

(1) Welcome and Apologies

The meeting was opened by Adam Wheeler, Chair of the SCF Management Committee (SCF-MC) who welcomed the attendees. He introduced himself to the audience, thanked them for attending and thanked The Holiday Inn, Southampton for generously donating use of the conference room for the evening.

Apologies had been received from Cllr. John Savage.

(2) Annual General Meeting

This was the first formal AGM for the Forum, the constitution having been adopted, and the initial SCF-MC elected at the founding meeting in January 2017. previously. The SCF constitution had defined a quorum for formal business as being half of the registered membership (i.e. those individuals and groups who had formally submitted a membership application form). From a show of hands it was clear that the number of registered member attending this meeting (20) fell well short of a quorum, therefore no formal Forum business could be passed at the meeting. Those members attending approved the strategy of the SCF-MC emailing the necessary business to all registered members to seek their approval of formal AGM business by electronic means (no disapproval being notified to the SCF-MC being taken as meaning assent).

Note: this was done and no dissent was received so all the formal business of the 2018 AGM was duly considered as having been approved by the formal membership.

The SCF-MC would look at making any necessary revisions to the existing constitution and seeking formal approval for changing it at the 2019 AGM.

2.1 Minutes of 2017 Inaugural Meeting

These had been circulated prior to the meeting and were approved by the (non-quorate) membership present. A subsequent email to the membership confirmed the approval.

2.2 Chair's Report

Adam Wheeler formally thanked the SCF-MC for all the hard work that they had done in the past year. The Committee had grown in size, diversity and skill sets over the last year through co-opting additional members.

The initial priorities for the Forum had been identified as:

- richer engagement across the City

- developing a new and updated plan for managing The Common
- assessing different operating models for The Common

These were all necessary to secure the future of The Common against the backdrop of ever decreasing City Council resources.

Richer Engagement - in 2017 the SCF-MC had undertaken an extensive survey of the views of Common users and City residents, the first since 1977, when the world was a very different place. The survey had received some 2,200 responses from across the City - collection of anonymous postcode data within the survey, and correlating this with census data, allowed us to demonstrate that the survey represented a broad demographic profile which was representative of the City as a whole. The survey therefor provided rich information which was also credible.

The Forum had also developed a www site and facebook profile, currently with 462 followers, allowing us to easily communicate with a large number of supporters. Thanks were offered to Tanya Bellows and Dave Johnston for creating and managing these resources.

The Forum had also reached out and engaged with local communities, including the local Chinese community and Andy Lai from the Chinese Association of Southampton had been co-opted onto the SCF-MC.

The Forum had also held a consultation on the City Council's controversial planning application to widen the Lovers' Walk path down the east side of The Common to facilitate its use as a shared pedestrian / cyclist path and a mini consultation and public workshops about the regeneration of the Hawthorns Urban Wildlife Centre.

A practical volunteer programme had recently been initiated to help the grounds team with identified landscape management tasks. This had been greatly facilitated by a Council Community Chest grant to buy tools, equipment and insurance. A set of priority works had been agreed with Council.

The Forum had built positive relations with Council officers and city Councillors, especially Cllr. Satvir Kaur who had been very supportive and helpful in building links with Council.

Links had also been developed with both the local universities - with the management and students union of the University of Southampton and with media students from Southampton Solent University who had produced promotional videos about The Common.

A new Plan - by December 2017 all the survey data had been collected and work had started on developing a new plan which was informed by the survey responses (the needs of Common users, the likes, dislikes and problems that needed to be addressed). This would be a high level Strategic Plan which set out a vision for The Common into the future and would be underpinned by detailed management plans and policies. A draft of the Strategic Plan had been released for public feedback by Easter and those approximately 40 individuals who had responded were thanked for their input which would inform subsequent drafts. The City Council would then undertake its own engagement exercise over the final draft (hopefully around Autumn time) before the document is presented to Council Cabinet for formal discussion and (hopefully) adoption.

The key issue was not the Strategic Plan itself, but rather building the finance, resources, labour force, expert advice and evidence base and governance structure to both write and deliver the underlying, detailed Management Plans.

From the survey data and draft Strategic Plan, 5 “hot topics” had been identified which the Forum would help to research to facilitate the Management plans. These were:

The Hawthorns - how to rejuvenate and reinvigorate the site as a sustainable and attractive visitor centre.

Toilets - there was a clear demand for more and better facilities, especially from young families - how might this be delivered against a backdrop of limited resource, maintenance requirements and possible antisocial behaviour / vandalism.

Safety of Common Users - how to address real or perceived fears for safety when using The Common, especially at night.

Green Travel - the survey had identified green travel (cycling and walking to work) as the 2nd most frequent use of The Common but there were clear conflicts between cyclists, walkers and dog walkers that needed to be managed

Landscape - the primary and statutory function of The Common was public recreation - how can this be promoted, enhanced and delivered whilst also maintaining and promoting biodiversity under The Common’s statutory status as a site of special scientific importance (SSSI)? How can enjoyment of wildlife be actively promoted?

The SCF-MC will be establishing working groups to fact find and assess options for all of these. Volunteers with specific interests in any / all of these were asked to sign up to those working groups.

