

NOTE OF MEETING

Thursday, 2 February, 2017 7.15pm

Summerhill Methodist Church, 5 Air Balloon Rd

Present: Susan (Chair), Rob (WPO), Rod (Committee member), Rich, Mary, Elaine, Fabian (Cllr), Judith, Margaret (minutes); Mali Kedward and Ami Stone (part)
Apologies: Norman

1. Approve September and AGM minutes

Rod requested an amendment to the wording of Para 8 in the September minutes to make it clear that he is just one of the administrators for the Facebook page, not the sole administrator. Amendment agreed and noted.

The AGM minutes were approved.

Susan reported that after the AGM Chris Deane, who had taken a lead on the play area project, had stepped down from the committee due to a lack of time. Richard Evans, who had also worked on the play area project and is a regular volunteer at work parties, had offered to become a committee member. Those present were delighted to co-opt Richard onto the committee. Rich has also agreed to be an administrator for the Facebook page.

2. Networking (part of this item taken early).

- **Toddler group and after school club on Troopers Hill:** Amy and Mali introduced themselves and explained that they are both environmental educators who deliver formal and informal educational projects in outdoor settings. Susan has shown them around Troopers Hill and they would like to do something on the hill for families, such as a toddler group and after school group, and also approach local primary schools to offer sessions, for example on mini-beasts or orienteering. They would run a pilot programme initially to gauge interest and to gain evidence and testimonials so that they could then apply for funding to run the groups next year. They would welcome any feedback on these proposals and also any links to local schools.

Mary asked how often the groups would run. They replied that the toddler group and after school group would run weekly. Mary also mentioned that Air Balloon School already has a Forest School teacher (Stacey). She asked how the proposed plans would work with other users of the hill, particularly the dog walkers who use the field and hill regularly, and often after school. Mali replied that they would be working with small, contained groups so they should not interfere with other hill users. Rod asked if they had contingency plans for bad weather. Amy replied that they would be advising parents to provide waterproofs and wellingtons; they might also use the shelter of the woods if it was raining, and in high winds they would not run the groups. Mary asked what they would do about dog and fox fouling. Mali replied that it was always part of their safety check to take a tour around the area to check for fouling at

the beginning of the sessions. Mary said she assumed they would take any litter home: they agreed they would.

Rob commented that the Scouts and Brownies already use the hill for outdoor activities, and Susan added that there had previously been a toddler group on the hill every Tuesday morning in the woods for some years. Both saw encouraging children to use the hill as a good thing. Mary asked how much they were planning to charge. Mali replied that they would start off with a low cost such as £3 per session, to encourage families on low incomes to take part. Fabian said he assumed they would be covered for insurance. They said they would and that they had already spoken to Teija, the new Parks officer, who had asked for all the relevant documentation. Susan asked if those present would support this project and any funding application. There was general agreement, although Mary said that she was still concerned about what they would do if a dog ran through the group. Amy said they would cover this possibility with the group at the beginning of the session and would talk through with the children what they should do if a dog approached. In the past they had acted out this sort of scenario with children so that they would be prepared.

Rich asked whether there was a forum for engaging with dog walkers. Susan replied that she had already initiated this and that Mary had been invited to attend FOTH meetings as a liaison person with the other dog walkers. Mary said that she had set up a separate Facebook page for Friends of dog walkers on Troopers Hill. Susan emphasised that she did appreciate the dog walkers and all they do to look after the hill, for example by picking up litter.

Elaine suggested that Amy and Mali contact the Family Liaison Officer at Summerhill School.

Amy and Mali circulated some draft posters and ideas for a natural learning education programme.

Susan has mentioned to Amy and Mali that FOTH has bug pots and nets that they would be welcome to borrow. FOTH has also received a donation of £500, following the closure of Children of Summerhill Out of School Club, to be used to support children and families in local area, and she proposed that this money could be used to buy more bug pots and nets as well as paying Rupert Higgins for the Bugs and Beasties session in August. If there were other materials that FOTH needed for outdoor activities with children then the donation could also be used for those and Amy and Mali would be welcome to borrow these. Rob added that the funding could also be used to maintain the trails on the hill, which are useful for outdoor activities with children.

Mali asked if there were any storage facilities on the hill that they could use. Susan said there was nothing on the hill itself: Rob and Susan's garage is used for FOTH storage but it is very full. Rich lives adjacent to the hill and said he might be able to free up some space in his garage. Mary suggested they contact the allotments association to see if there is any storage there they

could use. Rob added that Street Goat are using the allotments as well and they might have space for storage.

Amy asked about contact details for the allotments.

Action: Susan to forward details of contacts to Amy.

Next steps: Amy and Mali will now work on providing more detail on their proposals, making contacts and providing documentation.

