

# Britain in Bloom South West Pride in Parks Award 2017

## Troopers Hill Local Nature Reserve

Author: Susan Acton-Campbell, Chair, Friends of Troopers Hill, 16<sup>th</sup> July, 2017

Troopers Hill is a Local Nature Reserve in St George, east Bristol, 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.

This document takes the Britain in Bloom South West Parks and Open Spaces Assessment criteria and gives evidence of how those criteria are met by Troopers Hill Local Nature Reserve.

### 1. Community

In the 12 years of Friends of Troopers Hill's existence we have held over 132 events, excluding conservation work parties, raised over £180,000 for works and activities on Troopers Hill. This made the site attractive for further investment such as Bristol City Council, the landowner, investing resources to bring the site to a Green Flag standard and allocating a Community Park Keeper for 2 days per week.

The Friends hold 6 meetings a year, locally advertised and open to all, to discuss plans for the future and review what has been done. They work very closely with the landowners, Bristol City Council. One of the Friends' first actions was to create a management plan for the site and have a formal signing ceremony with the then head of Bristol Parks. This went on to be the annually reviewed 5 year management plan used today and shows clearly tasks owned by the Friends and those that are the responsibility of Bristol City Council.

A free newsletter [www.troopers-hill.org.uk/newsletter.htm](http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/newsletter.htm) is published and distributed to over 500 members, an annual leaflet of Troopers Hill's events is published each winter, the Friends of Troopers Hill maintain an informative and regularly updated website [www.troopers-hill.org.uk](http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk) plus "troopershill" Twitter and Facebook pages. Minutes of all meetings are published on the website and linked to Twitter and Facebook. Leaflets about Troopers Hill are distributed at local public events [www.troopers-hill.org.uk/leaflets/index.htm](http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/leaflets/index.htm) and at Hill events. The Friends also make use of display boards at events to showcase aspects of the Hill and the activities there. There are clip frames on welcoming signs at the Hill's entrances that are used to promote forthcoming events and activities.

A record of all volunteer work parties on Troopers Hill is maintained on [www.troopers-hill.org.uk/workp.htm](http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/workp.htm) and links are posted on Facebook and Twitter. The work parties are held monthly, on a Saturday and children accompanied by responsible adults are particularly welcome. The drinks and biscuits time at the end of a work party are another opportunity for sharing news and feedback on possible plans.

Funding has been found to pay for ParkWork <http://www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/parkwork/> to carry out conservation work on Troopers Hill for 1 day a month. This scheme provides training and skills development for those people needing additional support to secure permanent employment. Volunteers from the general public can also come to these sessions which are on Thursday morning.

The role of Community Park Keeper disappeared within Bristol City Council towards the end of 2014. The Friends of Troopers Hill have worked closely with the Parks team to ensure that good

quality maintenance has continued, following the Site Management Plan, under the new structure. We are extremely pleased with the provision of resource in these difficult times.

Details of all projects are recorded on the Troopers Hill website. Consultation with the local community is always high on the Friends' agenda before any project and they encourage and support the landowners, Bristol City Council to do this as well.

Our most recently completed project, to provide a children's play area on the flat playing field at the top of Troopers Hill, attracted a lot of local support. We raised over £80,000 to fund this project which is described on [www.troopers-hill.org.uk/play/](http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/play/). While the play area is not actually in the Local Nature Reserve our aim was that this added attraction on an adjacent site would encourage people to stay longer and enjoy more of the area including the Local Nature Reserve. Since the play area opened in October we have seen larger numbers of families, particularly with young children, visiting the Hill and in addition to the young boys that were already seen on the Hill we now have visits from girls. We were very pleased at the turn out to celebrate the opening of the play area, accompanied by drums and bagpipes.

Sources of all our funding, which is mainly from grants raised for individual projects but also from local businesses and individual donations is listed on [www.troopers-hill.org.uk/grants.htm](http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/grants.htm) Our free events are made as varied as possible to appeal to many tastes while always carrying the message of the importance of the site and the need to care for it. These range from guided walks, "Bugs and Beasties hunts" with naturalists to identify the finds, to looking at the night skies with the Bristol Astronomical Society and open air picnics with a band providing music. Details of future and records of all our previous events can be accessed via <http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/events.htm>.

The Bristol Astronomical Society (BAS) supported the site to receive a "Dark Sky Discovery Site" designation [www.troopers-hill.org.uk/DarkSky/](http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/DarkSky/) meaning that this is a good place to visit for star and planet watching, relatively protected from light pollution and with a good horizon. BAS work with us providing an annual winter star gazing event and a solar observation session in August.