2.3 Treasurer’s Report

Malcolm White (MW) presented the Treasurer’s report. The accounts and budget had been circulated in advance of the meeting. Finances were an ongoing problem, the Forum had received a small amount in donations from members (some £450) but was largely still reliant on the SCF-MC subsidising its activities from their own pockets (some £650 to date) and that was not a sustainable position. We have been very fortunate to have received a Council Community Chest grant of £2300 for 2018-2019 to help develop a volunteer programme - these funds were ring fenced for buying tools and PPE for volunteer work parties, insurance, developing promotional materials and meeting costs. Some £1,100 had been spent to date. We would also be receiving a £250 donation from the organisers of the ABP Southampton 10k, half marathon and marathon for providing a team of mile maker marshals for the day.

The (non-quorate) membership present approved the accounts and 2018-2019 budget. A subsequent email to the membership confirmed the approval.

2.4 Election of Officers

Under the existing constitution, four ordinary members of the SCF-MC were elected for a yearly term and could seek re-election

- Kate Martin and Roger Brown were seeking re-election
- Tanya Bellows and Andy Lai had been co-opted during the last year and were seeking formal election.

- Shirley Pinn and Simon Hill would remain as co-opted members for their specific expertise but other commitments meant that they were unable to stand for election.

No other nominations had been received in advance of the meeting and no others were forthcoming on the evening.

All 4 individuals seeking election / re-election were proposed by Adam Wheeler and seconded by Dave Johnston.

The (non-quorate) membership present approved the nominations. A subsequent email to the membership confirmed these elections.

2.5 Questions

The formal AGM business having been concluded as best it could without a quorum, the floor was opened for questions and comments.

The issues of dog walkers not clearing up after their dogs and of the absence of dog waste bins were raised. Respect and consideration for other Common users and the development of codes of conduct and awareness was part of the Safety working group remit. Nick Yeats for Southampton City Council (SCC) confirmed that dog waste can be placed in the ordinary litter bins - this was both easier to manage and more cost effective for SCC to operate than a separate system which classed "undiluted" dog waste as hazardous with more expensive disposal costs. It was noted that the responsible dog owners deplored the attitude of the lazy ones.

The issue of the status of great crested newt populations was raised. Very few in the audience claimed to having seen any great crested newts on The Common. This would be addressed by the landscape working group.

Conflicts between walkers / runners / cyclists and dog walkers were all identified. Respect and consideration for and awareness of other Common users , the development of codes of conduct and awareness , and "subtle ways" to encourage the concept of shared space and appropriate behaviour from all user groups were all part of the safety and green travel working group remits.

Litter and bin provision were raised as issues. SCF was going to be running regular litter picks to help SCC staff keep the site tidy. Bins were an interesting problem - there was an argument that not providing any bins would encourage people to take their litter back with them, but it would be a very brave experiment. Larger bins would be more visible and intrusive. Bins and litter would be part of the remit of the landscape working group.

A suggestion was made that a 6th "hot topic" should be the impact of SCC's proposals to move staff to a local authority trading company (LATCO) on upkeep of The Common. LATCO's could encourage chargeable, external work (revenue generation) over internal work (upkeep of public spaces). It might also be more difficult for the Forum to work with and influence a "commercial concern" than a local authority. Details of the SCC LATCO were still being negotiated so this would need to be considered once the picture was clear. It was recognised that LATCOs were part of the current economic climate so the detailed management plans would have to consider them and attempt to get the best out of them.

It was suggested that local supermarket community grant schemes were worth considering. The Treasurer would look into them.

The audience were encouraged to share experiences, photos and movies with the Forum through its facebook page or direct contact.

(3) Previews of promotional videos produced by Southampton Solent University Students.

The 3 promotional videos produced by second year media students at Southampton Solent University had recently been completed and were shown to a public audience for the first time. The students had been asked to create an approx. 3 minute long video on a theme relating to The Common which interested them.

- "Common Histories", by Luke Hall, Frazer Toppin and Andre Moore
- "The Common and me." by Milly Siverthorne, Jake Tilbrook and Jake Pocook
- "Our Common" by Lia Absalom, Joseph Barnes, Niall Jenkins and Joe Mensah-Brenner, with poem by Natasha Barnes

The 3 videos were all well received. If the relationship with Southampton Solent University was continuing, it was suggested that "families and children" and "growing up on The Common" would make good topics for future videos.

(4) Workshop Session

Roger Brown introduced the second half of the meeting. The aim was to hold open discussion on the 5 "hot topics" that the working groups would be looking into. These working groups will be comprised of SCF volunteers and SCC staff who would research and assess the underlying issues within each topic whilst the draft Strategic plan was working through Council. The reports from the working groups would then inform the detailed Management Plans which would be developed to deliver the Strategic Plan.

To start this process off, audience members were asked to pick a "hot topic" which interested them and to sit around a table with others interested in that topic to brainstorm issues and identify the types of data and research needed to inform decisions. This information, together with the survey results would inform the framework of each working group's activity.

Some SCF members had already signed up to specific working groups and if anyone else wished to participate they were encouraged to make themselves known to the convenor of the relevant table.

Because of the numbers in the audience, Green travel and Safety and Landscape and Toilets groups were joined.

Each group discussed its hot topic and key thoughts were recorded on paper. Each group elected a reporter who summarised the discussion for the wider audience. The raw outputs from the 3 discussion groups were later provided to the conveners of the 3 working groups to act as seed ideas for their discussions (see Appendix).

(4) Any other Business

Adam Wheeler thanked the audience for attending and for contributing to the AGM and workshops. He wished them safe journeys home and urged them to stay engaged with the Forum and to spread the word.

