



NOTE OF MEETING

Thursday, 9th July, 2015 7.15pm

Summerhill Methodist Church, 5 Air Balloon Rd

Present: Susan (Chair), Rob (WPO), Fabian (Cllr), Rod (Bristol Astron. Soc), William, Margaret (minutes), David, Hannah and Zoe (art project)

Apologies: Kit (Memb Sec), Helen (Secretary), Norman (Treasurer), Chris

Approve previous minutes

There was one amendment to be made to the previous minutes: Rod's name to be added to the list of those present.

Action: Chair to amend minutes

Issues and thank yous for Parks staff

- Winter works had overrun this year due to the machine used to chop up scrub being damaged. The work will now need to wait until next winter.
- The Council have confirmed that they will maintain the steps but are behind with filling in the tops of the steps with stones. Susan and Rob met with their contact from Parks last week who will chase this up.
- The management plan for Troopers Hill was agreed in 2012. Rob had a meeting last week to update it and a draft has been prepared. Parks will need to make sure they know who is doing what and will let us know if anything cannot be done, but that is unlikely.
- Grass on the corner of Troopers Hill Road and Crews Hole Road has been cut. The grass on the Greendown bed was also cut and will probably be maintained as grass rather than growing shrubs.
- The Green Capital flag is now flying on the flag pole.
- There is an experiment going on in part of Bristol to replace large black waste bins with combined recycling/dog waste bins which will have 3 sections: 1 for glass, 1 for plastic and 1 for dog waste. As a result we have asked for one of the old large black bins to replace the dog bin on the corner of Malvern Road, and to have a dog bin at the second entrance on Troopers Hill Road, which does not have one at present. The management plan states that there should be a dog bin at every entrance.
- The fencing at the third entrance on Troopers Hill Road is rotting. However there are brambles along most of the fence line so there is no need to replace the whole fence, just the stretch between the gate and the brambles. Parks to replace this section using the good bits of the old fencing.

- There is a budget within the Neighbourhood Partnership for a number of hours of Community Payback so we have put in a bid for this to be used to clear the edges of the wheelchair path to the chimney.

Troopers Hill Field

- Play area

Susan reported that there had been a very good response to the survey about the suggested play area, with 95% of respondents being in favour of a play area and only 5% against. Susan explained that our position as FOTH, having been approached by parents who wanted a play area on the field, was to see it as an opportunity for more people to then explore Troopers Hill. William commented that he did respond to the survey as one of those against, and came to the hill on Sunday as advertised but could not find anyone. Susan explained that, due to rain, they had moved the event to Summerhill Church and was sorry William had not seen the posters advertising this. Susan talked through the plans and survey using the display boards which had been prepared for Sunday and which she had brought to the meeting.

William asked whether planning permission had already been granted, and Susan explained that it was not needed as there was already a slide there. The development of the play area now depended on getting funding. Susan added that at the consultation they asked people to choose play equipment, given information about the costs and budget. The next step is to turn this into a design brief and request quotations from companies approved by the Council. Once they have quotations they can apply for grants: 3 possible sources, all landfill based: SITA and two others.

Dundridge Park are also applying for funding for a play area: we have been advised not to apply in the same quarter, so Dundridge Park hope to get their application in this quarter and we will then apply in October. SITA's grant would be for £50k; we need £70k in total, so Susan explained that our plan is to make the play area for 0-5 year olds a separate project for SITA funding, and then apply for a smaller amount for the play area for 6 to 11 year. We need to match fund; St George Neighbourhood Partnership have allocated £15k for this.

William then put his views. He explained that he was one of the 5% who was not in favour of the play area because what he particularly likes about Troopers Hill and Troopers Hill Field is that they are different from parks like St George Park. He has dogs and children: if he wants to run the dogs or if the children want to run through grass and climb trees then they go to Troopers Hill, but if the children want to go on playthings then they go to St George Park. They are two different areas with two different functions and he would not like Troopers Hill to become a mini St George Park. He has canvassed other people who have similar views. Dog walkers are concerned they won't be able to let their dogs off the lead. Susan said the play area would be fenced. William then pointed out that one of the good things about the field is that it is a big open space: it is a shame to have part fenced off. He added that they had received two questionnaires: one through the letter box and one via the school and other people with school children probably also received two forms so the survey may not be representative, especially as a lot of the dog walkers who use the Hill do not live in the surrounding streets.

Susan pointed out that they had asked in the survey whether respondents were dog owners; 75 were and there was no pattern of dog owners being against the play area. We delivered 500 surveys around the local streets and schools, it was on line on Facebook and Twitter so we did make an effort to reach as many people as possible.

Rob pointed out that many of our Facebook people are dog owners. The Council policy is that there should be a play area within 300 metres of home, so that is why Troopers Hill field would be a good site for a play area, and also parents felt St George Park was too far for toddlers. Rod pointed out that the play area in St George Park does get quite busy, so a park on Troopers Hill may reduce pressure. Also part of the St George Park play area is currently out of commission. Rob added that we do know that people want a big open space on the field so that is why the play area proposed would be small and sited where it is. We are not proposing to remove the goal posts. Bristol Parks are planning to have sockets put in two places so that the goal posts can be moved when the turf gets worn. One issue raised in the consultation was that, instead of having a curved path to the play area, it should go straight to the end of the milestone path, parallel to the fence, and then go to the play area. William said that people were concerned about the disruption during the building of the path. Susan said that it would take 12 weeks, and Rob explained that the entrance to the works would be next to the kissing gate so people could still use that gate, although the milestone path may need to be closed off. Susan added that they hope to get some of the log stepping stones replaced as they are biodegrading. Rob added that another suggestion was that they could put more trees around the play area.

