



NOTE OF MEETING

Thursday, 21st March, 2024 7.15pm
Wesley Memorial Church Hall

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

1. Approve minutes of 1st February meeting

The February minutes were approved.

2. Projects

- Memorial Trees Progress – After the last meeting Susan had emailed Holly Paton (Tree Bristol officer at Bristol City Council), who confirmed the memorial trees would be planted this season, although the paperwork had said they would be planted in 2025. However, as they have not yet been planted, Susan has sent another email to Holly today to check that they would still be planted this season. Rob said that the planting season can go on until April. (After the meeting Susan did receive a reply from Holly to say that the delivery of the trees had been delayed but they should be going in over the next week or two).
- Bench – This has been paid for but it has still been too wet to install the concrete base. Hopefully the weather will be getting drier now.

3. Communications

- Paper newsletter – Ruth and Susan have had a brief conversation about the paper newsletter, in which Ruth praised FOTH's 'very positive attitude'. The newsletter had been aimed originally at people who did not have web access and might appreciate a paper copy being delivered to them. However, this has not generated much interest, so instead the plan is to produce a paper newsletter with web details included, which can be handed out at events. Elaine said she would like some copies to hand out to people on the hill when they ask her about FOTH. Susan just needs to agree with Ruth when to produce another newsletter, but it is likely to be towards the end of the year as there are no events planned until then.
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4. Nature Conservation Work on Troopers Hill

Nature conservation work parties

- Recent – Rob reported that, since the last meeting, there was a work party on 10th February clearing gorse around the heather. The 22nd February work party was changed to 29th February due to bad weather. At this one 4 volunteers took out holm oaks and cotoneaster. On 9th March and 14th March work was done in Sally's Glade, taking out low lying bramble and saplings.
- Plan for next six months – As Rob and Susan are not available for work parties over the next six months, Susan has set up work parties to be led by the other trained leaders up until the end of June. She has put together a

spreadsheet showing the dates of the work parties, the names of the leaders and details of the tasks. Rob and Susan had a very useful walk around the hill with Neil and Fran today after which Susan refined the spreadsheet. Susan and Rob will be doing another walk around on Saturday with the other trained leaders.

- Another new work party leader trained – As reported at the last meeting, Jill has now been trained and will be leading her first work party on Saturday. She has also volunteered to lead several work parties over the next three months.
- End of project report accepted for the BCC Climate and Ecological Emergency Community grant – Susan has completed and submitted the report and has received feedback on two points that she raised. Firstly, the report had asked for an example of how the work had impacted someone. Susan gave the example of a person who had been critical of the work (removing gorse) because he said it was destroying the habitat for birds, but said to Susan in the end that 'she had defeated him' because the work had clearly not been detrimental to birds at all. Susan commented to Quartet that it would have been useful to have advance notice of this question. Secondly, Quartet asked for the report earlier than the date for the project to end (12th of February given as deadline for report when project not due to end until 29th February). They apologised for this and said it had been a mistake – probably a typo for 12th March. In her response Laura from Quartet thanked Susan for her 'thorough and interesting' report, and for the 'great photos'. She also said: 'It sounds like the work has been really effective and people have appreciated it'

Following a suggestion from Rob, Susan asked Laura whether FOTH could apply to Quartet again for funding for similar work next year. In response, Laura said that on 22nd April the Wessex Water Environmental Fund opens which would be giving grants of up to £2000. The criteria would fit well FOTH's work: (Involving communities in environmental activities that benefit their local area; restoring, maintaining or enhancing the local environment; engaging people in supporting the local natural environment). Susan will therefore make another application when the fund opens.

- Himalayan Balsam – Susan has included in the work party plan the need to tackle a patch of Himalayan Balsam on the hill. This was first spotted in 2016 when Susan arranged an emergency evening work party to tackle it. In 2019 Susan and Tyler tackled it again, but since then the brambles and scrub had spread around it. Since the recent work has been done the area had been opened up again and there are thousands of seedlings growing there. Susan emailed Neil Green for advice (Invasive Species expert at the Zoo) who suggested we start tackling it in April, once the shoots are big enough to pull. Susan will appeal for more volunteers to help. It is easy to pull up, and the shoots then need to be broken in half, crushed underfoot and left where they are to rot down, but this needs to be done before the seeds form. The main focus over the next few months will therefore be doing this work and also keeping back the bramble nearby so that the area can still be accessed.

Fortunately there is no water course on Troopers Hill which would enable to seeds to spread.

5. Maintenance

- Play Area – Susan was contacted by a father upset about some young teenage girls who refused to get off the memory swing so that his 2 year old could play on it. He reported this to the Police as anti-social behaviour. He also reported some graffiti, which Susan was able to clean up. While doing this, Susan noticed that the seat on the swing was worn and metal was showing. She reported this to Parks on the Sunday and was very impressed when they replaced it the next day. The swing was also squeaking, which again Parks dealt with within 24 hours. However, the same parent then sent a sound recording of the noise it was making with his theory about what was causing it. An inspector came out and repaired it.

Susan thought that, if young girls were using the play area, it might be a good idea to provide something for them outside the young children's play area. Susan contacted the police asking for their advice. If the police response was positive, Susan would contact development workers who could work with the girls to explore what they would like, and she would also ask for help from the charity 'Make Space for Girls'. It is important to get support from the police as this will help when applying for funding. Susan asked Laura at Quartet whether there were any funds that could be applied for, for this type of work. Laura said that they expect there will be more money in the summer from the Police and Crime Commissioners Fund.

