

Troopers Hill Access to Nature Completion Report – 1st October 2020

See also www.troopers-hill.org.uk/waystonature

Enovert Community Trust Agreement No 1038

Ibstock Enovert Trust Agreement No 932

Aims of The Project

‘Access to Nature’ was part of our larger ‘Ways to Nature’ project at Troopers Hill aimed at improving access to the hill for all, while ensuring it is protected and properly managed.

This part of the project was to construct a new path across Troopers Hill Field and to upgrade the existing wheelchair accessible route that was no longer fit for purpose.

Bristol City Council made it clear that this work did not fall within their statutory obligations and could not be funded from their parks budget.



The new path links a play area constructed in 2016 to the entrance to Troopers Hill Local Nature Reserve across an area of Troopers Hill Field that becomes particularly muddy in winter. The lack of a path discouraged visitors to the Hill from using the play area and more significantly discouraged people who access the site at Summerhill Terrace from exploring the Nature Reserve.

The wheelchair access route to the Hill was via an unsurfaced track, this is also used by Parks maintenance vehicles and had degraded to the point where it was uncomfortable for wheelchair users to use; indeed some found it impossible.



“Jim took me up on Troopers Hill last week. I am in a wheel chair and unfortunately once we left the tarmac path and reached the loosely gravelled path from Malvern Road, it was impossible to get to the Chimney. We were going to take photos for our Grandsons in America who walked their regularly with their Mum when they were over in the Summer. I had to be abandoned and Jim went on alone!”

Funding for Access to Nature

Funding for this part of the project came from three sources:

Enovert Community Trust Agreement No 1038 - £25,000

Ibstock Enovert Trust Agreement No 932 - £15,000

Bristol City Council Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) - £25,000

The sum from Bristol City Council included £2,500 as third party match funding for Enovert Community Trust giving an overall total of £62,500

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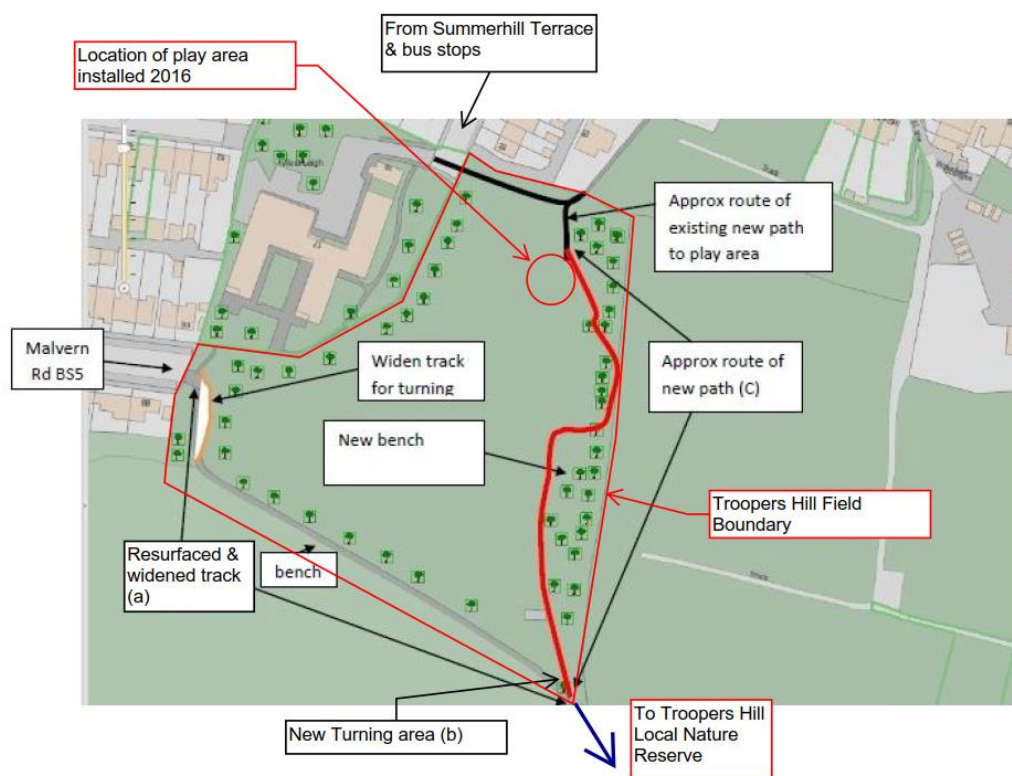
Funding for the overall 'Ways to Nature' project also included an award of £44,800 from the Heritage Lottery Fund for the 'Protecting Nature' element of the project. This, together with other smaller grants, meant Friends of Troopers Hill received around £125,000 for the whole project.