William said that it would be better if the play area could be made of natural materials. Fabian commented that wood could be torched, as happened at Southmead, so metal would be better. Rob replied that Parks would not install anything that was a fire risk. Susan added that the play area would be sited in the best possible position to minimise the risk of anti-social behaviour so it would not be where the slide is at present. The feedback is that this level of play area is unlikely to attract anti-social behaviour. We are also asking for input from the Police. Rob proposed that Chris Deane, the parent who is leading on this and making the application, be co-opted onto the Committee. This was agreed.

Susan said that people were in favour of a mix of steel and timber for the play areas. The results of the survey will be published soon, and will be put on the FOTH website. They will also be sent out to people who have shown an interest in the play area proposal. William requested that his name be added to the list.

- Trees
One of the saplings has died and will be replaced.
- Grass cut
The grass is doing well

Donation from Beeses and proposed works

There is a rough path from the woods down to Crews Hole Road; steps would make this more usable so it is proposed to use the £550 donation from Beeses to do this work. A group called Park Works do the work of rebuilding the steps if we pay for the materials. The quote for materials is £470, and work should be starting on 27th July. Once completed this path can be signposted from the layby on Crews Hole Road.
(William left meeting at this point).

Art Project

Susan introduced David, Hannah and Zoe from a team who are undertaking an art project in St George. Green Capital funding had been allocated to each Neighbourhood Partnership for an art project and the one selected for St George is to do with green paths and access to green spaces. David explained that they would be working with local groups finding out about green spaces, routes between them, key landmarks and activities with a view to producing a beautifully illustrated interactive map. The aim was to encourage people to visit the green spaces and take part in activities.

Fabian asked whether there would be any plans for signposts. Susan explained that the group were just producing the map. Fabian asked if the whole £10k grant was being spent on the map. David replied that the cost included community engagement, a website and a large print run that would cost £4k. Susan added that part of the brief was that a lower grade map be produced that people could print off themselves, so that the map doesn't disappear once the printed ones run out. Rod commented that it would link to activities in open spaces so the Astronomical Society would be included. Rob added that other Green Capital funding will be used to improve access between green spaces.

Work parties

- completed since the last meeting

- 6th June – Work was done on wheelchair path but this proved quite hard and so only part of the path was cleared

- 4th July – Work was done in the gully clearing saplings etc.

- Work parties before the next meeting:

1st August, 5th September

Sundays 19th July, 16th August afternoons– these are a trial as there has been a drop off in attendance at Saturday morning work parties.

Events

Since the last meeting:

Avon Valley Walk – Rob led this walk which was well attended and included a visit to the Bath House.

Music on the Hill – very good turnout for this. The weather was good as were the Fantasy Orchestra. Donations of £225 were received. Summerhill Church lent 25 chairs and it was agreed that a donation of £30 be made to the Church.

Before the next meeting:

St George Strollers 100th Walk – this will be a dragon hunting walk

Heathland Walk – with Rupert Higgins on 16th July

St George in Bloom – Open day on Saturday 18th July

Bugs and Beasties- 8th August - Rod said that they will bring 2, and possibly 3, solar telescopes to this as well as Safety Boards.

Networking

Local Nature Reserves (LNRs)

This year is the 20th anniversary of Troopers Hill being designated an LNR and the Council is organising a celebration of all LNRs. Currently there are 8, they have designated another 4 and then another 4 for Green Capital Year. Troopers Hill was one of the first. The Council have hired Ruth Coleman to co-ordinate the celebration with walks events in September and October and a leaflet about LNRs which will include a map.

Rob asked whether it would be possible to have a telescope on the hill looking at Bristol in September or October. Rod said that it would need to be before the clocks changed in October and he would prefer September, but will discuss with Fiona. Susan added that the focus could be 'near and far': looking at distant views or lichens on the hill.

Parkhive App

Bristol Parks Forum with UWE have developed a Parkhive App to help people find green spaces in Bristol. Further work is needed on content. Two aspects: App and archives. The archive is dependent on people submitting photos.

Assessments for awards

- It's Your Neighbourhood
We are entering for this award again which is part of South West in Bloom. Susan will submit a summary of our achievements over the year (2 sides of A4) and assessors will then come to look at the Hill and assess the work of the group.
- Pride in Parks
We are entering for this award again this year, having won a gold last year. This is an RHS award for the park itself rather than the group.
- Dark Skies
Two years ago the Bristol Astronomical Society suggested we apply for Dark Skies rating at the lowest level. Rod explained that, although this is a campaign for really dark skies, Troopers Hill could be eligible because the aspect of the hill means that most of the light is below it so, as long as it is not too hazy, it is surprising how much of the night sky you can see.

Susan said that the person who had volunteered to look into this had not had time to pursue it so asked Rod if he would look into it. It would involve reading the terms, obtaining a letter from the Bristol Astronomical Society and a letter from the Council to say they are happy with the application. Rod agreed to look into it.

Action: Susan to send Rod the link about applying for Dark Skies status.

Facebook/Twitter/website Update

Rob reported that the number of people who like our Facebook page has jumped to 570 people and there has been a similar increase in followers on Twitter, mainly due to the Play Area consultation.

Newsletter

The recent newsletter included an article about Pete Harris. Rob suggested an article on the art project.

Next meeting

Thursday 10th September at 7.15pm at Summerhill Methodist Church, 5 Air Balloon Road