

NOTE OF MEETING

Thursday, 7th November, 2024. 715pm
Wesley Memorial Church Hall

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

1. Approve minutes of 21st March meeting

The March minutes were approved.

2. Nature Conservation on Troopers Hill

Nature conservation work parties:

- Recent: Susan said that the work party leaders had done a fantastic job while Rob and Susan were away. Dom has not been able to offer any time recently as he is very busy at work but he is booking himself on to refresher training and will lead again when he has time. The next work party is this weekend and there is at least one more Duke of Edinburgh volunteer coming to work parties in the near future.

Susan has planned the work to be done at the next four work parties and handed out some photographs to show the areas to be worked on.

Fran mentioned that there seemed to be a lot of saplings growing in the gully.

Rob said that this would be a good place to work in the summer as there is no problem with disturbing nesting birds there.

- Plan for 2025: Rob and Susan will be around for the beginning of the year but will not be available from the 18th March to 8th May. Susan will also be out of action June/July/ August but will set up work parties again to cover the time they are not available.
- Winter Works and Meadow Cut: The Council have started the winter works and are doing a fantastic job. Susan has given them a very specific plan to work from (copies circulated). The only disappointment is that the meadow cut has not been done again this year (it was not done in 2023 either) and it is probably too late for it to be done now, as it really needs to be done in July/August. Other options were discussed: Fran asked if we could pay a contractor to do the meadow cut but Susan pointed out that it would be hard to raise money for this sort of work and it would also be hard to find a contractor who would be able to make it a priority. One year the Council did pay Avon Wildlife Trust to do the work but they would probably not have the budget for that now. It would also be too big a job for volunteers to do themselves. Not only is it a big area to scythe, there is also the issue of removing the arisings. It is now a case of making sure the Council do the work in 2025.
- Contracted work for Himalayan Balsam area: Susan reported that we will be spending £2000 of our Nature Conservation Fund (built up from donations) and the Council will be putting in £1460 Land Stewardship money to pay for Green Mantle to cut back a strip of vegetation that will allow us access to the

area where the Himalayan Balsam is growing. Susan circulated a photograph to show the area where they will be working.

- Hedge cut – Susan circulated a photograph showing the hedge cut along Greendown. The hedge had been quite severely cut on the Greendown road side and on the top but not at all on the inside, and not cut around the gate either. Susan wrote to Becky Belfin, Conservation Office at the Council, about this. Becky had previously been in discussion with the Parks team about rotational cutting of the hedge and informed Susan that the Parks team felt this would be too difficult. Susan then emailed Becky with some information about the benefits of an A shaped cut, or if that was not possible, an angled cut. Susan also asked if the flail can come back to finish the hedge when the ground is frozen. Becky asked how the residents of Greendown would feel about hedge laying. Susan said that she was sure they would not be happy with this as, when they were originally consulted about the hedge, they were keen it not be allowed to grow too tall as it would impede their view of the hill, and for hedge laying it would first be left to grow tall. Susan also questioned whether the Council would have future funds to do the hedge laying as it would be on a five year cycle. Susan also reported on Fix My Street that the hedge needed cutting around the gate. At first the report came back saying it had been fixed, but as it hadn't been done Susan reopened the report and contacted Chris, the Parks team manager. Part of it has now been cut but the call is still open.
- Ashes on the hill: Susan found what she is sure are human ashes which had been scattered on the hill near the chimney. She emailed Becky and Teija to ask if the Council had any guidelines about ashes being scattered on Parks land. She included links to some advice she had found from the Royal Parks and also Co-op Funeral Care. Susan told them it was a low priority and there was no urgency for a reply but Teija came back straightaway to say that the official guidance is that people need to seek landowner permission to scatter ashes (but not in sea or river). In practice, when asked, the Council do not give permission as it could cause problems next time the area is mowed. However, she is aware that people may be scattering ashes anyway without asking permission.

3. Troopers Hill Field

- Memorial Trees: the two Scots Pine trees were planted shortly after the last meeting and have been sponsored. There is a proposal from the Council's 'one tree per child' project for a community orchard to be planted on the field and also two specimen trees. Susan distributed some photographs to show the location of these. Susan has sent some feedback agreed by the committee on behalf of Friends of Troopers Hill, saying that it is important that there is a clear, direct path through the orchard from Malvern Road entrance to the entrance to the hill, that it should not prevent Council staff getting their grass cutting equipment onto the field, and it should not impede the view across the field from the Malvern Road entrance. Susan also gave our views on the specimen trees and the variety of fruit trees to be planted. The project will need to publish all the comments received before proceeding.

- Bench: Rob reported that the new bench was installed on the field in May and the family who sponsored it are delighted with it. Rod commented on how improved the field is now, compared to how difficult it used to be to walk on in winter when it became so waterlogged. The path has become a popular circular walking route.
- Plaques on benches: The acrylic plaque on the bench at the top of the path leading down the hill had been damaged several times. The family who had sponsored the bench had a brass plaque made and Susan arranged for one of our volunteers to fit it. He has made a very good job of it, and hopefully it will not be damaged or removed again.

A plaque on an old bench near the chimney had also been badly scratched and the family who sponsored that bench have replaced the plaque themselves.