3. Issues and thank yous for Parks staff.

Winter works 2016/17: Susan reported that two Parks staff are currently doing the winter works on the hill. Susan has pointed out to them the things that had been missed previously.

Preventing wear and tear on refurbished steps: Rob reported that he had spoken to Parks about this. The spending freeze should not prevent this work happening, as no new materials need to be purchased. Parks will use timber they already have in stock to divert water from the steps. This work should be done in the next few weeks.

New Parks Operations Co-ordinator: Rob explained that Teija Ahjokoski is now our main contact for Parks and she and Pete Staddon have already been to have a look at the hill with Rob and Susan.

Rod asked about the Management Plan. Rob replied that the photo survey report has now been received and work parties are already working on the areas highlighted in the report, mainly taking out areas of broom and bramble where they are preventing heather from flourishing.

4. Work parties and other works:

- As above, Rob reported that recent work parties had been focusing on taking out areas of broom that are preventing heather from flourishing.
- Work parties before next meeting: Saturdays 4th February, 4th March, 1st April and 6th May.
- Attracting more people to work parties/survey of good dates/times: Susan has drafted a survey asking people about their preferred days and times and will send this out with next newsletter. She added that there was a very good turn out (10 people) for the first work party of the new year on 7th January, including some new volunteers.
- New Little Elizabeth's Bench: Although FOTH had raised enough money for the bench, the Council's spending freeze had meant that it cannot be ordered yet. (It is being ordered through the Council to save on delivery costs and VAT). Hopefully the spending freeze will finish at the end of March and it can be ordered then.
- The new geology interpretation board has been installed near the chimney and the other board next to it has also been refurbished as the geology board came in under budget.

- Plans for fencing on Troopers Hill Road. Susan explained that there are three sections of fencing on Troopers Hill Road that need replacing. The proposal is to replace with black metal fencing and metal kissing gates, as at Greendown, as this will last longer than wooden fencing. The first step is to obtain estimates of cost, and Teija is currently finding out how best to go about this. Fabian offered to help in any way he could in obtaining funds. Susan explained that, once we have an idea of cost, the next step would be to approach possible funders. There are several possible sources, such as landfill trusts. A decision will also need to be made about whether to apply for three separate lots of funding for each of the three sections of fence, or combine it all into one application. Rob added that there are two options for the fencing at the lower chimney one of which, although more expensive, would enhance the access to the chimney and might therefore be eligible for other sources of funding, such as Heritage Lottery funds.
- Plans for a new path and replacing the track on the Field and the wheelchair access path: Susan explained that this is the other project that needs to be done quite urgently. The path from the Malvern Road entrance is so badly damaged that it is challenging, in current muddy conditions, to push a wheelchair along it. Part of the problem is that Parks are using larger vehicles when coming onto the hill to empty bins and this is churning up the edge of the path. Similarly, the wheelchair access path to the chimney has degraded and needs resurfacing. Teija has suggested covering this path with black slurry, which would be cheaper than replacing with a resin-based surface material. However the colour of the black slurry may be less acceptable. She will obtain costings and recommendations. Thirdly, it would be good to put in a new stretch of path on the field from the play area to meet up with the path on to the field near the allotments. The tree officer needs to check the route for this, and costings need to be obtained. There would also need to be consultation to show it is supported by local people before funding could be obtained.
- Chimney: Rob reported that the work on the upper chimney has now finished, completing the repointing. The work took longer than expected as they found other work that needed doing, including repairs to a significant crack on one side. Both chimneys are now in a better state of repair than they have been for some years. Rob had asked the team repairing the chimney to measure it. They have done this but not provided the information yet. Rich suggested having a competition to guess the height of the chimney (once we have the information).
- Finger post: Susan has approached Jon Gibson at Woodwise Academy about providing a finger post to replace the laminated sign from the lay by on Crews Hole Road directing people towards the new path through the woods. Jon has very kindly agreed to help us with the production of our next newsletter which currently costs us £46 per issue just in printing costs.
- Flag: The 'Welcome to Troopers Hill' flag has been replaced with a new one. Someone had posted a comment on Facebook to say that FOTH did not have planning permission for the new flag so it should be taken down. Susan

contacted Teija at the Council who replied with information confirming the law had changed and planning permission was not needed.

- Oak tree near Greendown entrance: Susan had received an email from someone concerned about the ivy growing on a large oak tree near the Greendown entrance and offering to remove the ivy themselves. Susan replied to say she would contact the tree officer at the Council for their advice and asked the person in the meantime not to do any work on the hill themselves, suggesting they join a work party instead. The advice from the Council is that, although ivy is usually encouraged as it is beneficial for wild life, in this case it would be a good idea to take the ivy down as it could act as a 'sail' if there were strong winds and damage the tree. They suggested cutting the ivy on one bough this year, as long as there were no wood pigeons nesting there, and then another bough next year.

