

An Action Plan for FoSOS

1. Introduction

FoSOS has now been in existence for two and a half years and has taken part in habitat restorations, guided walks and litter clean-ups. The energy of FoSOS was diverted for a significant period of time in opposing the selling of Stockwood's Green Spaces by Bristol City Council, but the group's main work at the moment is to restore an orchard within Stockwood Open Space. There is also to be an 'Apple Press' day on 16th October to give information about the orchard and to promote FoSOS.

FoSOS has now reached the stage where it needs to actively manage the work that it does across all the Open Spaces in Stockwood and this report sets out some of the issues that need addressing and makes some suggestions as to what our action plan should be. This includes sources of support, groups that we liaise with and funding opportunities.

2. Terms of Reference

The constitution of FoSOS states that:

'The objects of the Association are:

to promote the maintenance, protection, and enhancement of the informal public open spaces of Stockwood for the mutual benefit of both wildlife and people.

In pursuit of the above objectives, the Association may do any or all of the following:

- (1) apply for charitable status
- (2) raise funds to be used for furthering its aims
- (3) Provide a friendly and welcoming community focus for people interested in the preservation of the open spaces as community assets
- (4) Provide resources to raise interest in the open spaces and encourage community involvement in their maintenance, improvement, and enjoyment
- (5) Publicise the activities and concerns of the Association to local people
- (6) Research and collect information relevant to the wildlife and history of the open spaces
- (7) Liaise with Bristol City Council's Parks Department, the Avon Wildlife Trust, and others to ensure a high level of care for the open spaces of Stockwood and to have a positive input into how the sites are managed
- (8) Contribute to making the open spaces safe and inviting places to visit
- (9) Encourage more considerate behaviour and greater respect for the open spaces by the local community
- (10) To do anything else within the law which promotes or helps to promote the Objects'

I think it useful to remind ourselves of what the FoSOS constitution actually says, and I hope to address most of the above points in putting forward a plan for future activities.

3. Issues for FoSOS

Wildlife

Stockwood is fortunate in having the Open Space that is managed by Avon Wildlife Trust, but there are also a number of other green spaces which harbour foxes, bats, badgers and a whole range of fauna and flora in a number of habitat types. Whilst some individual members of FoSOS have a

great deal of personal knowledge about our local wildlife we don't really have a repository of information that all members have access to.

Natural England are currently funding a three-year project in Bristol called Wild City. The aim of the project is to enable people to enjoy and gain knowledge of their local natural surroundings in a variety of ways. The BCC project officers for Bristol are keen to come and talk to FoSOS and there may be opportunities to work with BCC to provide greater information to the public on the wildlife in all of Stockwood's open spaces.

The Trail Guide for Stockwood Open Space produced by Avon Wildlife Trust was written in 1984. It would be useful to get feedback from FoSOS members on how accurate this guide now is, and whether there is the possibility of updating it in conjunction with Wild City.

It is noted that there are some excellent photographs of the fauna and flora of the open spaces which we might want to build into a photo library that can be accessed on the internet, used for publicity and to aid in the identification plants and animals. Interpretation boards are a possibility at various points in the Open Space. These can be expensive and we would need to explore the options of what types of boards are available and funding possibilities e.g. AWT, BCC, Natural England.

At present there is a doctoral student working on the genetic basis of variation in cowslips (as I understand it). This is a particularly specialist form of research, but FoSOS might like to consider pursuing other forms of research such as keeping records of the incidence of rare species, recording the range of plants and animals in different areas of Stockwood, or just maintaining a library of research conducted by other people and organisations. We also said we would invite the student back for an update and I'm sure we would be interested in publicising her findings.

Publicity

A new website has been set up for FoSOS, but at present this is under-used. It may be of more use as a static website i.e. one that people read for information, but don't contribute to, although there is a forum for discussions. However, the website will benefit from being updated regularly with items of information, photographs, maps possibly. It would be helpful if all committee members, and ordinary members, could provide input to the website.

FoSOS should endeavour to have a presence at all community events and the impact would be enhanced if an 'events kit' were to be put together. For instance, the need for a gazebo, an A3 laminator and pouches has already been identified. Display boards, membership forms and publicity leaflets could also be purchased/produced.

The neighbourhood partnership site, [HANDS ON](#), has a section under Local Topics on FoSOS which it would be useful to keep updated on FoSOS activities.

Leisure

Many people use the open spaces for dog-walking, cycling, walking, picnics, games etc. FoSOS is in a position to take an overall view to enhance the open spaces in a variety of ways whilst seeking to ensure that the needs of different groups are taken into account.

[Walking for Health Bristol](#) are setting up community groups to lead and take part in sociable walks within local communities. The project has already started in a number of areas of Bristol and they hope to start in Stockwood soon. FoSOS has a great deal of local knowledge and could contribute to planning walking routes, setting up groups and wildlife information for selected routes.