- Flytipping – this is on the layby on Crews Hole Road. The Council have been really good at clearing this when it is reported but have had problems accessing it because of the parked vehicles. Susan has now devised a system with another local person to put up barriers, with a sign on asking people to keep the area clear for Council work, on the days they are due to come. This has worked well so far. Susan leaves the barriers chained to the gate when not in use. Margaret commented that it was a pleasure to finally see the area clear.

The Council is no further ahead with the work to change the layout of the layby, although the money has been available for some time now, as they have not managed to sort out a contractor prepared to do the work. Susan will chase this again.

6. Events

Past

- Star gazing – one night between 13th and 15th February
- Planetarium shows – Saturday 17th February starting 3pm
- Star gazing – one night between 17th and 19th March

Rod reported that neither of the stargazing events had been able to go ahead due to the weather. Alan, the outreach co-ordinator for the Bristol

Astronomical Society, had reported that 97% of the events planned this winter had not been able to go ahead due to weather. There has been a long spell of mild, wet weather which Rod thinks may be a pattern that will continue. However, they have agreed to try and set up another group of dates for November.

The Planetarium shows were very successful. They made a profit (approx. £140 after paying for the hall) and were very popular. Susan expressed her gratitude to Mario for giving his time and the planetarium freely. He prepared three different shows for three age groups and all went down well.

If we do this again, Susan will think about using Eventbrite's paid service as for the free service you need to have no more than 25 tickets per event, and it was complicated to do this for the numbers involved. As the charge for this would be quite small, it was agreed this would be a good idea. For the Star Gazing Susan had been able to use Mailchimp for people to express an interest, and Eventbrite just for the actual tickets, and this had worked well.

Future

- Geology Walk – Susan hopes to find out soon who will be leading this walk, which we hope to put on in November
- Mosses and bryophytes walk – Nick Trapp has agreed to do this, possibly in February
- Star gazing in November – as discussed above, the British Astronomical Society hope to provide some dates for star gazing in November.

7. Networking

- Soil and water sampling project with University of Bristol students – FOTH had been approached by the Geographical Sciences department of Bristol University asking if there was anything we would like them to do a study on, on the hill. Ideas were put forward, the students came and took soil samples and they have come up with some interesting theories about the reasons for differences in the soil. There are bits of surface coal on the hill and it is possible that rainwater hitting the coal will produce sulphuric acid and so the soil would be more acidic than you would expect for Pennant Sandstone. Also, there is a 'hump' on the top of the hill where ribwort plantain grows and Susan wondered whether some soil had been dumped there in the past. The students thought that the greater depth of the soil here would lead to greater retention of water and so the ribwort plantain, which likes neutral conditions, grew there but not on the rest of the hill where the soil is shallower.

Susan is looking forward to their report. Next year she would like to ask them to do measurements of depth of soil across the hill, and also see if they could correlate coal and the 'unexpectedly acidic' soil. The area of meadow near Greendown is also less acidic and this may also be due to the depth of the soil there.

- Visit from Year 3 Summerhill Academy – Rob spoke to this group of Year 3 pupils about the hill and took them for a walk around, including the gully. They were really well behaved and engaged. Following the visit, Summerhill Academy then asked if a volunteer could assist with a group of Year 5s but unfortunately no volunteers are available for that date.
- Visit in May for Summerhill Infant School – Susan and Rob will take this group of Year 1s around the hill.
- Bristol University – videos by masters students from Biological Sciences. Ed Drewitt brought a group of students to the hill, first for a look around with Susan, and then they came back the following week to make a series of short films aimed at young people (late teens/early twenties) about different aspects of wildlife on the hill. There was some discussion about how best to use these films. They will go on our website but Susan would also like to explore how they can be best accessed by young people when walking on the hill and she will approach some youth organisations for ideas.
- Talk for Hanham History Group – Rob gave this talk on Troopers Hill and the Crews Hole area. It was very well supported (about 80 people came) and they made a donation of £50 to FOTH. Brian Vincent, who is giving a talk to the group in April, has written a book about the tar works and the Butlers published by the Avon Local History Group and suggested to Rob that he do a book about the History of Troopers Hill to be published by the same group.
- British Carnivore Survey – We were approached by the University of Hull who are doing a national survey of carnivores (foxes) and would like to do this on Troopers Hill and at Blaise. They would leave food in locations in the wood, in some sort of container, and set up cameras to monitor how the foxes approach the food. They are looking at whether urban foxes have become more adept than rural foxes at accessing food. It has been agreed with Parks that they can do this.
- Blackswarth Road Wood Woodland Tree Preservation Order – Susan has been very impressed by the Council's tree officer who took this on, following her emails, and issued the Woodland Tree Preservation Order. Being a 'Woodland' order is important as it covers all existing trees (whatever their size) and all future trees. The officer also expanded the area to cover more than just the woodland that was sold recently. Susan circulated aerial photographs showing the extent of the order. Notices have been put up near the site and letters will have been sent to all landowners involved. Although the owner of the new land has not yet been identified, the letter will go to the previous owner who should forward it to the solicitor for the new owner. They have until April 12th to raise any objections. The order has attracted publicity and Susan was approached by Bristol 24/7 for a quote. Once the new owner is listed in the Land Registry, it was agreed that Susan should write to them offering to meet up and support them in looking after the land. Neil suggested that Susan could ask to be informed by the Land Registry automatically when the ownership changes, rather than having to keep checking herself.

The meeting closed at 8.50 pm.

Next meetings

Thursday 7th November 2024

Thursday 12th December (AGM)

Meetings both starting at 7.15 pm at Wesley Memorial Church Hall.