

NOTE OF MEETING
Thursday, 6th March, 2025. 715pm
Wesley Memorial Church Hall

Present: Susan (Chair), Rob, Fabian, Neil, Fran, Rod, Elaine, Willy and Margaret (minutes)

Apologies: Rosie and Jill.

1. Approve minutes of AGM

The AGM minutes were approved.

2. Nature Conservation on Troopers Hill

Nature conservation work parties:

- Recent: Rob reported that we had held 10 work parties since the last meeting on 12th December, covering several different areas on the hill. There had also been one morning corporate work party, with a group from the DEFRA International Deforestation Team. There had been a bit of light rain on one of the work parties but otherwise we had been lucky with the weather and none had had to be cancelled.

The morning corporate work party had gone well and having a half day work party avoids the problem of not having toilets on site or anywhere to shelter for lunch if it is wet, so Rob suggested that in future we only offer half day sessions. If groups prefer an all-day session there are other organisations that offer these (usually with a charge). All agreed this was sensible. Rob will change the information on the website. Rob also noted that, interestingly, the Thursday work parties have more, young, working volunteers taking part. Fran commented that attendance at work parties has definitely increased over the last few months. Fabian asked whether it would be a good idea to have some sort of storage shed for tools, etc on the site. Susan replied that it would be ideal if the building, currently housing the Intermediate Care Home which is up for sale, could include use of toilets and storage. Elaine wondered whether we could make use of the facilities on the allotments but Rob said that the allotment holders would not be happy for others to have access.

- Plan for 2025 including meadow cut, hedge cut and bracken cutting: Susan said that she would put together a plan for the coming months so that work party leaders will have an idea of what work to undertake. She will remind the Council about the summer bracken cutting, meadow cut (usually in August) and hedge cut (timing varies). The hedge cut was a bit extreme last year and Susan will talk to the Council again about leaving the hedge higher.

The main task for coming work parties will be to tackle the Himalayan Balsam. Green Mantle have done a lot of cutting back (paid for by FoTH and the Council's Stewardship Fund) and we need to keep this area clear so that we can gain access to the area where the Himalayan Balsam grows. At each

work party starting from April the leader should check the bank that has been cut back and clear any brambles, etc.

- Winter Works including contracted work for Himalayan Balsam area: Susan said that the winter work done by Green Mantle had been fantastic as usual and the work done by the Council had also been amazing. The winter work plan was agreed beforehand and the Council had done everything on the list. Susan thought it was the most effective winter work they have ever done and has written to thank them.

3. Fundraising

- Susan reported that Dave Stephenson had given us 50 (new) copies of his book on Crews Hole, Speedwell and St George which Susan has been selling at £10 each (although some people have given more). So far this has raised about £400 and there are only 9 copies left to sell. There have also been donations from the Moss walk and Stargazing.

4. Troopers Hill Field

- Memorial trees and orchard: Susan reported that, under the One Tree Per Child scheme, an orchard has now been planted on Troopers Hill Field. There was consultation beforehand, with only one objection, and a mix of 30 fruit trees were planted on 21st January. Rob said that there had also been one memorial tree planted since the last meeting, and Susan said they were delighted to find that this was a Wild Service Tree. They have become quite rare so it is good that they are being reintroduced to this area. They have a pretty white flower, which the bees and other pollinators love, and the birds love the seeds. The fruits used to be known as 'Chequers', hence local pub names. This tree has already been sponsored but there will be another plot for a tree that someone can sponsor. This will appear on the Council website about April and will be planted next winter.
- East Bristol Intermediate Care Centre: Susan reported that the Council have confirmed that this is to be sold. We will be keeping an eye on what happens to it as it would be good if the entrance to the field from Summerhill Terrace could be improved.

