

Annual Report for 2018

What a difference a year makes on Midsummer Common! This time last year we were slowly recovering from the ‘Beast from the East’ and the damage caused by the heavy lorries associated with the Half Marathon. Walking on the Common in the beautiful early morning sun yesterday everything was looking lovely, with the swans sunning themselves on the grass, a heron silently fishing and a large patch of daisies showing on what had been a bare patch of earth all last summer. There was even a report of two otters being sited last week by the boathouses. This recovery has been helped by the new Council Management Plan for large events on the Common that was introduced last year, which makes a commitment to proper renovation of the grass and paths after each event. This has to be on-going and we hope for good things in 2019. We had very few complaints from residents last summer about the traditional Big Events, which were enjoyed by many- apart from the real problems which occurred on the traditional Saturday evening of the Midsummer Fair. I will not raise these issues here, but leave it to the Open Forum after my talk, when I hope there will be a good discussion.

On another positive note, after years of campaigning about parking problems we seem to have progress! After a series of different and largely un-co-operative landlords at the Fort St George, we finally appear to have a new landlord who listens to the wise words of Anthony French and wants to establish more friendly relations with FoMC. What a difference the reduction in illegal parking -together with the work to keep the whole area looking clean and tidy- makes to the atmosphere on the Common. I know that the new FoMC Committee hopes to hold its committee meetings in the pub, which will help to keep us on friendly terms with those who work there.

If you walk through the orchard you will see that it is looking lovely, with the blossom starting to emerge and the spring bulbs at the entrance adding some welcome colour. This is a result of a considerable effort on behalf of the orchard manager and a few committed volunteers. The weather was not helpful—the prolonged drought during the summer threatened to kill off our newly planted hazel copse- rescued thanks to the heroic efforts of some residents in Evening Court who rigged up a series of connecting hosepipes to save the day. (There is no tap in the orchard for such emergencies.) I note this week that all the plants have survived. After the drought came the rain, and for the first time we sadly had to postpone and ultimately cancel our annual picnic and two autumn volunteering sessions. We also had to cancel our usual stall in the Kids Section Strawberry Fair: we have run this for several years to help introduce children (and their parents) to the wildlife and trees on the Common and explain what we do. The stall is always crowded and great fun, but unfortunately this year many of our stalwart supporters were away that weekend and we were short of help. Hopefully we will run the stall in 2019 and please remember to volunteer when the message goes round! We did, however, have a delightful evening walk during Swift Awareness Week with local members of Action for Swifts. Although swifts have yet to colonise our nesting boxes under the Elizabeth Way bridge there are a few nesting sites around the Common and further up the river on Logan’s Meadow and we will continue to broadcast swift calls next summer to try to entice them back on to the Common.

The other serious problem has been the re-emergence of regular drug dealing and use in the orchard and surrounding roads. At least now we have established good quick reporting networks with the police and Council officers and I want to thank all members who take the time to report what they

see. This enables the police to build up a picture of what is happening around the City and there have been several drug related arrests recently.

At the AGM last year BRunk presented a cheque for us to use to help the local community, and we decided to install a picnic table in the orchard. To buy something suitably robust required some further funding and we were delighted to receive a generous contribution from the Beth Shalom Synagogue and several FoMC members. This has proved to be a very popular addition to the orchard, and it was good to see a neighbourhood 'Sunday morning breakfast with newspapers' regime quickly established, as well as individuals quietly working on their laptops happily munching on an apple. As the Treasurer mentioned in his report we would like to build on the success of this acquisition by setting up a small project fund with voluntary contributions. In 2019 we hope to work with the Council to install a drinking fountain (and tap!) to reduce the use of plastic on the Common, and also put some money aside to help with tree planting on the main Common, as we did when FoMC was first established.

Before I finally hand over to others I would like to flag up an issue which I can see getting more problematic in the future. I have attended several meetings where the plans for the new 'Green Highways' cycle routes into the city were discussed. I am very much in favour of encouraging this development. However, the maps I have seen show all the new routes simply disgorging more cyclists on to our open spaces when they reach the city centre. I understand that the cyclists' lobby have argued that commuters enjoy cycling in green spaces on the way to work, and I am sure that many do, and they should be welcomed. However, there are an increasing number who simply rush by without a glance around them and aggressively expect everyone to get out of their way. Part of the problem is that they see clearly designated cycle routes (I think they are numbers 11 and 51 on Midsummer Common) and think they have priority. Before we have a serious injury I would make a plea for some well designed signs at the entrance of each of our historic green spaces, identifying them by name and indicating that this is a shared historic space and cyclists should slow down.

That's enough talk from me, and time for your comments. I want to thank our local hard working Councillors and Council officials and everyone who has supported FoMC over the years and I pass on all my good wishes to the new Committee and Officers. I am looking forward to spending more time just quietly working in the orchard.

Susan Stobbs
Chair FoMC
March 2019