

Annual Report for 2010

It is customary for the Chair to say something about the year past and the year ahead. FoMC set itself specific **aims** and **objectives** when it was formed back in 2006. As we head into our fifth anniversary, it is worth taking stock and reporting progress.

Condition of Midsummer Common

Two of our **aims** are "to help foster good management practices in order to protect the environment" and "to discourage the spoliation or inappropriate use of Midsummer Common". We gave ourselves three objectives:

1. to work with the City Council and other groups to prepare and adopt management plans for Midsummer Common;
2. to identify areas of poor Common's maintenance and failure to meet standards and to work with the City Council to rectify these; and
3. to test and express a view on any proposed developments on Midsummer Common.

Back in 2008 the Wildlife Trust produced a Management Plan for Midsummer Common and FoMC has been working with the Council to put it into action. I would like to thank Council officers (and Councillors) for their efforts in making FoMC dreams become reality. Dialogue between us has been challenging at times but we are still on speaking terms! And the Council has invited ideas for improving the appearance of local areas under a new four year Environment Improvement Programme.

It was a very dry Spring in 2010 and this impacted on the state of the Common. The grass was slow to grow making early **mowing** unnecessary but delaying the arrival of **grazing cattle**. More time was given to the control of nettles and thistles and the Common looked at its best in early Autumn. Unfortunately, heavy rain during the bonfire night display led to extensive damage caused by moving fair vehicles and repairs to the grassland were much delayed.

The dry Spring had another effect. To enhance the species richness of the Common and to achieve a more natural floodplain grassland habitat, the first of three **wild flower meadows** was created on Butt Green with the help of FoMC volunteers. Doubts had been expressed about this task and the results have proved disappointing. No decision has yet been made over whether to try again.

The big story of the year has been **trees**. There has been a dramatic decline in the number of trees on the Common in recent years as damaged and diseased trees have been removed. After many meetings, workshops and public consultations, a new plantings programme was finally agreed. Fifty new trees have been planted and others moved or pollarded. Not everyone will be pleased with the outcome; the overall scene appears somewhat denuded at the moment but should be rewarding in a few years time.

The **Community Orchard** has been the place for more tree plantings. FoMC volunteers have planted 35 apple, plum, gage and pear trees and kept them watered during the year. Maintaining this part of the Common will be an ongoing task for FoMC but it should be a benefit for the local Community. Our Secretary organised an enjoyable picnic amongst the trees in August and this was much enjoyed by local families and the Mayor. And we welcomed 60 pupils from Milton Road Primary School into the Orchard to learn how the community has been involved in selecting and planting the trees.

Poor Common's maintenance becomes most evident when the infrastructure shows signs of neglect. Progress is being made. Last year I was able to report that the **concrete footpath** from Auckland Road to Parsonage Street in front of Brunswick Cottages was replaced, the **river bank** bounding the Common was upgraded with concrete reinforcement, and the **iron railings** around the Common were repainted. This year I can

report the addition of 8 new **litter bins**, wicker **fencing** in the Community Orchard, and better **signage** (covering littering, camping, fires and grazing). For the future, FoMC would like to see the **wooden benches** on the Common upgraded and a few **pedestrian gates** widened to comply with the *Disability Discrimination Act 1995*. The Council has plans for a **cattle ramp** near the Cutter Ferry bridge and a **new entrance** to the Community Orchard from the Newmarket Road. FoMC continues to monitor developments by Berkeley Homes and the proposed synagogue in Auckland Road insofar that they may affect the Midsummer Common environment.

Vehicular movements and parking on the Common continue to be a problem. The legal position is clear (see <http://midsummercommon.org.uk/papers/Vehicles.html>) but there is no easy foolproof solution. Many options have been put to Council officers but current Council thinking on this matter is hard to discern. Decisive action is needed before the Summer season attracts more intruders into the green space.

Events on Midsummer Common

Another of our **aims** is "to encourage the use and enjoyment of Midsummer Common and its facilities by members of the public". We gave ourselves three objectives:

1. to work with the City Council in drawing up the annual programme of events on the Common and to ensure that these are well advertised;
2. to work with organisers to ensure that events have minimal impact and cause no nuisance to local residents; and
3. to gather and report grievances made by those attending events on Midsummer Common and by those living nearby.

Last year saw the usual list of **events on the Common**: three fairs, two bike rides, a circus, the bonfire night display, and various charity meetings. They proved popular and enjoyable but bonfire night suffered from heavy rain. Strawberry Fair was missing in 2010 but supporters turned up and proved less troublesome than anticipated. Most of these events caused little problem to local residents. FoMC had few grievances to report from both event attendees and local residents.

The City Council has produced an Events Management Framework for outdoor events in 2011 (see <http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/democracy/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=3438>). Midsummer Common is put at the top of the venues with up to 4 major and 4 large events. FoMC made its own views known to the Council's Scrutiny Committee (see <http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/democracy/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=176&MIId=255&Ver=4>). In response, the Council accepts that careful planning will be needed to prevent local disturbances, that reinstatement of the Common might be needed after some events, and that temporary cattle removals should be minimised. The Executive Councillor for Arts and Recreation approved the proposed approach and FoMC will monitor developments carefully. Strawberry Fair will be back in 2011 and Midsummer Fair will be celebrating its 800th birthday.

Legal and other developments

Our final **aim** is "to establish the legal position regarding the use and management of the common" and "to ensure that any developments and improvements are within the law and sympathetic to the nature, characteristics and qualities of Midsummer Common". There is little to add here beyond what was said in last year's report. As chair of FoMC, I have had many meetings with Council officers and lawyers over statutory powers and duties and given evidence to Council meetings. The legal paper on our website (see <http://midsummercommon.org.uk/papers/Legal.html>) has been updated and has attracted the attention of other campaign groups in the country. The Council has made mutterings about updating the byelaws but there has been no sign of action yet. FoMC will continue to exert pressure on this front.

R S Baxter (chair)
16 March 2011