

## NOTE OF MEETING

**Thursday 7th February 2019 7.15 - 9pm**

### **Summerhill Methodist Church, 5 Air Balloon Road**

Present: Susan (Chair), Rob (WPO), Jo (minutes), Fabian (Cllr), Judith, Arielle (Young Rangers), Margaret (Treasurer), Mali (Natural Learners), Sophia, Elaine.

#### **1. Approve December minutes**

The minutes for the December AGM were approved.

#### **2. Projects**

- Progress on Access to Nature: Rob reported that he is currently in the process of getting the work to lay a new path for improved wheelchair access to the play area priced up by Bristol City Council (BC). Dependent on whether the quotes are covered by the funding we have set aside (from Enover Communities Trust, Ibstock Enover and the match funding from the council), we will then decide what our next plan of action needs to be - either asking for extra money or looking into improving the existing path to the chimney on top of this work.

- ParkWork, woodland path waymarkers: Money left over from Avon Frome Partnership funding will be used to rebuild some of the broken steps down to the woodland from the field and for tidying up the area behind the access from Crews Hole road. ParkWork have done some strimming before the birdnesting season starts.

- Wild Play: Mali reported that she has finished her report which will be sent to Nineveh Charitable Trust who funded the Natural Learners project. Mali also reported that she has almost finished a new funding application and asked Susan if she would check it over when it is convenient. Susan is shortly going to be in contact with Nineveh regarding the dates of their upcoming meeting and wondered if it would be a good idea to include the report with her email - Mali agreed. Mali announced that she has hired a freelancer to help her run the project who has the relevant experience and skills required (she runs her own forest school). Mali will need this help when her co-worker Amy starts her maternity leave in the spring. Mali reported that there are 4 outdoor learning sessions organised with The Hive (a centre run by Mencap) using part of the funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. With wriggle room Susan has managed to stretch the funding to cover the hire of a mini bus to escort the group to and from the centre in Kingswood. This part of the project has been a learning curve the experience will help with future activities with this group of the community. Susan noted that the National Lottery Heritage Fund, were particularly interested about our plans to reach out the the wider community.

- Protecting Nature: Susan reported that part of this pot of funding is for new fencing at the boundary of Troopers Hill road. The existing fencing was of a good quality (Oak) but has deteriorated over time and needs replacing. The work has been delayed slightly not to coincide with the traffic calming project which was carried out during January. This work will commence shortly.

- Defibrillator update: Susan announced that the defibrillator is now installed on the back of Woodwise academy (Didac Ltd), adjacent to the river path and is now ready for use for anyone who needs it.

Bull Inn: Rob reported that the order protecting the pub from a change of use has now expired but as there is no immediate threat to the pub there is no urgency on the matter. When we reapply, we will need to put in a fresh application as the previous one cannot be renewed and 21 signatures from the local community will be required. This will ensure the use of the building is not changed, without

a planning application, from a pub into something which would be less valuable to the community such as a mini Tesco.

### **3. Conservation work on Troopers Hill**

- Heritage Fund update to Conservation Management Plan: Rob explained that the funder has changed its name from the Heritage lottery Fund to the National Lottery Heritage Fund and they are now putting more focus on green nature and sustainability. They have also made the allocation of grants simpler with one scheme instead of lots of different funding pots. Susan reported that we recently hired Rupert Higgins from Wessex Ecological Consultancy to rewrite our management plan using the grant from them. Rupert Higgins has been visiting Troopers Hill since the 1990's and is well known as a Bristol naturalist and ecologist. Susan handed out the draft plan of the compartments which shows the hill is now divided into 17 compartments rather than 12, as it has been in previous years. Each compartment needs to be managed differently and the plan is used to organise work parties and agreeing which work FOTH can manage at their work parties and which work BCC are to be responsible for. The plan has been sent back to Rupert for him to modify and Susan now needs to get back to him with any comments we might have but explained that we are almost there with this work. When we have a final version which we are happy with, it will be used to set out a formal agreement between BCC and ourselves. Rupert has done all the work which also includes information of all the habitats which exist on the hill and explanations of why we carry out the work we do. Susan commented that Rupert's work has been very good value for money. It is a living document and is reviewed every year.

- National Lottery Heritage Fund works: Susan reported that BCC did their bit to raise an order for Green Mantle Ecosophy Ltd to carry out winter works. Brown areas have appeared on 3 areas of the hill showing where the works which have been completed. We asked them to remove the scrub which was marching out from the woodland area, remove about a third of the gorse and clear way for contractors to start work on the new fences at the bottom of Troopers Hill road. There will be enough money left over to bring Green Mantle back next winter and to review the gorse again. Gorse is more difficult to control on Troopers Hill as burning it away is not an option as a method of control which is often used at other locations. Bristol City Council (BCC) has done a really good job even though they are stretched for staff. Susan says she intends to write and thank them again for all they have done - she will ensure that this is not overlooked as we are always quick to criticise, so it is only fair that they receive a thank you when we are pleased with their work.