The provision of benches and picnic tables encourages greater use of the open spaces and makes them more welcoming and user-friendly. A wish list of sites throughout Stockwood that would benefit from some additional infrastructure could be put together by FoSOS, in consultation with the wider community, but the chances of funding such a large project may be low in the immediate future (see funding below).

Maintenance

A number of FoSOS members already make a significant contribution to keeping the open spaces cleared of litter and in getting fly-tipping removed. Despite this, the continuing problems of both littering, including dog mess, and fly-tipping detract from people's enjoyment of the open spaces. FoSOS has organised litter picks in the past, and whilst these are initially beneficial the problems tend to return all too soon. The Neighbourhood Partnership is currently pursuing a more active strategy to reduce littering and fly-tipping, but will be concentrating on residential areas. It is hoped that FoSOS will be contributing to the [NP strategy](#), but in doing so may wish to focus on green spaces rather than streets and other paved areas.

There are several sites, e.g. Sturminster Close and the small area at the top of Craydon Road, that would benefit from brambles being cut back. This would enable access to fruit trees and stop the encroachment of brambles onto grassland. It would not be practical, or from a wildlife perspective desirable, to cut back all brambles and nettles. However, some provision of pathways and maintenance of boundaries would both enhance the green spaces and ensure that FoSOS has a wider public presence.

The work that has been done in the orchard has opened up pathways, has revealed at least a hundred fruit trees (probably a lot more) and has enabled a wider range of wild flowers to grow as competition from brambles has been removed and more sunlight can get through. Relative to the area covered by all the open spaces the orchard is currently taking up nearly all the time and effort of a small number of FoSOS members. When work started on the orchard it was with the help of a team from a bank doing community work; it should be possible to arrange more workdays using large groups doing one-day major projects in conjunction with AWT. This should allow FoSOS to pursue a more varied programme of maintenance and development throughout the open spaces.

Enhancement of the open spaces

Given the potential of the orchard as a major community asset it is not surprising that it is currently the main focus of activity, but it is possible that there are FoSOS members who would like to contribute in different (less physical) ways; some ideas for involving the wider FoSOS membership are explored in other areas of this document.

Craydon triangle is a reasonably sized area of green space which has a few trees and a phone box on it at present. A seating area in the middle surrounding a raised bed with food plants (fruit trees might be good here) would give this patch of land some character. There is an opportunity to enhance this green space and make more of a link to the green space beyond the nearby cycle track.

The idea of their being more formal woodland management, e.g. coppicing, has already been floated with AWT and BCC. Unfortunately there has been no response on this, but Stockwood has several patches of woodland which tend to be overgrown and which could provide local sources of wood products. This could be a major project involving other organisations with commercial possibilities, probably across a much bigger area within Bristol. It could also be the basis of some (limited) local employment and an opportunity to revive some old craft skills.

A persistent problem in the orchard is the continuing failure of BCC to deal with the (now expanding) area of knotweed. This is a serious issue and BCC does not appear to have fulfilled its legal responsibility to treat the knotweed. It is a concern that FoSOS is working around the knotweed, but is perhaps becoming careless in ensuring that this invasive species is kept isolated from human contact.

Hengrove are exploring the idea of a Sculpture trail using section 106 money. This is potentially a major item of expenditure, but may be worth exploring as a future development of the open spaces that could have local input and add interest to local pathways.

Youth

It is stating the obvious to say that the age-range within FoSOS is largely limited to those over or approaching retirement age. This brings the benefits of having time available to do regular work in the open spaces and of course the knowledge and experience that we bring to many of the tasks in hand. On the downside, it limits our status as a community organisation and in failing to engage with younger residents in Stockwood we are missing the opportunity to get wider support for the objectives of FoSOS.

Possible ideas to pursue are: working with local youth services to enable groups to do supervised work on some of the open spaces such as bramble clearing, pruning; putting on talks at community centres and schools; contributing (in a small way) to educational materials on wildlife and local communities; offering guided tours to school groups; having family activity days, such as the Apple Press day, fruit picking days.

History/mapping

The trail guide written by Avon Wildlife Trust in 1984 makes some reference to the history of Stockwood Open Space, and there is also information in the library about how Stockwood came into being with old maps and written accounts from residents. It would be an interesting project to produce an historical guide to all of the open spaces in Stockwood if a group of FoSOS members were willing to take up this challenge.

The idea of a food map has been raised on several occasions and this could be to a greater or lesser degree of detail depending on what area it covers. For instance, the orchard has hundreds of trees and we are working towards these being identified, but at the moment it would just be 'apples, pears, elder, plums'; a more detailed map would be for the future. A more general map of the whole of Stockwood could be produced; perhaps a FoSOS member with artistic skills could produce a sketch map of the area as we couldn't use published maps without paying royalties (I'm fairly sure about this).

