan, Maureen, Anne, Roy, Vernon, Emma, Lucy, Jude, Anne, Jane, Helen.

Apologies: Val, Gill, Kit.

Outstanding actions from the previous minutes

Any outstanding actions to be addressed during the meeting. The previous minutes were approved.

Security on Troopers Hill

Pete Crawford introduced himself as the police beat officer for St George East. He had compiled a list of incidents recently reported on Troopers Hill. They included damage to the benches and to the grass together with six incidences of motorcycle access (acknowledged to be a common problem in Bristol parks, Troopers Hill not being among the worst affected). He outlined the Force's pursuit policy (for safety reasons individuals not wearing helmets are not pursued, although registration numbers are taken wherever possible). The motorcycles concerned are likely to have been stolen. These incidents often take a lower priority than other more serious complaints. Roy commented that motorcycle crime is easier these days as the machines are easier to steal and to drive. The cost of insurance seemed to represent an insuperable problem to setting aside ground for legal off-road motorcycling. Friends would be likely to support the creation of an off-road motor cycling facility.

Pete outlined measures for addressing illegal motor cycle use: Officers were being trained in off-road motorcycle procedures and a specialist unit was to be set up at Fishponds. From early 2007, there would be funding for Police Community Support Officers (one for each of the five beats) on bicycles. On prompting from Caroline about liaison between Bristol Parks officers and the police, he agreed that the names of individuals concerned, where available, would be passed to the Anti-social behaviour team; He enquired about access to Troopers Hill field. Action: Caroline to consider possibilities for impeding motorcycle access to the Field via the "milestone" lane from Summerhill Road.

Lucy courageously described her recent experience of assault and robbery on Troopers Hill. She had reported the incident, having known the name of one of assailants, and arrests had resulted. She expected to attend an identity parade shortly. The perpetrators had emerged from a den near the gate between the Field and the LNR that was concealed by undergrowth. The meeting considered photographs of the area and concluded that it would be possible to open up the area quickly if a mini-work party could do it on Saturday 14 August. Caroline reminded the meeting of the Drugs & Sex Litter Hotline number: 922 2241. Sally described the bird observation protocol to be complied with before embarking on the work.

Action: Friends to cut back the undergrowth starting at 12:30 on Saturday. Susan to observe for birds earlier in the day. [Done]

After discussion, it was concluded that bringing more street lighting to the Hill and Field would probably not be possible given the engineering constraints and may cause more problems as a focus point and vandalism target.

Emma reported that at certain times, people would aim fireworks from the top of the Hill attempting to hit cars parked on Greendown.

Pete expressed a hope that the robbery incident had been a one-off, unlikely to be repeated. The greater use of the Hill for social gatherings by Friends etc would be helpful. He promised to alert his colleagues to the existing crime risks on the site and undertook to visit it more frequently on a routine basis. Chair suggested that special constables should also visit the Hill. Pete said he would suggest that the helicopter crew adopted the practice of flying to Troopers Hill between visits to other parts of the city and shining a bright torchlight while flying over. He mentioned that rape alarms were available if required and reminded the meeting that the sensible use of reasonable force in self defence was not unlawful.

Parks, FOTH and a dog care service

Caroline introduced an initiative by the dog care service "Woferz" (a dog walking, training, pet taxi and pet food delivery company) to encourage good behaviour and agree a code of conduct for dog walkers in conjunction with local community groups, as a means of promoting their business, using leaflets and stickers for bins, and entering into dialogue with people exercising their dogs. They had already engaged with Ashton Court and were raising their profile with the local nature reserves in Bristol. Caroline circulated the Ashton Court leaflet. Woferz were proposing a similar partnership with FOTH to educate dog walkers in clearing up after, and proper training for, their animals. FOTH welcomed the approach and suggested a trial. Roy highlighted the problem of large dogs allowed off the lead that can knock over small children.

Action: Caroline to forward draft leaflet for comments when received. Rob to invite Woferz to a future FOTH meeting.

Issues on Troopers Hill to be passed to Caroline/Claire

- Fence posts: Caroline explained that the order had gone astray. Action: Caroline to obtain and supply new gate post.
- The security fencing around the Field had not yet been painted green. Action: Caroline to follow up with Bristol East Allotments Association.
- Works to the lower chimney stack: Action: Caroline to find out and let FOTH know when exactly pointing will begin to secure the stonework at the top of the chimney.
- Caroline reported that the benches for the Field had been ordered
- Caroline also reported that tarmac for the ground near the gate at Troopers Hill Field had been included in the work schedule.
- The Chair reported that YANSEC had agreed to release funds for the benches built by Barton Hill Youth Group and FOTH (2 of which were subsequently destroyed).
- FOTH observed that the new access path had been constructed but not to the required standard – particularly disappointing in view of the forthcoming event on 14 August. Caroline apologised. Action: Caroline to contact the contractor and arrange remedial works as soon as possible [First step done: by 14 August the surface of the path had been cleared of loose gravel, news awaited of replacement surface].
- The schedule for the contractors' work programme 2006 had been agreed between Rob, Susan, Kit and Caroline, and would be available for the next FOTH meeting. The agreement took the form of a rolling five-year plan.
- Caroline advised that the area of bramble at the top end of Greendown was not to be cleared. A large wheel had been left there and needed to be removed. Action: Caroline to write to the resident concerned about the bramble, also mentioning dog behaviour.
- Green Flag award (see minutes of June meeting): Caroline had a meeting about the Management plan and was preparing for the mock judging, originally planned earlier in the year but postponed. Action: Caroline to tell FOTH the judging date.
- Caroline announced the return of Gary Ratcliffe to his post, and her consequent return to her former duties. FOTH thanked Caroline for her valuable work in support of the group over the past year.
- Rob sought and obtained the meeting's agreement to approaching YANSEC for funding replacement benches at the two positions previously identified, to take the form of a steel bench with a wooden seat bolted to it, having the appearance of a wooden bench with the advantage that if the wood were destroyed there would still be a functional bench remaining. The meeting discussed and agreed that funding should be sought, remarking that the benches would have to be substantial and difficult to destroy. Rob said that FOTH would expect to provide part funding.