5. Maintenance

- Play area (benches): As reported in a previous meeting, Susan had noticed that the benches in the play area were rotting and had contacted the Play Team who had arranged replacement. They were due to be replaced at the end of February but haven't been replaced yet and the Play Team will follow this up.
- Flytipping: Susan said that flytipping on the Crews Hole layby continues to be a problem. There is more there now which has been reported. The Council's Landscape Team are supposed to be arranging for the layby to be redesigned using money that was allocated 6 years ago. The last email Susan received said that there was to be a pre-contract meeting but she has not received an update.

There is a very committed local resident who notices the flytipping and reports it regularly. Susan and this resident use barriers to block off the layby so that the Council can pick up the flytipping. The same resident has also reported some anti-social behaviour in the woods. Vegetation has been removed from the edge of Lamb Hill with the risk that motorcycles could enter the woods there. Susan and Rob have offered to go and help the resident create a dry hedge this weekend which should be an effective barrier. This resident has also applied for CIL funding to put in fencing.

- Noticeboard: Susan said that, while there are several wonderful information boards around Troopers Hill, there is only an old, battered noticeboard at the Malvern Road entrance, so she would like to install a new information board there, similar to the one at the Summerhill Entrance, but with 4 clipframes on the sides for notices. Susan has put in an application for CIL funding for this.

At the same time Susan has applied for an Active Travel Grant (this is backed by the West of England Combined Authority). Susan has combined the application for the information board with an application for funding for an event to celebrate the 300th walk of the St George Strollers at the end of June. The walk would end at St Anne's House and Susan has applied for funding for light refreshments and rent of a space. Susan has emphasised that the walkers can make use of the local buses (5, and the new 36 and 16) and the noticeboard can be a permanent result of the walk. If this application is successful then Susan will withdraw the CIL application. (We should hear about the Active Travel Grant well before the CIL applications are considered).

Fran has very kindly offered to put up posters around the hill in Susan's absence

6. Events

Past

- Mosses and Liverworts Walk: We held our first Moss walk led by Nick Trapp. This was very interesting and well attended despite the weather. There are about 30 different types of moss on the hill. Willy commented that someone posted on Instagram to say they were disappointed to have missed it and asked if there could be another one. If Nick was willing to do it again then we could think about this for next year.
- Stargazing: This went ahead on Sunday 2nd March and went really well. It is the first time we have been successful in holding this event since 2019. Rod commented that in the end any of the three days earmarked for this event would have been good. Rob added that it was the first time this event has gone ahead since the new path on the field was put in and the path to the chimney resurfaced, which made access much better. Rod pointed out that holding the event on the Sunday, rather than the Saturday, meant that they could have an extra telescope and in the end there were five telescopes and binoculars set up, with 30 people attending. One person had sent a very positive email after the event which Susan has forwarded to Bristol

Astronomical Society (BAS). Donations will be shared with BAS. Rod commented that March is a particular good time of year for stargazing due to the correlation of the stars at sunset.

Future

- Bird Walk on Saturday 15th March at 8 am, led by Ed Drewett. This is fully booked.
- History Walk on Sunday 18th May. Rob is leading this as part of the Walking Festival. People will need to book places on Eventbrite
- Drop in Gazebo on Saturday 31st May from 2.30pm. Fran, Neil, Willy and Margaret offered to help. Helpers to be there at 2pm.

7. St George Strollers

- 300th Walk and grant application – already covered under ‘Funding’
- 2 x special walks at the weekend for St George Active Travel Group: The St George Active Travel Group is a group of local residents hoping to make travel easier by foot, bike and bus. Using the Community Association as backing they have successfully applied for funding for a cycle workshop/event and have approached St George Strollers about providing two walks. Susan’s plan is to do one walk in the north of St George and one in the south. The aim would be to show people how easy it is to reach their GP surgery, Community Centre, Schools, etc by foot. Both walks would take place at weekends and maps of the routes would be provided. The Strollers would be reimbursed for the cost of paper, laminating pouches and printer cartridges.

