

# OPEN SPACE MANAGEMENT PLAN 2014-2019

## MIDSUMMER COMMON



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## **INTRODUCTION**

This nature conservation Management Plan covers the five-year period from 2014 to 2019. The opinion of local residents is that there had been a steady decline in the management of and therefore appearance of Midsummer Common prior to 2009 and the last Management Plan. The Common has the potential to support a greater diversity of species and retain its value as a public open space. Much work has been done since the implementation of the last Management Plan to improve the Common both by increasing the biodiversity and by making the spaces more usable and attractive for the community. The intention is to continue with this work as well as starting new projects to further enhance the space.

### **1. SITE DESCRIPTION AND INFORMATION**

#### **1.1 Location**

Midsummer Common is located at grid reference TL 455 590, within the administrative district of Cambridge City. The Common is enclosed by the River Cam to the north and residential areas and Maids Causeway to the south. The east and west boundaries are delineated by Walnut Tree Avenue and Victoria Avenue respectively.

Midsummer Common covers an area of 13.4 hectares. Prior to the creation of Victoria Avenue in 1890, the Common also covered the area now known as Jesus Green. The two areas are now managed separately. The size of the Common makes it suitable for traditional cattle grazing and as a venue for open-air events.

#### **1.2 Recorded History**

The appearance and use of Midsummer Common has been well documented. Local enthusiasts are interested in preserving the Common for traditional uses alongside its modern role as an events venue. The Midsummer Common Conservation Plan provides further detail of the history of the Common and its significance to people in Cambridge. The Common holds archaeological interest in the form of prehistoric, Roman and Medieval finds. In addition to these, human skeletons were found in 1952 that are thought to be plague victims. Midsummer Common has been the subject for a number of botanical surveys conducted by The Wildlife Trust and the Cambridge Natural History Society.

#### **1.3 Summary Description of Open Space**

Midsummer Common is low-lying riverside pasture covering an area of 13.4 hectares. It is classed as a functioning fluvial flood plain as defined by the Environment Agency. In the 19th century, the area was an important trade post and held the annual Midsummer Fair, from which it got its name. The Common played host to the Coronation (1838) and Jubilee (1887) celebrations during Queen Victoria's reign, and the Royal Agricultural Show in 1894. The expanse of open grassland and river ferries linking to the north of the city, made the Common a perfect venue for sporting events, exhibitions and trading. In 1927, the ferries were replaced with footbridges located by the Fort St George public house and Cutter Ferry path. These routes are now well used by cyclists and walkers. The Common provides a safe vehicle free corridor between residential areas and the city centre. The public house and Midsummer House restaurant attract people on to the Common all year round.

Midsummer Common is relatively flat and consequently any furniture or infrastructure installations are required to be carefully planned to ensure they do not detract from the Common itself.

The Common has provided grazing since at least the 13th Century and the right to graze there is exercised today. This traditional management of the Common is supplemented by mechanical maintenance during the summer months in order to accommodate the busy events programme. The railings and gateways are essential for the Common to be grazed. The current design consists of a self-closing gate for pedestrians and a small cattle grid for cyclists and users of disability vehicles. These meet the requirements of the grazier and are not too obtrusive.

The Common is a rare example of a large open grassland suitable for open-air events that is in close proximity to the city centre. This makes the Common an invaluable resource for the Cambridge community and visitors. Events that take place there include the Midsummer Fair, Strawberry Fair and the November Fireworks displays for bonfire Night. It is a popular place for dog walkers, cyclists and people picnicking. Residents of the nearby boats also enjoy the large Common area adjacent to the river.

### Grassland

The grassland on the Common can be described as species-poor, semi-improved riverside pasture. In the past, the grassland was likely treated with herbicides and fertilisers which have reduced the species diversity, though this may also have been the result of excessive and regular mowing or the spreading of river dredgings. The grassland is dominated by perennial rye grass (*Lolium perenne*), wall barley (*Hordeum murinum*), yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), white clover (*Trifolium repens*), cock's-foot (*Dactylis glomerata*) and daisies (*Bellis perennis*). The ceasing of chemical use on Midsummer Common has contributed to an improvement in the grassland species composition.

