

Minutes
Southampton Common Forum
Open Public Meeting
14/01/2017
Richard Taunton College, Hill Lane.



(1) Welcome and Apologies

The meeting was opened by Roger Brown (RB), Chair of the initial SCF Steering Group Committee (SCF-SC) who welcomed the attendees.

Apologies had been received from Cllr. O'Neil.

(2) Introduction

RB thanked Richard Taunton College for providing the venue and described the fire evacuation procedure.

The forum had started as an initiative between Highfield Residents' Association (HRA), Southampton Common and Parks Protection Society (SCAPPS) and the Common Sense group who undertook practical land management work on Little Common.

At the first meeting of the Forum in Feb. 2016, a number of individuals had offered to form an initial steering group to get the Forum up and running. A second meeting in June 2016 had brainstormed ideas for improving The Common and identified the need for a better understanding of how it was managed by Council. As a consequence, Council officers were invited to present at the third meeting in September 2016.

The steering group had also held meetings with Cllr. Satvir Kaur, Council Cabinet member responsible for leisure and with council officers involved with Parks and Open Spaces. It was clear that Council welcomed the initiative to create a residents' voice for The Common.

(3) Formal Inauguration of The Southampton Common Forum

3.1 Constitution

The steering group had drafted a constitution for the Forum, which was required for the Forum to be formally recognised by Council and would allow us to seek grant support for projects and activities. This had been circulated on the Forum's web site, facebook page and by email to individuals who had attended any of the previous meetings and provided email addresses to us. The draft constitution was modified in response to comments provided and a final version presented in advance of this meeting, with a view to it being formally adopted. No further comments or amendments were provided from the floor of the meeting and the draft constitution was adopted by a show of hands.

3.2 Election of Management Committee

With the constitution now adopted, this established a formal Management Committee comprising officers and ordinary members. Nominations had been sought in advance of the meeting and several individuals had been nominated.

Chair: Adam Wheeler (AW) had been nominated to chair the Forum's Management Committee. A Southampton resident for 21 years, he had been involved with the initial steering group since summer 2016. He was retired, having worked in academia and university management, his last position being deputy vice chancellor (Provost) of the University of Southampton. He lived in Shirley and estimated that he had crossed The Common some 8,000 times. He viewed The Common as a constant presence in the life of family and friends, and one which had huge potential, probably not yet fully realised. Despite the best efforts of Council, it was recognised that The Common was not in a condition which they, and City residents, would like it to be in. With Council facing ever greater cutbacks and demands on its budgets, it was unlikely that they could provide adequate resources to maintain and improve The Common. He saw SCF as a main point of engagement with all stakeholders including city residents, Council, the business community and the universities and wanted The Common to be a space for local residents, all city residents and visitors to all enjoy and appreciate. Whilst aware of existing frustrations experienced by other groups with interests in The Common, he viewed the creation of SCF as a new beginning and it was important to put those frustrations aside and to start the Forum with a clean slate and a constructive attitude of working strategically, cordially, productively and deliverably with all stake holders. There would be no easy wins, the problems were complex and so would be the solutions. He believed that the Forum should initially focus on 3 objectives:

- (1) Richer Engagement - bringing all city residents into the Forum, especially young families and the numerous ethnic communities, so that everyone had a say.
- (2) Establishing a clear vision for The Common, how it should be managed and how it should develop / evolve to meet the needs of a changing city.
- (3) Evaluating the different options for how The Common could be managed, learning from the experience of other Cities, groups and open spaces.

Q. There was some concern over what was meant by "development" of The Common.

A. This emphatically did not mean building on The Common, but enhancing and maximising its potential to meet the needs and aspirations of the City as an open space. For example was clear that The Hawthorns was not reaching its full potential as a focal point for education, let alone for fostering a deeper appreciation of both the natural history and heritage of The Common. The Hawthorns needed to be upgraded, refurbished and better resourced to act as a focal point, drawing people into The Common and engaging with them.

There were no objections or counter nominations, and Adam Wheeler was duly elected as Chair of the SCF Management Committee for a term of 3 years.

Secretary: Dave Johnston had been nominated to serve as Secretary to the Forum's Management Committee. He had been involved in the initial steering group from the outset. He was a biologist who worked for the University's School of Medicine at the General Hospital. He had previous experience of working with Council and of undertaking practical works on Council land through the Friends of Southampton Sports Centre, for which he was treasurer. He would take a lead role in SCF "engagement activities" like communications, volunteer projects, www site and social media as well as preparing meeting minutes.

There were no objections or counter nominations, and Dave Johnston was duly elected as secretary to the SCF Management Committee for a term of 3 years.

Treasurer: Malcolm White had been nominated to serve as Treasurer to the Forum's Management Committee. He had been involved in the initial steering group from the outset. He had lived in Southampton for 8 years and was an accountant by profession. He was a regular Common user, especially as one of the directors of the weekly Parkrun. He was also a keen cyclist

There were no objections or counter nominations, and Malcolm White was duly elected as treasurer of the SCF Management Committee for a term of 3 years.

Vice Chair: no nominations had been received so this position would remain vacant for the time being.

Ordinary Member: Kate Martin. Kate was active in both the Friends of Southampton Old Cemetery and Southampton Common and Parks Protection Society (having served as secretary for many years). She had lived in Southampton for 35 years and whilst she lived in the east of the city, regarded The Common as a city wide resource.

There were no objections or counter nominations, and Kate Martin was duly elected as an ordinary member of the SCF Management Committee for a term of 1 year.

Ordinary Member: Roger Brown. Roger was a former vice Chancellor of Southampton Solent University and a former Chair of Highfield Residents' Association, though which he had lobbied Council over matters relating to The Common. He lived close to The Common.

There were no objections or counter nominations, and Roger Brown was duly elected as an ordinary member of the SCF Management Committee for a term of 1 year.

No other nominations had been received. It was noted that only one place on the Management Committee was held by a woman. It was regrettable that others had not yet stepped forward and anyone interested in contributing was encouraged to contact Adam Wheeler, Dave Johnston or Roger Brown. The Management Committee had the authority under the constitution to co-opt others onto the Committee until the next AGM when they could stand for formal election.

The newly established Management Committee intended to meet at least monthly and the first meeting would be arranged for the following week.

Roger Brown handed control over of the meeting to Adam Wheeler as newly elected Chair of SCF. Adam moved a formal vote of thanks to all members of the initial steering group for getting the Forum to where it was today.

(4) Workshop Session

The aim of the second half of the meeting was an open discussion on 3 key themes that SCF would initially be looking into.

The 3 key themes discussed were:

- Richer Engagement
- A new Strategic Plan for The Common - Council has not got an up to date one - the "current" one was written in 1992 and based largely on ecology.
- Possible operating models for managing The Common.