Links have been established with local primary schools resulting in the "Fun Learning Trails" so many visits can be self-managed by schools [www.troopers-hill.org.uk/FunLearning/](http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/FunLearning/). We were particular pleased during this last year to receive visits from Bristol City College and the Royal Agricultural College from students studying conservation. We are working on links with the University of the West of England as a resource to provide guided geological walks.

We are particularly proud of our audio trail, put together by our volunteer Kit Elliott, a professional cameraman and sound recordist, which makes Troopers Hill come alive even to those who cannot visit it or see it.

The accessibility of Troopers Hill, by virtue of its rugged nature, is limited but is to the level approved of by the Bristol Physical Access Chain, a local group who assess accessibility. We were delighted to follow their suggestions to improve and add to signage along the wheelchair accessible route.

Details of all Troopers Hill trails, which also include a tree trail and a woodland trail, can be downloaded via [www.troopers-hill.org.uk/trails](http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/trails).

We have recently further improved access to Troopers Hill by using a donation from a local business, Beeses Riverside Bar and Tea Gardens, to pay for materials to add steps to a path leading from an informal parking area on Crews Hole Rd to the woodland adjacent to the Local Nature Reserve. The work has been done by young people participating in the ParkWork project [www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/parkwork/](http://www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/parkwork/).

Our group has been awarded a level of "Outstanding" in the RHS "It's Your Neighbourhood" scheme for the years 2012-16. A summary of our aims and achievements on Troopers Hill for the year summer 2016- summer 2017, produced for the IYN judge can be read on [www.troopers-hill.org.uk/achievements2017.pdf](http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/achievements2017.pdf).

## **2. Maintenance and Development**

All work on Troopers Hill follows the 5-year management plan 2012-2017 [www.troopers-hill.org.uk/plan.htm](http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/plan.htm) developed for the site by Bristol City Council in partnership with Friends of Troopers Hill. This plan is reviewed annually. 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 when Bristol City Council stopped applying as they had no staff resource to support the process.

In accordance with the Management Plan maintenance of the site aims to balance the use of the site for recreation while protecting its natural beauty and its diversity. For example, while vegetation is cut back from paths to keep them clear this is not carried out too vigorously and it is accepted that occasionally visitors may have to brush past taller vegetation. The aim is for the site to be accessible but to look natural.

We have been particularly pleased to not only have Parks staff and our volunteers carrying our conservation management work on Troopers but also Community Payback teams. Offenders have been particularly useful in clearing part of a large area of gorse.

Work is needed on the south-east boundary fencing and entrances to prevent future motorcycle access. We have recently included this topic in a consultation with local people and have strong support to go forward to apply for funding to replace fencing. The consultation also asked about adding a new path on Troopers Hill Field to improve access in the winter months for walkers, wheelchair users and those pushing children's buggies. In addition questions were asked about resurfacing existing wheelchair access paths that are degrading and surfacing a track used for access by parks vehicle. All these issues received public backing from the majority of our survey respondents and will be including in our funding bid. More details on <http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/waystonature/>

## **3. Environment**

Litter and dog waste bins on the site are emptied twice weekly by the Parks staff. Much litter is picked up by visitors to the Hill, particularly dog walkers. Other litter picking is done by Parks staff and the Friends. Cuttings from work parties are either concealed at location onsite or placed in one ton sacks for collection by Parks staff at contractors' entrances.

We were delighted to add a new dog waste and litter bin to the site during 2016, as part of the new play area project. All entrances have a dog waste bin.

Graffiti is addressed promptly but is rare. Police are advised. The Friends have graffiti removal spray provided by the Parks Department so we do not have to wait for Council staff to attend if it

is a simple task. Where it is more complex we use Bristol City Council's online graffiti reporting system where usually graffiti is removed within 3 working days.

As a Local Nature Reserve the amount of "furniture"/clutter has to be limited to be in keeping with the site, a view supported by local people. There are welcoming signs on every entrance and a number of interpretation boards. Up to date leaflets on the history, geology, wildlife and events of the site are available in paper and electronic form. Seats are available at the top of each section of steep path.

In common with most green spaces dog fouling and dog control, is an issue but a recent audit carried out by our volunteers actually shows the Local Nature Reserve itself has low levels of dog fouling, although a footpath in adjacent woodland is a "hot spot". We encourage good owner behaviour through signage, Facebook and Twitter postings and staged a 2015 Family Fun Dog Show at which we gave out free dog waste bags. We have worked with Bristol City Council's Dog Warden. We have found that signs displaying responsible dog ownership message are regularly slashed to pieces. We cannot afford to replace signage daily but remove the remains as quickly as possible and replace at monthly work parties. More on [www.troopers-hill.org.uk/clearUp/](http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/clearUp/).