Tools

Although the Neighbourhood Partnership agreed to give FoSOS money for tools it turned out that this meant giving us the tools directly. We were asked what we wanted but agreement was not reached within FoSOS and in the end the council decided to give us what are basically gardening tools. It has taken some time to find somewhere accessible for storage and we now seem to be nearly there with the lockup at the top of Craydon Road.

It is now a matter of urgency that FoSOS purchase a range of tools for clearing brambles and other unwanted undergrowth, and for pruning purposes. These could all be used across the open spaces and enable more people to take part in our activities.

Funding and Support

FoSOS has managed to achieve a great deal without major funding due to the extent of voluntary work done by members and external organisations. This is still a good starting point for many types of action that FoSOS may want to move forward on. FoSOS also benefits from not having to pay for any fixed office costs and from some committee members effectively subsidising printing and stationery costs.

The amount of money that FoSOS currently has will pay for identified expenditure in the short-term. This expenditure includes £200 set aside as a donation towards purchasing a picnic bench, tools and publicity materials.

The Neighbourhood Partnership has already provided some funding for tools and some training on pruning, and is likely to support the request for a bench alongside the path from Showering road to the shops. There are three funds that we can apply to and we have excellent support from the NP co-ordinator, Gemma Dando, and the NP development officer, Ariaf Hussain. The NP will be an ongoing source of funding for the foreseeable future and as well as Pete formally representing FoSOS on the NP there are three other FoSOS committee members there in other capacities.

There is a great deal of information, expertise and support that we can gain working with other organisations whose aims and interests coincide with those of FoSOS. We already work with AWT and I have mentioned Bristol Wild City and Walking for Health elsewhere in this document. There are other organisations across Bristol doing similar work in Green spaces and community orchards. Making links with other groups is also likely to increase our exposure to opportunities for funding that other organisations know about or have access to; a planned programme of visits and invitations would raise our profile.

Generally speaking there are fewer grants available due to the economic situation, but there are still opportunities to apply for a wide variety of grants from local and national organisations. A useful source of support and information is [Voseur](#) which supports voluntary and community action in Bristol. However, before considering any sources of grants FoSOS needs to have an action plan, to identify areas where additional funding may be required, put together detailed plans and costings and possibly fundraise towards the costs of a particular project. Any funding organisation will want to know things such as what the demand for a project is, who it will benefit, how it fits in with other local provision, environmental impact etc. At present FoSOS is not in a position to apply for grants other than those provided through the Neighbourhood Partnership, but in identifying some medium to long-term priorities we may wish to put together some grant applications in the future.

Committee member involvement and decision making

The lack of an action plan that has been agreed and supported by the FoSOS committee has resulted in a number of ad hoc decisions being made on behalf of FoSOS which, whilst made with good intentions, have made it difficult for FoSOS to operate in a cohesive fashion.

As I have mentioned before there is a lack of communication between members of the committee that means that opinions are formed and decisions made outside of the full committee. It is important that we are all 'kept in the loop' by email, by correspondence and by more regular meetings. This is not to say that the committee is any sort of closed society, and some issues and points of discussion will go on within the wider membership and community, and possibly in the forum on the website.

Beyond the main officer roles there has been little identification of what the main interests and areas

of expertise are held by other committee members (to my knowledge that is). Whilst the actions of FoSOS are not limited to the preferences of the committee it may be useful if they all led on some aspect of the action plan without limiting their input to all of it.

Recommendations

For immediate agreement:

- All planning, consideration of external requests and actions taken on behalf of FoSOS must be agreed by the full committee of FoSOS. This may be through ordinary meetings, special meetings or by email.
- Tools that can be used for clearance of overgrown areas and for pruning should be purchased as soon as possible and stored for the use of all FoSOS members.
- Equipment and resources should be purchased that will enable FoSOS to develop and maintain a strong presence in the community at public events and for general publicity.

Medium-term (three to six months):

- Organisations and businesses willing to provide community support in the form of continuing the work of making the orchard accessible and productive be identified and a programme of work be put into place; this may include local businesses but also e.g. youth groups, AWT, BCTV
- Committee members should be asked to identify their main areas of interest in what FoSOS could do in the future and take a lead on one or more issues; ordinary members with specific interests and/or areas of expertise can be asked to join working groups where appropriate
- Links to be made with external organisations which are similar to FoSOS or can facilitate and support some of our work; this includes inviting external speakers and visiting other groups.

Long-term

- Committee members produce long-term plans on the issues they are leading on with regular reports on progress being made at committee meetings
- Where appropriate funding applications can be put together to support particular projects identified by the committee
- Planned activities are publicised every two months for up to six months in advance; information will be on the website, but also available in leaflet form for distribution to the library, community centres etc.

Conclusion

FoSOS has the potential to be a major influence on improving the quality of life for Stockwood residents by improving access to and enjoyment of the open spaces. For FoSOS to fully achieve this aim a more structured and varied approach to planning and implementation needs to be taken with greater involvement from all committee members.

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