

Upgrading the footpaths and surrounding environment on Midsummer Common: a summary of our recommendations

There are many metalled footpaths crossing Midsummer Common. Some are Public Rights of Way under the care of the County Council; others are the responsibility of the City Council. They carry a variety of users: walkers (some with push chairs or dogs), runners, skaters, cyclists, disabled people in their wheel chairs or mobility scooters, and motor vehicles. Traffic is on the increase and users are often in conflict with each other.

County and City Councillors, Council officers and representatives from campaign groups walked the Common together to see the problems and discuss possible ways forward. Three problems were highlighted: the area around the Fort St George pub, the small path linked to Victoria Avenue and the much longer footpath from Cutter Ferry Bridge to Maids' Causeway. The *Friends of Midsummer Common* was asked to present ideas with help from *Cambridge Past, Present and Future*.

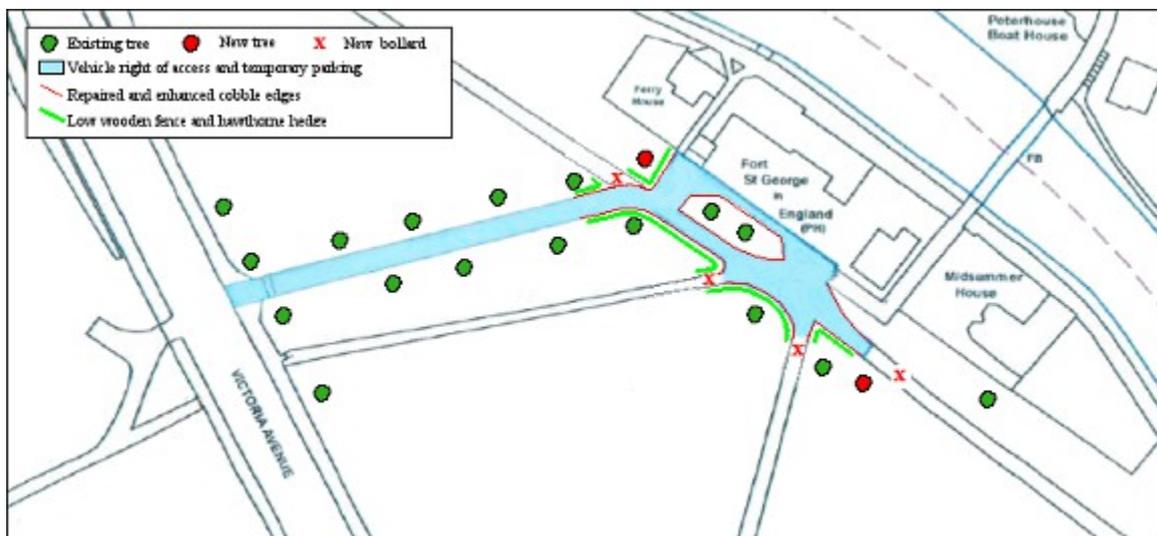


1. Environmental enhancement of the Fort St George area. The continuing problem of illegal driving and parking around the Fort St George pub and Midsummer House restaurant has resulted in widespread environmental degradation of the Common. Parked vehicles are an eyesore and barrier to pedestrian and cycle movements. Ways must be found to keep vehicles within the designated area and not to outstay their welcome. Whilst the paths are generally fit for purpose, environmentally sensitive and high quality measures must be taken to prevent vehicles leaving the paths and driving and parking on the grass.

The Council recently negotiated rights of access and parking with the pub owner and this should be the starting point. We **recommend**:

- a) Restoring and extending the cobbled edges to the paths at the most vulnerable corners;
- b) Planting some low hedging and protective fencing to discourage illegal driving and parking on the grass;
- c) Planting two trees to reinforce the driving restrictions;
- d) Pruning the trees immediately outside the FSG to ease movements and improve views across the Common;
- and
- e) Installing removable bollards along cycle/pedestrian routes to stop vehicles exiting over the grass.

A detailed plan of our proposal is shown below.





2. The footpath linked to Victoria Avenue. This short narrow footpath is in constant use by both pedestrians and cyclists. Its surface has many pot holes, puddles and gravel areas which, when coupled with heavy traffic, makes it unsafe. The edges are fragmented and indistinct. Poor drainage results in large puddles along the edges. We **recommend** that this path be:

- a) Resurfaced with a lower camber, improved edging and well keyed-in grass verges and drainage; and
- b) A sign should be placed on the railings at the entrance to the Common asking cyclists to slow down.



3. The footpath from Cutter Ferry Bridge to Maids' Causeway. Heavy traffic and conflicts are particularly evident on the footpath from Cutter Ferry Bridge (A) to Maids' Causeway (C and D) - see map to right. The stretch from A to C is part of the National Cycle Network; the stretch from B to D is a Sustrans local route. Only the stretch from B to C is a Public Right of Way. There are 3 major problems areas associated with this footpath: the intersection at B, the stretch from B to A, and the intersection at A.



3.1 The intersection at B. Three footpaths used by pedestrians and cyclists meet at a pedestrian gate leaving North Terrace and Brunswick Walk. The downhill slope from Fair Street encourages cyclists to go fast. The footpaths are in bad condition at this junction, utility manhole covers break the surface and visibility is impaired by the corner buildings. It is dangerous to walk through the gate, especially at night, because of unsighted cyclists.