The introduction of the grazing cattle has been a positive addition to the management regime and continued grazing at the right levels will bring further benefits. Some small areas are showing signs of improvement and there is the potential for this to spread across the Common. One such area has a finer sward with a dominance of red fescue (*Festuca rubra*), ribwort plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*), creeping buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*), meadow foxtail (*Alopecurus pratensis*) and creeping cinquefoil (*Potentilla reptans*). The easternmost end of the Common is not used during events so has a greater sward height (approximately 25cm). It is slightly more species-rich with white campion (*Silene latifolia*), black medick (*Medicago lupulina*), cut-leaved crane's-bill (*Geranium dissectum*) and rough meadow-grass (*Poa trivialis*) present.

The banks by the Auckland Road access point are dominated by tall ruderal species including nettles, thistles and bindweed. Due to the gradient, these banks are not mown or grazed regularly and consequently more aggressive weed species have become established. At the top of this slope is an area known as The Pound.

As part of the previous Management Plan, a Community Orchard has been established in this area that connects back to Newmarket Road. This area is enclosed by stock proof fencing and was once used as a temporary enclosure for the cattle but this is no longer the case. There is pedestrian access from both ends and a new set of steps from the main Common makes ascending the bank to the Orchard easier. The allotments are located to the east of The Pound, to which easy access must be maintained.

### Trees

The schemes and placement of the trees on Midsummer Common are not natural; however they do hold great aesthetic value for the Common. These trees are planted with the aim of them reaching maturity and developing the habit typical for that species. An exception to this is the willow trees which are pollarded. Because of the intensive use of the Common, the trees are managed to minimise the risks associated with dead wood and comply with Health and Safety regulations. This creates an unnaturally healthy environment. Where possible, native, traditional tree species have been planted in order to re-create the historical look and feel of the Common. In some cases non-native species have been selected as they are more tolerant of our current climate or have a resistance to disease.

The tree planting on the Common is restricted to the perimeter and one small avenue. The southernmost corner of the Common, known as Butt Green, is subject to a slightly denser tree planting scheme. This is to conceal the surrounding urban development. The trees around the perimeter play an important role in creating a natural feel to the Common. They act as a screen to the surrounding buildings and roads whilst maintaining the long distance views of the spire of All Saints Church, the tower of St John's College chapel and the Museum of Technology.

The horse chestnut tree (*Aesculus hippocastanum*) avenue along Victoria Avenue was planted soon after the road was built in 1890 with some trees being replaced in the years since. These large trees create an impressive boundary to the Common whilst allowing people to see underneath them and across to Jesus Green.

In 2010, following some tree felling in the previous years, the City Council undertook a program of tree planting and management that resulted in 43 new trees being planted, 7 being felled and 3 relocated. There are now more than a hundred trees growing on Midsummer Common. Over 40 of these are on Butt Green comprising a mixture of horse chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*), London plane (*Platanus x hispanica*), common lime (*Tilia x europaea*), silver pendent lime (*Tilia tomentosa 'Petiolaris'*), Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*), common walnut (*Juglans regia*), wych elm (*Ulmus glabra*) and Huntingdon elm (*Ulmus x hollandica 'vegeta'*).

The trees along the river are predominantly white willow (*Salix alba*) of various ages and condition. They are part of the important Hayling Way willow habitat extending from Waterbeach to Cambridge. London planes (*Platanus x hispanica*) have also been planted along the river and are now impressive specimens at approximately 80 years old. In recent years, some trees along the river have been removed for safety reasons and replacements have included white willows and hybrid or continental black poplars. Elsewhere on the Common, the Friends of Midsummer Common (FoMC) have raised funds to enable the replacement of other mature trees. Along the southern boundary, a mixture of limes (*Tilia spp*) and horse chestnuts account for most of the more mature trees, alongside silver birch (*Betula pendula*) and walnut (*Juglans regia*).

The Southern boundary is predominately silver lime (*Tilia tomentosa*) and silver pendent lime (*Tilia tomentosa 'Petiolaris'*) but there is common lime (*Tilia x europaea*), Crimean lime (*Tilia x euchlora*), silver birch (*Betula pendula*), horse chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*), tree of heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*) and common walnut (*Juglans regia*).

#### Community Orchard

The *Wildlife Trust*, in their 2009-14 Management Plan for Midsummer Common, proposed the planting of a Community Orchard on part of the Common. FoMC welcomed this idea and presented its own planting proposal using heritage trees of local provenance. Over the last 4 years FoMC volunteers have cleared the site of brambles, nettles, thistles and other weeds and have planted and nurtured 50 fruit trees with the help and guidance of City Council staff.