Feedback on recent events and activities

- Music on the Hill:

Chair expressed thanks to all who attended and did the work. BBC Bristol had given the event good publicity. It would be desirable to do a similar event next year with the proviso that the financial cost should be covered by commercial sponsorship. Maureen remarked that it had not been possible to arrange her prize balloon flight but she had nevertheless received £50 in vouchers. Chair read out a note of thanks from Bernard.

- Purple Prowl:

Over 40 people attended the event which had been very much enjoyed and was reported as really interesting. The high attendance, though gratifying, coupled with the narrow route had unfortunately meant that not everyone had experienced the full benefit of Libby's explanations.

The tube web spider, third largest in the UK, had been found living in the chimney. Libby had written to say how much she had enjoyed becoming acquainted with the Hill.

- Latest Newsletter:

Chair expressed thanks to Kit for an interesting newsletter carrying varied articles.

Other

Chair read out a letter of appreciation for the work of FOTH from a Fir Tree Lane resident. She also remarked that following a donation of around £350 from Somerfield's casual dress day, FOTH's financial situation was healthy.

Breathing Places grant application

Rob had submitted a grant bid for just under £10,000 including:

- Training sessions on flora and fauna identification and similar topics
- Surveys of invertebrates, badgers, bird nesting, etc
- Encouraging greater involvement by individuals, tools for work parties etc
- Equipment for events such as collection of bugs and beasts by children
- Exhibition room hire, materials, gazebos, display boards
- Leaflets, maps, and other publicity and educational material.

He expressed the hope that as he had met a short deadline there would not be a great many competitors for the funding, and as Troopers Hill was featured in the Breathing Places booklet, FOTH stood a good chance of success. FOTH could expect to hear in October whether the grant would be awarded.

Event planning

- Family Fun Picnic – Saturday 12 August: As well as the balloon race and the story teller, there would be art and craft activities including creating bird masks and colouring. Chair had produced a dog awareness poster. The programme for the day was envisaged as:

07.00 – meet BBC Radio Bristol for publicity broadcast and carry out bird observations

12.30 – Bramble cutting

13.30 – put up first gazebos

14.30 – sapling cutting at site of story gazebo, put up gazebo, display, refreshment tables

16.00 onwards – picnic

16.45 - story telling

18.00 – release balloons, watch any balloons flying from Ashton Court, followed by taking down gazebos etc.

Action – All to attend and assist.

- Avon Valley Walk – Sunday 3 September

Tanya distributed information on the forthcoming walk organised by Bristol Living Rivers project in conjunction with Bristol Parks, FOTH and Friends of Eastwood Farm. The walk would begin at 10.30 at Conham car park, proceeding to Troopers Hill, then via Conham ferry for a picnic or lunch at Beeses, then to Eastwood Farm and return to Conham car park by 15.30. Participants should let Tanya or Susan know in advance and bring 50p for the ferry (25p each way). Tanya advised that on Sunday Beeses hold an afternoon barbecue, starting at 14.00, so it would be advisable to bring a picnic. Action: Tanya to e-mail Rob a risk assessment.

- Quiz night - Tuesday 5 September at St George Community Centre. The quiz would start at 7.30. FOTH members were encouraged to form teams. The entry fee would be £5 per team. Kit would ask the questions. Other LNRs and community groups in Bristol would be invited to join in.

Action: Susan, Helen, Rob and Kit to liaise over arrangements.

- Volunteers Workshops and Bat Walk: Tuesday 12 September, Hanham Folk Centre from 19.00 – 10.15 (approx). Sally circulated a poster from Avon Valley Partnership about workshops to a) discuss how to research the history of a site, or b) find out more about raising funds for environmental projects. After the workshops, Dan Merrett, the Batscapes Project Officer would talk about bat conservation before leading a stroll around Conham River Park to hunt for bats using detectors. Anyone wishing to attend MUST book a place in advance by contacting Paula Spiers on 0117 922 4325 or paula_spiers@bristol-city.gov.uk.

Date of next meeting: Thursday 21 September 2006.