We **recommend** that the layout of this junction be fundamentally reviewed:

- a) The path should be lightly cambered and curved further away from the gate (at B) allowing pedestrians who wish to enter the Common a place to wait until it is safer to cross the path;
- b) Signs should be placed on the railings asking cyclists to slow down in this pedestrian area;
- c) The awkward junction of paths CB/DB should be improved by adding a little more tarmac to round the corner;
- d) The verge should be well integrated by placing soil and grass seed at least 1 to 1.5m wide along both sides and compacted so that it lies flush with the final tarmac surface, allowing any overtaking bikes an easy run-off (as has been achieved on Coe Fen behind the Leys School);
- e) Adjacent manholes should be made flush with the final tarmac surface and grass verge; and
- f) A further tree could be added along section BD.

3.2 The stretch from B to A. This is a long, narrow footpath close to North Terrace that is overcrowded with walkers and cyclists often brought into conflict with each other. There is a natural tendency for both to stray onto the adjoining grassland which is often waterlogged. Water collects there because the footpath as a structure impedes the natural flow of surface water on the Common. In many areas grassland is also compacted, mainly by the Council's litter collection lorry that makes its daily journey straddling the path.



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We **recommend** that serious thought be given to rebuilding this footpath:

- a) Improved grassed verges flush with the final tarmac edges (minimum 1-1.5m wide) would ease the drainage problem right next to the path;
- b) Enhanced surface finish. Building on a floodplain is not easy. The 2009 Management Plan says that paths surfaced with tarmacadam "suits the Common as it is hard-wearing, has some degree of flexibility and

requires a shallower construction than a paved path. A top dressing of gravel chippings, as suggested in the 2001 Conservation Plan, would soften the appearance of the footpaths whilst retaining their practicality". This may not be practical for a cycle route but an improved surface finish is essential. No road markings should be used on the Common;

- c) Widening the path. There is a strong case for widening this very busy path (currently 1.5-1.8m wide.) to an absolute maximum of 2.5m. But it is important to recognise that there are statutory restrictions on what can be done with footpaths on "common land" such as Midsummer Common. The *Commons Act 2006* prohibits the resurfacing of "common land" without the Secretary of State's consent. Resurfacing means "the laying of concrete, tarmacadam, coated roadstone or similar material, but does not include repairing an existing surface of land made of such material". This might imply that the "widening" of footpaths requires ministerial consent involving public consultation and likely objections;
- d) Tree preservation. When widening the path great care is needed to avoid the root zones of existing specimen trees. Therefore, the final path should undulate lightly through the Common and as such set a new characteristic of the area and create more interest when using it; and
- e) City Council refuse collection vehicles should avoid damaging Common paths and make collections in a different way. A proper workable route should be developed to empty the bins in an ergonomically efficient way without damage to the Common - particularly where this is undertaken on a daily basis.

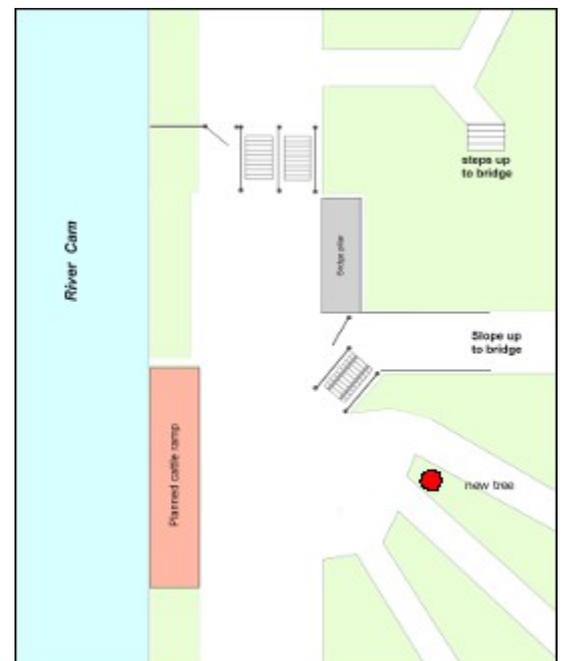
3.3 The intersection at A. Four footpaths converge on the Cutter Ferry Bridge from the west (two of these are public rights of way, one of the others is our footpath to Maids' Causeway), two footpaths converge from the east (one is a public right of way), and the bridge brings pedestrians and cyclists across the river from Chesterton. It is a very busy junction for cyclists, pedestrians and push chairs; daily bike counts are over 1,200. Grazing cattle on the Common dictate the need for gates and cattle grids in this area.



The current junction layout is hazardous. Pedestrians and push chairs must cross the bike lanes to use the gates. Cyclists travelling in both directions along the river bank must cross the same cattle grids twice. Many posts in the path give a challenging barrier to movement. Those coming off the bridge are fed at right angle past a blind spot straight into this two-way traffic. Users, cyclists in particular, have asked for improvements to the layout in order to ease congestion and improve safety. However, where mixed transport must share a space it might be better not to free things up so everyone is obliged to slow down and be prepared to give way.

We **recommend** a fundamental review of this intersection. One might consider (see sketch plan on right):

- a) A single gate for pedestrians (in line with the new gate installed at Walnut Tree Avenue);
- b) Two cattle grids in parallel for cyclists travelling in opposite directions (in line with the grids installed at Walnut Tree Avenue). Cattle grids to have a proper internal ramp to enable easy escape for any trapped wildlife;
- c) To reduce conflicts for those coming off the bridge, the base of the slope might be redirected away from the cross traffic and a cattle grid with pram irons and pedestrian gate inserted (as on the footbridge next to the Fort St George pub). Space can be reserved for the City Council's proposed cattle ramp;
- d) Planting of a tree and cattle guard to the rear of the new litter bins to integrate these large features better into the Common landscape; and
- e) At all times, high quality design detailing should be adhered to.



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Prepared in close liaison with CambridgePPF
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