- Bristol Parks Winter Conservation works: Rob reported that on Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> December ParkWork (a scheme that helps people to gain horticultural skills and work experience whilst maintaining public parks) helped reinstall the refurbished Geology Interpretation board. They also dug out some channels for drainage and finished off clearing some areas of broom, guided by the conservation management plan. They were also back on the same day as the January work party and worked around Sally's glade.

- Volunteer conservation work parties and other works: Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> January saw a good turnout and some new faces. The group removed saplings and broom on the south facing slopes. Susan is committed, by the terms of the grant, to informing at least 15 people about conservation work plans, so gave a briefing at the start of the work party and handed out questionnaires to the volunteers at the end of the work party. Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> January was another successful session when the group worked above the gulley. The session on the 2<sup>nd</sup> February unfortunately needed to be cancelled due to the hill being too slippery from the snow the day previous. Rob and Susan picked up broken sleds which had been discarded which many of the visitors to the hill had also helped to do. The public are being kept informed about the work being done on the hill via the St George & Redfield Voice publications. The next Thursday work parties are on 21<sup>st</sup> February, 21<sup>st</sup> March and 18<sup>th</sup> April and the next Saturday work parties are planned for 2<sup>nd</sup> March and 6<sup>th</sup> April. Susan informed

the group that a work party leader is needed for the 6<sup>th</sup> April - Mali volunteered and will check her availability.

#### **Action (1) Mali**

#### **4. Troopers Hill Young Rangers (Future Proof Parks) – update**

Rob reported that he, Mali, Arielle and Susan attended a training session in Lockleaze to learn about safeguarding and engagement with young people to help them work with the new Young Rangers. The project is a pilot and we are one of the 1<sup>st</sup> park groups they are working with. Over Christmas the project advertised for volunteers to become Young Rangers and there are 6 young people who have been accepted, a few of which are working towards a Duke of Edinburgh award. Susan and Rob reported that they plan to take them on a walk around the hill with Arielle and are looking forward to meeting them. The volunteers are currently doing a training course about conservation and learning other skills to help them in their roles. The group agreed it was a good idea particularly as it will add different angles to the work we do and help us with social media reporting and data collecting.

#### **5. Other Troopers Hill issues and news**

- City of Nature Challenge: This challenge starts in April and involves cities around the world competing to see who can make the most observations of nature, find the most species and engage the most people. Rob announced that last year, Bristol & Bath came 7<sup>th</sup> in the world but if you scored on the number of records per square kilometre we would have been first. Other cities who scored higher, like San Francisco, are much bigger in terms of area. Rob explained that there is an app called iNaturalist which can be used to enter recordings. To use it you just need to submit a photograph of your sighting and the app will then try and identify it - the clearer the picture is, the better. Your observation is then shared with other users of the app and needs to be verified by someone to be recorded as an entry. Susan and Rob successfully recorded a sighting of 'Bath Asparagus' when they were testing out the app in France. GPS is used within the app to verify the whereabouts of the observation.

- Spider survey: Susan had news that Shelley McManmon, a former work party volunteer will be coming back to do a spider survey on the hill. She made the first record of a 'Purseweb spider' whilst walking across the hill. Her interest in conservation led her to go on to a study a degree in conservation. She is currently studying in Zimbabwe.

- Replacement dog bin: Susan explained how the design of the dog bin, fixed to the fence, at the entrance half way up Troopers Hill road isn't working as the bags end up all over the ground when the bin itself is not full. BCC is funding a new replacement bin which will be freestanding. There will be a short period of time when there will not be a bin in place and so we need to make sure the public are aware of this. Susan explained how putting up laminated posters doesn't work well - the posters are slashed or cable ties cut, the reason for this remains a mystery! This is the last of the 'old style' dog bins to be replaced with a better design and should help improve the issue we have with dog poo being left on the hill. Although it seems to be less of an issue nowadays it is still a problem and a danger to children and work party volunteers. Mali checks the area for dog poo as part of a risk assessment before her toddler group sessions begin, but it remains to be a problem when the group are moving around the hill. Susan noted that there is no easy solution and we need to be careful how we approach the issue with dog walkers who we welcome on the hill, particularly as they are a good provider of natural security and take part in litter picking. It has been known for some dog walkers to clear up other dog's mess to account for any mess they might have accidentally missed from their own dog. Being a dog walker herself, Jo agreed that it is hard to identify which dog walkers are the issue and most do their best to be vigilant.

