

Friends of Troopers Hill - It's Your Neighbourhood 2014

1. Aims of the Project

Troopers Hill is a Local Nature Reserve extending over 21 acres (8.4 hectares) of acid heath and grassland on a pennant sandstone hillside overlooking the River Avon. This wild and romantic site supports rare plants and wildlife and provides local people with a space for relaxation and recreation.

Friends of Troopers Hill is a community conservation group of primarily local residents, formed in December 2003 to:

- provide a friendly community focus for people who care about Troopers Hill
- undertake practical conservation tasks
- organise public events, including walks and talks
- work with Bristol City Council Parks department to ensure Troopers Hill is properly managed.

Our constitution is at <http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/constitutionE.pdf>

2. Achievements since the IYN judging of 2013

In addition to our usual activities (see section 3), we have:

- 1) Created a 90 minute audio trail with commentaries from invertebrate, trees, birds, geology, fungi specialists and ecologists, produced by our Membership Secretary, media professional Kit Elliott. Download it to your phone from <http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/trails>
- 2) Advised by dendrologist, Tony Titchen, with Community Spaces funding, we created a 26-tree identification trail through Troopers Hill woodland
- 3) Together with Bristol Astronomical Society, we held two free very successful star gazing sessions on Troopers Hill in January and February 2014. We are seeking a possible 'Dark Skies' site designation.
- 4) Obtained funding from St George West Community First for a falconry display this autumn, highlighting the position of raptors in the food chain
- 5) Hosted work parties from Badminton School, Good Gym and Lloyds Bank cutting back scrub and maintaining trails. Local scouts, cubs and beavers will be putting up bird boxes, creating poster artwork and testing the tree trail just before the forthcoming IYN judging (July 2014).
- 6) Audited the dog fouling problem on Troopers Hill by clearing and quantifying dog faeces and highlighting fresh 'deposits.' Surveyed residents' ideas for addressing the dog fouling and control issues. We are pursuing the idea of holding free dog training 'taster' sessions. More information on www.troopers-hill.org.uk/cleanup.
- 7) Our Summer newsletter contained an article explaining why Troopers Hill features in a Geography 'A' level textbook. Geography lecturer Fred Lewis of Bridgwater College wrote, "It is a great example of a local scale conservation project that meets the needs of maintaining biodiversity yet involves local people in its management. [...] Whilst Troopers Hill may be a relatively small plot of land it is significant far beyond East Bristol." <http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/news/Summer14.pdf>
- 8) Supported local childminders in setting up a Forest School for toddlers.

3. What we have achieved since we started

In December 2003 paths were obscured under vegetation, large quantities of litter had accumulated, and, most importantly, scrub was invading the acid grass and heathland that justifies the Local Nature Reserve classification. The site had no park keeper and maintenance visits took place only for brief periods every 6-8 weeks.

Now the site is well managed according to an annually-updated 5-year management plan <http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/plan.htm> agreed with Bristol City Council. This plan links to the

relevant sections of the UK and Bristol Biodiversity Action Plans. The latter is supported by bodies including Bristol City Council, Avon Wildlife Trust and Natural England. Regular photographic and species surveys are funded by Bristol Parks and ourselves, and/or are performed by students as part of their studies. The site has achieved Green Flag status each year from 2007/8 to 2013/14 (Bristol City Council has not applied for any Green Flags in 2014/15, having no staff resource to support the process).

We organise monthly Saturday work parties and some evening ones, mainly addressing encroaching scrub and litter picking. Bristol City Council has allocated a part-share of a Community Park Keeper (CPK) to Troopers Hill, to undertake machine-based maintenance, while Friends of Troopers Hill continue with manual tasks that would not otherwise be practicable, e.g. removing brambles growing in and around broom plants, and pulling out bracken amongst the heather, etc. Over 50 different local people have volunteered at our work parties.

In 2006, to preserve a boundary, 20 volunteers planted an 80-metre hedge of native species. Local residents were consulted about hedge management: the majority favoured cutting over hedge-laying. Volunteers hand-pruned the hedge annually until December 2012 when it was sufficiently mature for a flail cut. In Winter 2013 wet conditions precluded the use of tracked machinery on the adjoining ground and the hedge was not cut.

We have 400 members on our free membership list, 385 Facebook 'friends' and 295 Twitter followers. We maintain an informative and regularly updated web site www.troopers-hill.org.uk and publish a quarterly newsletter which is, for the most part, either e-mailed or hand-delivered to recipients.

Notices and details of all the activities are posted on the site. Our meetings are open to all. We focus our publicity locally, encouraging people to walk, cycle or use the bus.

We are proud to have founded a Walking for Health group, the St George Strollers, which celebrated its third anniversary in May 2014. The Strollers have provided over 75 walks attended by over 90 individuals.

In addition to our monthly weekend and summer evening work parties and regular meetings, we have organised over 100 free public events since 2004, including guided nature, history and geology walks, concerts, dog shows, tai chi classes and craft activities for children and families. Since 2003 Friends of Troopers Hill have raised over £100,000 for different projects. We work closely with Bristol Parks, are members of the Bristol Parks Forum, and are represented on the St George Neighbourhood Partnership.

Troopers Hill is a venue for educational visits by primary school and 'A' level pupils. The site provides study material for University undergraduates. Our attractive and informative website promotes Friends of Troopers Hill as a first point of contact for students seeking further information about the local nature reserve.

4. What we are aiming for in the future

We will continue with conservation work and promoting Troopers Hill, particularly via events. We aim to attract new members from the local community who will contribute to the care and promotion of the Local Nature Reserve. Better dog control and reducing dog fouling will remain a priority.

Next year we shall seek funding to remodel the entrance at the foot of Troopers Hill using designs already funded by an earlier grant. A listed historic chimney stands at the entrance, representing the local coal-mining heritage of coal mining locally. The plans include a base for cherry-pickers for chimney maintenance. An existing interpretation board contains details of the historic structure. We also need to replace the deteriorating wooden fencing to continue to keep out motorcycles. We predict that resource cuts to Bristol Parks staffing and services will present a challenge for the years ahead.