Good news gathered while going round paint spraying dog poo piles during our audit is that a number of dog owners not only pick up their own dog waste but other people's dog waste too.

Our group is proud that Troopers Hill was one of the sites visited in 2015 by David Notton, Senior Curator, Hymenoptera, of London's Natural History Museum, to collect bee specimens to create a DNA database for speedy identification of bee species. He identified 4 species that had not previously been recorded on Troopers Hill so as a result we now know the Hill provides a habitat for at least 77 bee species. He wrote, "It was great to visit a site which is so obviously valued and actively conserved".

### One of Troopers Hill's interpretation boards



# Welcome to Troopers Hill



*Marbled white*



### A Haven for Wildlife

The purple heather and yellow broom of Troopers Hill Local Nature Reserve is unique in Bristol. The heathland and acid grassland form a very special habitat, particularly for invertebrates. The Hill is managed to protect this unique environment.

### Shaped by Its Past

On a 1610 map of Kingswood Forest the Hill was shown by its older name of Harris Hill. The landscape on the Hill then would have been very different from its appearance today. Over the years, the Hill was extensively quarried for Pennant Sandstone which was used for building. From deeper underground, miners took coal and fireclay.

### The Chimney

in front of you is a relic of Troopers Hill Colliery which operated in the early 1800s. This chimney formed part of an Engine House like the one shown in Loxton's drawing, which was further up Troopers Hill Road. The colliery had two shafts, this helped with ventilation – one for updraft the other for downdraft. The Engine Houses contained steam engines or "Fire Engines" for hauling up the coal and pumping water out of the mine.

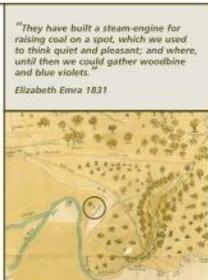
### A Nature Reserve shaped by Industrial History



Loxton's drawing of Troopers Hill Road, about 1914.  
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*"They have built a steam-engine for raising coal on a spot, which we used to think quiet and pleasant; and where, until then we could gather woodbine and blue violets."*

Elizabeth Emra 1831



From a 1610 map of Kingswood Forest.  
© By kind permission of Bristol Record Office.

### Woodland Trail

The landscape of part of the Hill was changed again in the 1960s and early 1970s when the area to the west, which is now woodland, was used to tip building rubble. As you follow the path up the Hill look out for the carved marker post that shows the start of the Woodland Trail which will take you on a circuit through this quiet woodland where, if you are lucky, you might catch a glimpse of a roe deer.

### A Space for Everyone

We hope you enjoy exploring Troopers Hill today. Please respect this special place; take your litter home, clean up after your dog and protect the Hill's delicate grassland by not using barbecues.

### Find out more

Please contact:  
Bristol Parks [www.bristol.gov.uk/parks](http://www.bristol.gov.uk/parks)  
T: 0117 922 3719  
Friends of Troopers Hill  
[www.troopers-hill.org.uk](http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk)  
Download an Audio Tour of Troopers Hill from [www.troopers-hill.org.uk/audio](http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/audio)

### 1700s Recycling

The black blocks used in the chimney are made from copper slag. This was waste produced from copper smelting. There were 49 copper smelting furnaces recorded at Crews Hole in 1754 using local coal and copper ore brought by river. The Black Castle in Brislington was built from the same blocks.



*A fascinating mix of history and wildlife on your doorstep*



Our next event

**Bugs and Beasties Hunt**  
with expert Rupert Higgins  
Saturday, 12th August, from 4pm  
Troopers Hill Local Nature Reserve

Bring a picnic

No Barbecues – Bristol Parks Byelaws



Our new play area





The ashy mining bee (*Andrena cineraria*) is regularly recorded on Troopers Hill. Photo taken April 2015. This bee has a cleptoparasite *Nomada lathburiana* which is also regularly recorded on this site.

Lichen and fungi to be found on Troopers Hill - we are prouder of our waxcaps but the fly agaric does make a striking image



Plus the odd reptile - a common lizard that supervised a work party



**Conservation Work Party – 5<sup>th</sup> June 2017**

2012 Management Plan Objectives for this work party		Compartment
6.2.2.4	Prevent spread of gorse and begin cutting on a rotational plan to encourage regeneration, reduce the fire risk and prevent it becoming old and degenerate.	5
6.2.2.9	Removal of all tree seedlings from grassland and heathland	4 & 5
6.2.2.10	Control bramble and scrub encroaching onto grassland and heathland	4 & 5
6.2.2.11	Manage to maintain some areas of heath type scrub with broom	4 & 5