## **6. St George Strollers**

Susan explained that Friends of Troopers Hill raised the funds to start this walking group in 2011 with the support of Bristol City Council's Bristol Walk for Health scheme. Bristol City Council has now deleted the role of the council officer whose role included running the Bristol Walk for Health scheme, to save money. This means that more than 20 walking groups across the city will need to find a way of either creating a new, replacement Walking for Health scheme, move into another existing scheme or become an independent walking group. Bristol City Council is being helpful in extending the insurance until June whilst the groups work out alternatives. The group will remain until the 'Walking for Health' scheme until then. Susan attended a recent meeting with the leaders of the group when the introduction of a voluntary donation was discussed. In order to cover the costs of running the group which includes the cost of Hi Vis vests (quoted £204), insurance (quoted £350) and bus fares for volunteers, a donation of £1 per walker would be enough to keep the group ticking over. This shouldn't be an issue as in the past walkers had been asked to donate £2 and it was never a problem for anyone. The group is one of over 20 in the city, many are only open for the over 55s, but St George Strollers like to be accessible to everyone, including children. The volunteers consist of a lead walker, back walker and photographer and there are 2 walks a month. The group is exploring avenues to keep cost down, but all is looking positive and is moving forward.

## **7. Events**

- Star gazing: A range of dates have been put forward and anyone interested in coming up the hill to join astronomers from Bristol Astronomical Society, including FOTH committee member Rod (a retired meteorologist), can express their interest via Eventbrite. It is dependent on weather which of the potential dates the event goes ahead on, if at all, but the forecast is looking hopeful. Susan reported it is looking likely to be Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> February. When the date is confirmed, all those who have expressed an interest will be emailed and the first 25 to respond are allocated a place. Susan asked Sophia if she would be available to help carry some of the equipment up the hill which she said she should be able to help with.

- Dawn Chorus: Susan announced the date for this event will be 27<sup>th</sup> April. She will put this event up on Eventbrite - there will be 25 spaces available. The walk (which is funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund), starts at 5am prompt and is led by Ed Druit. Ed is known well in the bird world and has written a book about Peregrine Falcons. Susan will research to find if a local cafe will be open to offer breakfast at the very early time of 7am, when the walk will have finished.

- Other events: 19<sup>th</sup> May the Avon Valley walk to be led by Rob. Susan announced that there will be another fungi Foray in November led by Doreen and John Bailey of North Somerset Fungi Group. Troopers Hill is noted to be an important site because of its acidic soil which is helpful to certain species of fungi. The report from this will go on our website. Our annual Bugs n Beasties event is planned for Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> August.

## **8. Networking**

- Community Fayre at St Aidans: Susan reported that the fayre is scheduled for Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> March 11am – 2pm at St Aidans Church and hall. This year the fayre does not fall on the same day as our work party. There will be a range of community groups there, local councillors, Kerry McCarthy the local MP and the Police. It is a useful event for getting to know community groups in the area and networking. Margaret and Jo volunteered to cover the stall for part of the time and will double check their availability.

## **Action(2) Margaret Jo**

- St George & Redfield Voice: Susan is thinking of doing the next article on St George Strollers and the Dawn Chorus walk but if anyone has any other ideas to please let her know. She suggested that the new Young Rangers may want to write something in due course.

- Parks Charity: Rob reported that this new charity has been set up to help raise money to enhance the parks in Bristol and Bath. They are in the process of finding trustees and Rob has been nominated as the Chair of the interim board. Rob explained how funding for Bristol's parks had been cut but the charity not be looking to make up for those cuts. Funds raised would go to projects that would not be covered by the base level of parks maintenance provided by the councils. The charity will be looking to local businesses and residents for their support. Bristol is leading the way with this work at the moment and it is a good opportunity to create employment – Bristol City Council is recruiting a volunteer Coordinator for Bristol as their contribution to the project and are waiting for employment checks to go through. The successful candidate will work with a part-time volunteer Coordinator from Bath. The council had put in the bid to set up the charity using funding from Nesta and the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The Councillor for St George West (also cabinet member whose remit includes Parks and deputy Mayor for Bristol) fully backs the project.

### **9. The Troopers Hill Shopping List**

Susan asked the group if there were any more projects we need to plan beyond regular maintenance and conservation work. Since FOTH was set up in 2003, we have raised money for various things such as play equipment, refurbishment of the steps, fencing, wheelchair accessible paths, benches and dog bins, and gradually all of these have been ticked off the list. The group agreed that no more benches are needed, and hand rails are not appropriate as it is a nature reserve – also it might encourage people to venture further around the hill than they are capable of. No realistic suggestions were put forward, but the group will think it over.

### **Next meeting**

Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> April 2019 7.15 – 9pm, in the back room of Summerhill Methodist Church, 5 Air Balloon Road, St George, BS5 8LB