

**2017 COMMON USER SURVEY:
RESPONSE BY THE FORUM
MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**



INTRODUCTION

The accompanying report describes the Survey of Southampton residents conducted by the Forum between May and October 2017. This report contains the Management Committee's comments on the Survey outcomes, the issues arising, and the way forward.

THE SURVEY

The Management Committee is very pleased by the sheer number of respondees (over 2,100), by their wide geographical coverage (every Ward is represented), and by the strong correlation with the City's ethnic diversity. There can be little doubt that the Survey is an accurate, up to date and authoritative account of what users from across the City think and feel about their Common and the important part that it plays in their lives. This is reinforced by the fact that there was no attempt to 'lead' respondees: the Survey sought free text responses on major issues, rather than pose leading questions. Finally, it should be noted that designing, publicising, conducting and analysing the Survey results absorbed a huge number of 'person hours', all of which were given voluntarily. Special thanks are due to the Forum's Chair, Adam Wheeler, and the Secretary, Dave Johnston, who did most of the work.

THE SURVEY OUTCOMES

It is clear from the Survey that the amenity impact of the Common is far reaching: so far from being the preserve of the predominantly white, middle class citizens who live close to it, Southampton Common is used by a wide cross-section (and considerable proportion) of the City's population. It is also clear that it is used for a very wide range of, chiefly, recreational purposes as well as commuting by foot and bike. Finally, it is clear that it is greatly appreciated as one of the City's most valuable assets, contributing as it does to better and healthier living and to the achievement of the City Council's two key strategic outcomes: *People in Southampton live safe and healthy lives; Southampton is an attractive modern city, where people are proud to live and work.*

At the same time, there is a clear and urgent need for improvements. The most pressing of these are mainly 'hygiene' factors – personal safety, toilets, litter and waste management, maintenance of the footpaths. In addition, there is a need to improve the management of the Common; to actively create both more open space and more natural areas; minimise the impact of major events; reduce conflicts between pedestrians, dog walkers and cyclists,

as well as to maintain its major facilities (e.g., the Hawthorns Wildlife Centre, the lakes, the Play Area). There is an obvious need for more capital investment (e.g., lighting, the Hawthorns, signage and information, toilets, better refreshment facilities).

The Council's recent major investment in an excellent play area makes a good start in addressing one of the Survey's major concerns (the Survey was conducted while the new play area was being constructed). However in recent years capital investments have not been accompanied by sufficient revenue resource to keep them in good condition (e.g., the paddling pool, the Hawthorns). This underlines the need to find ways in the future of both improving the management of the Common and of attracting new resources to it.

THE WAY FORWARD

The Forum has already established, and the City Council has fully accepted, the need for a comprehensive new plan for the Common (the existing Management Plan dates from 1992). The Management Committee believes that the new plan should be strongly aspirational, its fundamental purpose being to make Southampton Common the most attractive, as well as the best used, large open urban space in the country for the benefit of all the City's residents. But it is also clear that the resources devoted to the management and maintenance of the Common have fallen sharply in recent years.

As well as adopting bold and imaginative objectives, therefore, it will be paramount to identify additional resources – both capital and revenue – that can supplement community and voluntary effort to make the Common once again the jewel in the City's crown. A secondary, but still vital, purpose will be to ensure that the Common is operated in a transparent way that takes full account of the views expressed by the City's residents and by local and community groups. Finally, the new plan needs to reach out to, and engage, a wide range of stakeholders across the city, not only residents' associations and community groups but also private companies, public organisations and third sector bodies. The Survey provides an excellent starting point.

SCF Management Committee, December 2017.