In addition to the works described here, Ways to Nature included new fencing, an updated conservation plan and some conservation work as well as events and a new interpretation board on the Local Nature Reserve and some way-marking in the adjacent Troopers Hill Woods.

Work Completed

The proposed work had three major elements:

- a) Resurface and widen the track across the Field so it is suitable for wheelchair use and for the size of vehicles used by Bristol Parks for grass cutting and emptying bins.
- b) Form a proper turning area at the end of the track, so that vehicles can turn safely and will no longer create a muddy area at the entrance to the Hill.
- c) Install a new tarmac path on the east side of Troopers Hill Field connecting the new path to the children's play area to the wheelchair accessible path to Troopers Hill.



The new path was the most visible part of the project. Troopers Hill Field is an ex-landfill site with a clay capping under the topsoil. This results in rainwater perching on the clay so that in winter it becomes very muddy, without the path this formed a physical barrier to access across the site.

The route for the path was agreed with the Council's tree officer so that it did not have an adverse effect on the trees in the Field. A new memorial bench installed in 2017 was sited so that it would be alongside the new path

Delays to Commencement

Confirmation of the award of the three strands of funding were received in September, October and November 2018.

Given the ground conditions likely during the winter, the works were scheduled to be constructed during the summer of 2019. The works were to be managed by Bristol Parks Landscapes Team.

Unfortunately due to staffing issues works were unable to be progressed during the summer and it was agreed that works would have to be delayed until the Spring.

Both Enovert Community Trust and Ibstock Enovert Trust kindly agreed to extend the completion date set out in the funding agreements.

Construction - First Phase

Work finally started in February 2020 with erection of Herras fencing on the route of the path.



While it was known that the ground conditions would not be ideal, the plan was that by the time reinstatement was

being carried out in late March the ground should be drying out and this would be the ideal time for the reinstated path edges to be seeded. Construction of the path was planned as the first phase of works to ensure that there would be access across the Field to the Nature Reserve on a firm surface while the track was closed off for that phase of the works.

Unfortunately February & early March proved to be exceptionally wet resulting in progress being slower than hoped and vehicle movement around the site causing more damage that would otherwise have been the case.

However, by mid-March the timber edging and stone base was in place over most of the length of the path.





The route of the path was varied slightly from that planned, so that the bench was set back from the path rather than being at the path edge, this created a more attractive seating area.

Impact of Coronavirus Pandemic

The national 'lockdown' on 23rd March 2020 brought work to a total stop. At this stage the Field was very muddy and it was necessary for the fencing to remain in place to prevent contamination of the stone base and also because the timber edging presented a trip hazard.

Work remained suspended until 27th April. Frustratingly, this suspension period coincided with an unusually dry and warm spell of weather which would have been ideal for completing the works. As it was it meant that ruts formed by the movement of construction vehicles became baked in.

The pandemic continued to have an impact after the restart. Particular issues were the with the supply of tarmac but there were also difficulties with a general shortage of labour and some key staff 'shielding' and having child care issues.

Both Enover Community Trust and Ibstock Enover Trust kindly agreed to further extend the completion date set out in the funding agreements due to the pandemic to the end of September 2020.

Construction – Second Phase

On restart, the stone and edging to the final section of the path was soon completed and then moved on to the turning circle.



Unfortunately delays to tarmac supply meant that the surfacing of the path could not be done as planned to allow it to open. Rather than the delay the works to the track it was decided (given the dry conditions) to provide a temporary access across the grass and part of the turning circle while the works progressed.

Work then progressed with the concrete kerbs and stone base to the track, with tarmac works to the path and then the track being done as resources became available.



Path & Track Opened

Completion of the tarmac works to both the path and the track allowed the fencing to be removed and the path and track to be brought into use on 4th June 2020.