The fruit trees comprise: 5 *New Rock Pippin* apple; 5 *Wayside* apple; 3 *Histon Favourite* apple; 2 *Jolly Miller* apple; 4 *Crab* apple; 1 *Vranja* quince; 1 *Meeches Prolific* quince; 4 *Wallis's Wonder* plum; 3 *Cambridge gage*; 2 *Willingham gage*; 3 *Laxton's Foremost* pear; 3 *Warden* pear; 1 *Mulberry King James I*; 1 *Medlar Nottingham*; 6 *Stella* cherry; and 6 *Sunburst* cherry. A new hedge, 50 wildflowers, 6 raspberry canes and 2 blackcurrent bushes have been planted to help enrich the biodiversity of the Common. All of this has been made possible by funds from the City Council, the Cambridgeshire Community Foundation and FoMC members.

#### **1.4 Legal Status**

Midsummer Common is registered common land and falls within Conservation Area 1 (central). A series of Definitive Footpaths cross the site and are Rights of Way maintained by Cambridgeshire County Council.

#### **1.5 Land Tenure**

Midsummer Common is owned and managed by Cambridge City Council.

### **2. SITE EVALUATION**

#### **2.1 Trees**

The 2001 Conservation Plan, the 2009-14 Management Plan and the Council's Arboricultural Strategy provide an excellent basis for future tree management. FoMC and other volunteers have provided a vehicle for discussing tree management on the Common. Some have helped physically by watering new plantings, removing weeds from around the bases, replacing broken ties, carrying out minor pruning and keeping a general eye on their health all of which aids the City Council with whom the responsibility for the trees lies.

It is very important to the residents of Cambridge and to the history of the site that the trees are maintained and enhanced to their fullest potential. To this end, there should be a plan in place to ensure the future quality of the trees with an eye for both immediate improvement and for long term planning beyond the individual's lifespan. To this end, several factors must be considered.

Shade is an important function in the Common as it is otherwise a highly exposed area. To this end, attempts have been made to complete the avenues of trees to keep a constant band of planting around the perimeter of the site and to fill gaps with new trees. As a result of climate change, many native trees on the Common are showing signs of disease and may have to be sympathetically replaced. If required, this will need to be done in a way that will minimise the time spent before replanting or where possible planting new trees before the removal of the older plant.

The historical nature of the Common is an important one and where practical and possible every attempt should be made to keep the trees avenue close to the original design. In this Jesus Green should be considered as the mirror image of Midsummer Common's avenue of trees on Victoria Avenue. The possibility of using non traditional, non-native tree species may be a good opportunity to explore increasing the species diversity on the Common that would not normally be seen there.

Because of the rapid increase of pathogens in recent years, as a result of climate change, it may be necessary to have a larger discussion about the future species that should be considered on the Common as the native tree stock may be severely affected. Consideration made need to be made towards both diversifying the tree stock on the Common to lessen the impact of any one disease on the total population and also perhaps towards the sympathetic choosing of non-native species which are known to be resistant to certain pathogens which are already present in the trees in the Common.

Ongoing maintenance of the existing trees must be carefully planned. A number of willows have been pollarded in the past but many of the pollards have lapsed and require careful management to bring them back into a pollard cycle. There are also some trees that have recently died and are in need of replacement.

There may be trees on the Common whose life expectation is limited. These trees should be identified and, where possible and practicable, the opportunity should be taken to plant a replacement tree in advance of the removal so that another tree is in place and established when the older tree is felled. New planting should be developing and maturing ready to take over from that in decline or through structural weakness close to felling. It is important not to fill all the potential tree planting positions at one time so that the landscape can be orchestrated over a long period of time, beyond the working life of a single manager of the tree stock.

#### Flood risk

The increasingly unpredictable weather in recent years has made the possibility of flooding on Midsummer Common more likely. Large pools of water adjacent to the river have become more frequent sights and this standing water often remains for long periods as the ground can become saturated over time in long bouts of rain.

The City Council has limited control over any flooding on the Common. The river level is controlled by the Environment Agency and changed to avoid affecting certain areas. Naturally priorities are made to protect residential areas over meadows. Midsummer Common is classed as a functioning fluvial flood plain as defined by the Environment Agency serving its natural purpose.

Trees are known to absorb water run off significantly faster than grazed grassland and to help water soak more rapidly into the soil. This is another reason to continue to support the existing trees on the Common and to quickly replace those that have failed as they will both reduce the effect of flooding and help to remove the water that remains in the soil after heavy rainfall leading to saturation and possible flooding. This is particularly important alongside the river where flooding occurs most frequently.

