

Annual Report for 2009

It is customary for the Chairman to say something about the year past and the year ahead. Last year's Report was somewhat damning, with much of the blame heaped on the Council's performance. I believe that 2009 saw a great improvement - a number of people have told me how much better the Common now looks. I would like to thank all the Council officers and workers for their personal help and commitment over the year. Their inputs are best detailed.

1. **The state of Midsummer Common** has improved over the last year. Grass mowing in 2008 was infrequent and incomplete. It was better in 2009. More mowings have been promised for 2010 but we still need to persuade the Council that timings should not relate solely to events on the Common but also to the growing and flowering of the nettles and thistles.

2. Under their **Management Plan for the Common**, the Wildlife Trust want to enhance the species richness of the Common to achieve a more natural floodplain grassland habitat, to improve the overall habitat diversity, and to create a community orchard. The first of three wild flower meadows was created on Butt Green by the Council with the help of FoMC volunteers. Preparations were made for the Community Orchard and the site has now been cleared and fenced for tree planting by FoMC volunteers.

3. Six **diseased and damaged trees** were removed from the Common in 2009. This caused much public disquiet and I was criticised for defending the Council's actions before their Scrutiny and Planning Committees. In return the Area Committee promised an early replacement of the lost trees. It is one of my main regrets that the Council has reneged on this promise.

4. The **cattle** were with us once again in 2009 and were welcomed by most of those using the Common. FoMC has petitioned for a longer grazing season and reduced absence during events. More Red Polls are promised for 2010 and they should be with us soon.

5. There have been many **infrastructure improvements** during 2009:

i. The **concrete footpath** from Auckland Road to Parsonage Street in front of Brunswick Cottages was replaced and, after an extensive interchange with Council officers, all the newly installed lights were made to work.

ii. The **river bank** bounding the Common was upgraded with concrete reinforcement. The boaters are the main beneficiaries but the overall appearance is improved.

iii. The **iron railings** around the Common were repainted. The Council promised to open up some of the pinch points to comply with the the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. FoMC was consulted way back in 2007 but we are still waiting for action!

FoMC has made a case for better **signage** on the Common - telling users what they can and cannot do therein. Officers should be working on the issue.

6. This time last year, I reported a rise in the number of **bonfires** on the Common. Many meetings

were held with Councillors and officers without a clear outcome. The problem seems to have gone away for the moment.

7. **Litter** and its removal remain an ever-present problem and we frequently accuse the Council of a dereliction of duty in failing to clear the site. They usually respond quickly when asked to empty bins or remove vegetation but litter sweeps prove more challenging.

8. **Vehicular movements and parking** on the Common continue to be a problem. There is no easy foolproof solution but further discussions are planned with Council officers.

9. **Legislation** covering the Common is a bit of a minefield. I have reported the current situation on our website and frequently had to enlighten Council officers (and Councillors) on statutory rights and duties. I believe there is an urgent need to issue new byelaws for Cambridge Commons. In 2008 I drafted a set (based on a national model and other local authority variants) and gave them to the Council and was promised a response. I am still waiting.

10. Last year saw the usual list of **events on the Common**: May Fair, Strawberry Fair, Midsummer Fair, the London to Cambridge and Oxford to Cambridge Bike rides, the Chinese State Circus, the City's most popular bonfire night display, and various charity walks. Although encouraging such events, FoMC has a secondary objective which is to work with organisers to ensure that events have minimal impact and cause no nuisance to local residents. Most of the events in 2009 caused little problem. Strawberry Fair had been causing problems in recent years and FoMC exerted much effort with the Fair organisers and other parties in trying to reduce the nuisance element in 2009 and with a high degree of success. Many local residents conveyed their thanks.

R S Baxter (chair)
17 March 2010