At this stage works to complete the topsoil at the path edges and other tidying up still remained to be done.



Construction – Third Phase

Continuing issues, including staff shielding, caused difficulties in bring the contractor back to site to complete the reinstatement works.

The works that needed completing to the path & track were some snagging items, plus top soiling at the path edges – it was decided that this was now to be done by the Council's in house team.

In addition the path at the turning circle was designed to minimise the steepness of the slope for wheelchair users. This presented two problems which should have been foreseen but weren't fully appreciated until too late - partly due to reduced visits by the project manager due to Covid-19. There was an area where more able people cut the corner across a triangle of grass (meaning grass would never get established) and the wheelchair route did not align with the existing path on the Hill, so needed an additional tie-in area to be surfaced.

A resolution was agreed which involved stone surfacing to the two areas - this was to avoid making an even larger area of tarmac.

This work was completed during September 2020 to meet the extended completion date in the funding agreements and also to allow grass at the path edges to become established before the winter.



Feedback on Path Opening

Very soon after the path opened we received this message from a wheelchair user:

"Hello! I made it up to Troopers yesterday and went on the new path!!! It was amazing, made so much difference to how comfortable it is in my wheelchair, so smooooooth!!! and also it made it so much quieter, I could go along near my mum and hear her talking, but also, I could go along and still hear the birds 😊 the grit under my chair used to be very noisy, so that's made a huge difference. I just wanted to say a massive thank you to all involved x"



The focus of the work had been to improve access to the Nature Reserve across the Field; however, we had not anticipated two other benefits.

The first was that the track provided an excellent area for young children to learn to ride their bicycles and the second was that the now completed tarmac circuit around the Field would prove so popular. We have seen young children on bikes, skates, scooters etc as well as joggers and older people walking using the 550m circuit.

The full benefit will of course been seen this winter, particularly if we have a wet spell.



A further unexpected benefit was that it was not possible for the grass to be cut on the area surrounding the path while it was fenced off during lockdown in the Spring growing season. Having seen the appearance of this area with long grass Friends of Troopers Hill have agreed with Bristol Parks a revised mowing regime so that this will be left long in future years bring some ecological benefits.

Publicity and Celebration

We received good publicity in the local press for the award of the grant in early 2019.

Unfortunately the coronavirus restrictions mean that we have not yet been able to hold our planned celebration event, which will hopefully bring more publicity.

But we will organise one as soon as we are able.

January, 2019

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NEWS

Funding approved for improved access to Troopers Hill in St George

FRIENDS of Troopers Hill have secured funding of over £60,000 to improve access to the popular Local Nature Reserve, Troopers Hill.

When the work is completed next summer, visitors to the reserve crossing Troopers Hill Field from Summerhill Terrace and the new play area will be able to use a new path and those accessing from Malvern Road will find the existing rough track has been resurfaced.

These improvements will particularly benefit those in wheelchairs and parents and carers with young children in buggies. Access from the play area is particularly difficult in the winter because the Field becomes waterlogged and muddy at times.

Both Troopers Hill Field and the Local Nature Reserve are owned by Bristol City Council. Friends of Troopers Hill have

The group's application to the Area Committee was championed by Councillor Fabian Buckels who represents the St George-Troopers Hill Ward.

Susan Acton-Campbell, Chair of Friends of Troopers Hill, said: "We know that the lack of a path is discouraging visitors to the Hill from using the play area and more significantly deterring people who access the site at Summerhill Terrace from exploring the Nature Reserve. We are delighted that we have now gained sufficient funding for this project to proceed".

Angela Heymonds, Trust Secretary of both Envoert Community Trust and Istock



organisations, Bristol Parks and local Councillors are willing to support Friends of Troopers Hill to improve the Nature Reserve, and access to it, is in a large part thanks to the strong support we receive from local residents and particularly those who volunteer at our regular conservation work parties to help look after the reserve."

Angela continued: "This is just one of the many community projects Istock Envoert Trust has funded through the Landfill Communities Fund (LCF). The scheme offers funding to projects that benefit communities living within 10 miles of a landfill site. Groups interested in submitting projects should visit our website to find out more."