5. Troopers Hill Field

- State of trees: Rob reported that one more tree is to be planted to replace one of the whips that had died. Some of the cages have been removed that were no longer needed. Otherwise it is just a case of keeping an eye on the trees, and he asked that people let him know if they notice any problems with the trees.
- Log Play equipment: this is degrading. The Play Inspection team will keep an eye on it and remove it when necessary.
- Memorial bench, tree sponsorship: Susan has been approached by a family wishing to sponsor a tree and/or put in a memorial bench. They can sponsor an existing tree, but there are no plans for new trees. The family were happy with that proposal. Susan suggested that a memorial bench could be placed part way along the proposed path in the field. Teija will check with Richard Fletcher that this would be agreed. The Council is not currently allowing new benches in parks that have a large number already, but as there are not many on the field this will probably be acceptable.
- Play area: Susan reported that a bin is being installed near the play area at the fork in the path. There will also be a concrete plinth installed at the contractors' entrance to the play area where the ground is eroding. Susan had requested matting but the Council advised concrete would be a better solution. There is contingency money left over from the installation of the play area to pay for these improvements.

6. Events

Rob circulated the new Events leaflet.

The Geology walk on 16th October had been well supported.

AGM/Slideshow: attendance at the AGM had been poor and Susan questioned whether it was worth Rob providing a slide show for the next AGM as it did involve a

considerable amount of work. Rob added that he thought people were less interested in the slide show now as there were plenty of opportunities to see photos all through the year, for example, on Facebook. Margaret agreed with the idea of dropping the slide show and suggested just providing tea/coffee cake after the meeting. Rob suggested having a guest speaker or a talk about the history of the Hill and an exhibition. There was general agreement with the history talk and exhibition idea, although Judith did say that she would have liked the slide shows to continue.

Before next meeting:

Star Gazing – February: Susan needs more volunteers to help carry equipment on the night. Rich could do one of the dates and Mary offered to help.

Action: Susan to send out an email asking for volunteers.

Social event for FOTH: As there was no Christmas social event Susan suggested a picnic on the hill in May to which anyone who has helped in any way with FOTH could be invited, possibly on a Friday night. All were happy with this suggestion.

Action: Susan to send round an email about dates.

St Aidan's Community Fayre: Susan asked for volunteers to man the FOTH stand at this event on March 11th. Mary said she could help with this.

7. Impact of Council Cuts to Parks on Troopers Hill

Susan reported that the Council hope to make Parks 'cost neutral'. They are hoping, for example, that volunteers would be able to raise money to cover the costs of maintaining parks, or that money could be raised by events sponsorship. Bristol Parks Forum do not think this is feasible, and they are meeting Asher Craig, the Cabinet Member whose remit includes Parks, to put their views to her. The budget that the Council is proposing for the coming year cuts spending by £400k for Parks; the 'cost neutral' proposal would be for the following two years, so there is time for discussion. Susan is going to write to Asher Craig to say that, while volunteers can obtain funding for specific projects, they cannot raise funds for maintenance. Fabian added that the Council is in a difficult position and the budget shortfall means that some activities do have to be stopped. The Council is therefore looking at greater commercialisation.

8. Networking

- WI Red: Susan has received a request to lead a walk by WI Redfield which she and Rob will be happy to do. Mary asked whether we ask for donations for this type of event. Susan replied that we do. If it is a commercial organisation we would agree a fee, or for more local groups we would ask for a donation.

- University of Bristol study of dog fouling audit: Susan has not heard any more about this.

Action: Susan to chase.

- Bristol Walking Festival: St George Strollers have offered to do a walk for the festival and Rob will do the Avon Valley Walk as part of the festival. Rob is also helping on another walk with Paula Spiers along the Feeder Canal.

9. Facebook/Twitter/website Update

Numbers of followers on Facebook and Twitter continue to grow.

10. Newsletter

Comments on last one and date/content for next one: The lady who has helped with recent newsletters is free to do one next week. Susan ran through her suggestions for inclusions in the newsletter. Mary suggested adding some more information about the play park.

Susan showed the meeting a plaque that had been made to add to those on the post near the play park to reflect the contribution FOTH made to the park. Fabian said that there should also be one for the St George Neighbourhood Partnership. Susan explained that she had proposed this herself and had contacted the Council, Dundridge and Meadow Vale proposing plaques for all three parks, but then funding to Neighbourhood Partnerships had been cut. After discussion, it was agreed that Susan would forward to Fabian details of the size of plaque and costings, and Fabian would approach the other councillors involved to see if they could raise the money for a plaque.

Action: Susan to forward email and information about plaque to Fabian.

Next meeting

Thursday 11th May at 7.15pm at Summerhill Methodist Church, 5 Air Balloon Road