8. Networking

- Paper Newsletter – due to ill health, this is not likely to happen in the near future
- Should Friends of Troopers have a presence on Bluesky: Rob has looked into having a Bluesky account as we no longer use Twitter. He said that it is much less toxic than Twitter and a lot of people have moved on to it, but at the moment not the Council or the BBC. There is quite a bit to do with nature on there. Fran suggested that we leave it up to Rob to keep an eye on it and he can sign up if something comes up that FOTH would like to be involved with. This was agreed.
- Soil and water sampling project with University of Bristol students for 2025: We had asked the students (2nd year Geography students) to look at a particular site on the hill and to take samples of soil from that site and two comparison sites nearby. The area studied is on the right of the steps going down and is an area where trees were cut down and every year since 2007 the Council has cut back vegetation but the heathland has not recovered. We wanted the students to look at whether a soil scrape would be beneficial as the cuttings are left on the site each year and may be causing the top level of soil to be too rich for the heathland. The comparison sites were the heathland above the path and the woodland below the area. Susan, Rob and Margaret had been to a presentation on the study today.

The students had looked at nutrient levels, Ph values and organic matter. The results showed that the nutrient levels were not linked to the amount of organic matter, as the heathland soil had high levels of organic matter but low nutrient levels. The area being considered did have high levels of nutrients but the students concluded that it would not be a good idea to do a soil scrape. This is because, according to the literature, there needs to be at least 3cm of soil left for heathland to regenerate and, due to the fact the in some places the rock is very near the surface, while in other places the soil goes much deeper, it would not be possible to retain 3 cm of soil everywhere. The literature also shows that doing a soil scrape could lead to the loss of important invertebrates.

It is possible that sulphur could be used to reacidify the soil and Susan asked the students to look into how that could be applied. The students also thought the high levels of coal spoil on the hill could be having an effect. Therefore, looking into the effects of coal spoil on the proliferation of heather could be a useful study next year. The students also mentioned the importance of the seed bank in allowing for regeneration.

- Visit in May 2025 for Summerhill Infant School. There is also a visit from Summerhill Academy next week.
- Blackswarth Rd Wood Woodland – Susan is keeping an eye on this but there are no further developments to report at present
- The Birch Collective – nothing further to report at present
- Bat expert: Susan was approached by somebody interested in doing bat population monitoring. He has been in contact with the Council and is talking to his employer about insurance cover. He would be happy to lead bat walks in the future.
- IYN (RHS South West in Bloom It's Your Neighbourhood): Susan has applied to take part in this scheme again this year
- Pride in Parks: whether we apply for this again can be decided at the next meeting
- Facebook messages: Susan usually covers these, although she commented that it is not easy as we do not get alerts. Neil offered to cover them when Susan is not able to.
- Website: Rob has changed the website address from http: to https: as this is more secure and some links would not work for people on the old address due to the security issue
- History of Butlers Tar Works: Rob had obtained a red copy of this book. (Employees had blue copies, directors had red copies). This copy belonged to Rita W Butler, wife of one of the Butlers, and has been signed: 'With Best Wishes Harold'. It was published in 1954 and as this is over 70 years ago and

out of copyright, Rob has been able to put a link to a scanned copy on our website.

'Remembrancer' – Rob found, through an internet search, that the University of Pennsylvania held a notebook, entitled a 'Remembrancer of Old Friends' which included unpublished works of the Emra family. The University sent Rob a scan of the handwritten notebook and Susan has transcribed it. It is now on our website on the Emra page.

- 'New' photos – we have been sent some new photographs from the 1970s and 1980s, including an incident where a truck went into the river at the Tar Works and had to be lifted out with a crane. (The driver escaped safely). These photos are now on the website.
- Instagram: Willy has very kindly taken over the FOTH Instagram account and will be adding information on events, photographs, history, etc.

The meeting closed at 9.00 pm.

Next meeting

Thursday 22nd May

Meetings in 2025:

25th September

4th December (AGM)

All meetings in person, on Thursdays at 7.15 pm, at Wesley Memorial Church Hall