4. Maintenance

- The wood on the two low benches in the play area is rotting. Susan circulated photographs of this. She had thought that the benches were guaranteed for 15 years by Wicksteed who supplied them, but Wicksteed are saying they are only guaranteed for 5 years. They have sent a quote of £651.04 (possibly + VAT) for replacements, but Susan suggests it is not worth spending so much on replacements if they are only guaranteed for 5 years. Susan has been in contact with Jill at the Council asking about other options and sent Jill the information about guarantees given by Wicksteed. Jill is contacting Wicksteed again to see if they can be replaced under guarantee and will contact Susan once she has heard back from Wicksteed.
[Post meeting note – on the day after the meeting FoTH received an email from Jill stating that, despite the benches being out of guarantee, Wicksteed had agreed to replace the timber bench tops free of charge, as a gesture of goodwill. Jill confirmed that Bristol City Council would then install the new bench tops – an excellent result.]
- Flytipping on layby: Susan reported that flytipping is still going on. The Council have had the funding for several years to improve the layby which should make flytipping harder. Susan has received an email from Teresa from the Landscapes team at the Council to say that, following the tendering process, they are just waiting to hear about the award of the contract from Procurement.

5. Events

- Eventbrite – Susan reported the good news that Eventbrite have stopped the limit of 25 places to set up meetings for free.
- Geology Walk on Sunday 17th November: 29 of the 30 places on this walk have already been booked. Once it is fully booked Susan will set up a small waiting list. She is doing the reccie tomorrow with the person leading the walk.

- Events 2025: It was agreed that we did not need a separate meeting to plan events in 2025 and could decide on them now. The following events were agreed:
- Mosses and Bryophytes walk in February: Nick Trapp, who is doing a Masters degree on mosses and bryophytes, has said he is happy to lead a walk. Susan will contact him in December to fix a date in February.
- Stargazing in March: Susan contacted Alan from the Bristol Astronomical Society(BAS), and they have agreed the dates of Saturday 1st March to Monday 3rd March, hopefully to have a stargazing session on one of those nights. Rod commented that, even if we had tried to go for a date in November, the chances are it would not have gone ahead given the weather conditions.
- Bugs and Beasties event in August: Rod said that BAS would be happy to come to this event. We would possibly hold this event on the same day as the Balloon Fiesta (Saturday August 9th), subject to the expert's availability.
ACTION: Susan to contact Rupert Higgins and BAS.
- Drop in Gazebo: we will have a drop in gazebo on Saturday 31st May in afternoon, from 2.30 to 4.30 pm.
ACTION: Susan to check times for drop in gazebo
- History Walk: Rob will do a History Walk on May to coincide with Mayfest
- Autumn walk: Susan will arrange an autumn walk, possibly fungi, nearer the time.
- Meetings 2025: The following meeting dates were agreed:
6th March
22nd May
25th September
4th December (AGM)
All in person, on Thursdays, at Wesley Memorial Church Hall

6. Networking

- Paper Newsletter: If we produce another one Susan suggested it should be in time to publicise next year's events. Ruth is keen to do another one and to emphasise human connectivity so would like to focus on people involved with the hill. She has already spoken to Elaine and Susan would like her to talk to Rod as well about stargazing. It was agreed that we get it printed in mid-January so that we can then hand it out on the mosses walk. We can also leave copies in local venues, and hand it out at the drop-in gazebo.
- Use of X: It was agreed that we stop using this. Rob will not close it completely as it can be useful to publicise when we receive grants
- Soil and water sampling project with University of Bristol students for 2025: Susan reported that students on the Geography course will be coming back,

building on the topic they worked on this year. Susan has asked them to look at two areas that are regularly cut by the Council: to take samples and to make recommendations about whether a soil scrape would be beneficial, to take off the top layer of rich humus. We could then try to get funding for this, although Susan thought it might be controversial. Susan will talk to the person leading to the Geology walk as well.

- Visit in May 2025 for Summerhill Infant School: Rob and Susan will be talking to Year 1 pupils from the school when they visit the hill in May. She has asked Willy to come along too, so that he can shadow what they do and possibly help with future school visits
- Blackswarth Road Woodland: Susan had managed to track down, via the Land Registry, the name and address of the person who has bought the woodland. In May Susan wrote to this person, telling her about the Friends of Troopers Hill, the conservation work we do and our interest in the woodland also being managed in the best way for nature conservation. Susan offered to put her in touch with experts and also invited her to make contact with Susan. There has been no response. Susan will write to her again in a couple of years.
- The Birch Collective: This group works with young people and recently they have been working on the Community Garden at Strawberry Lane allotments. They would be very interested in partnership working with Friends of Troopers Hill, and Susan has met with Tim, who runs the project, and suggested some ideas for work in the woodland. Tim has now spoken to the Council about developing a management plan for the woodland and hopefully this will lead to a joint project.
- Talks: Rob is giving a talk to a group who have an interest in Keynsham Abbey, and another talk to a wine tasting club. He has also been invited to give a talk to a group in Brislington.

The meeting closed at 9.00 pm.

Next meeting

Thursday 12th December (AGM)

Meetings in 2025:

6th March

22nd May

25th September

4th December (AGM)

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