## 2.2 Biodiversity

### Grass mowing

Midsummer Common is unlike other green spaces in Cambridge that receive regular grass mowing for sports and family usage. Midsummer Common is a flood plain with coarser grasses and grazing cattle. Mowing is necessary before the big events on the Common. Mowing would also help control the growing incidence of chickweed, barley grass, nettles, thistles and brambles on the Common.

The main Common is mown infrequently and rarely completely. The Eastern pound receives little attention. The Community Orchard gets a single mowing after the cow parsley has flowered - it is then left to FoMC members to hand mow the area for the rest of the year. The grass cutting programme could be reviewed, with different programmes established for the central areas of the Common in frequent use for events, and the areas such as the eastern Pound where increased biodiversity is a priority.

The uses of the Common have restricted the habitat diversity and as such the majority of the Common is improved grassland. There are, however, some areas that are not so heavily used and do support a greater diversity of species. The mature trees along the riverside are an important ecological feature as they provide roosting sites for bats and are home to a wealth of invertebrates. There is a distinct shortage of scrub or hedgerows for birds to utilise for feeding and nesting.

Much of the Common's boundary consists of roads or urban development. The exception is the northern boundary which abuts the River Cam. Midsummer Common forms part of an important wildlife corridor along the river that includes Jesus Green to the west and Stourbridge Common to the east. This green corridor aids the local movement of invertebrates, small mammals and birds. The River Cam is a County Wildlife Site in recognition of its importance for biodiversity. The Common has been selected as a City Wildlife Site as a result of it being an undeveloped floodplain associated with the River Cam County Wildlife Site.

The ceasing of chemical use on Midsummer Common has contributed to an improvement in the grassland species composition. The introduction of the grazing cattle has been a positive addition to the management regime and continued grazing at the right levels will bring further benefits. Some small areas are showing signs of improvement and there is the potential for this to spread across the Common. One such area has a finer sward with a dominance of red fescue (*Festuca rubra*), ribwort plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*), creeping buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*), meadow foxtail (*Alopecurus pratensis*) and creeping cinquefoil (*Potentilla reptans*).

The easternmost end of the Common is not used during events so mowing is unnecessary thus leaving a greater sward height. It is slightly more species-rich with white campion (*Silene latifolia*), black medick (*Medicago lupulina*), cut-leaved crane's-bill (*Geranium dissectum*) and rough meadow-grass (*Poa trivialis*) present.

### Hedgerows

There is a small area of scrub species adjacent to the Fort St George footbridge. This includes hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), dog rose (*Rosa canina*) and guelder rose (*Viburnum opulus*) which all provide nesting sites and food sources. There is a privet hedge in front of the new Berkeley Homes development and there are brambles on the bank in front of the allotments and nearby residences. There are few other opportunities for creating scrub habitat on the main Common because of the cattle grazing so these small areas hold great significance for the species present.

Volunteers have planted hedges around the Community Orchard. These comprise blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), guelder rose (*Viburnum opulus*), hazel (*Corylus avellana*), dog rose (*Rosa canina*), sweet briar (*Rosa rubiginosa*) and field rose (*Rosa arvensis*). There is a scattering of weeds and wildflowers amongst the domineering couch grass. Cow parsley (*Anthriscus sylvestris*) is an attractive hollow-stemmed, tall plant that grows and covers much of the Orchard in early summer before dying back. Broad-leaved docks (*Rumex obtusifolius*) with their long tap roots are plentiful and difficult to eradicate. Stinging nettles (*Urtica dioica*) are plentiful and unwelcome in what is a community space. Couch grass (*Elymus repens*) is often listed as an

invasive weed. It is very difficult to remove as the thin rhizomes become entangled among the roots of trees and shrubs and each severed piece of rhizome can develop into a new plant.

The trough that is still in place in the Orchard boundary attracts cattle up the steep incline where they can damage the steps and crowd the entrance to the Community Orchard.

There is still an issue of access to the Orchard through the site of the new synagogue. This has historically been used by residents as a short cut through to the Common and allotments but is now blocked for building work and the placement of hoardings have both damaged the hedging to the edge of the Common and intruded onto the common land itself. According to both the contractors on site and to the Council this access will be reinstated once building is completed in 2015.

#### Wildflower meadows

The 2009-14 Management Plan called for the creation of three wildflower meadows on the Common. In discussion with FoMC, the City Council decided to establish a trial meadow on Butt Green and in 2009 a Councillor led a group of officers and local volunteers in clearing an area of grass and weeds, tilling the soil and scattering a variety of wildflower seeds over the site. Some wild flowers have established themselves but not in great numbers. An unfavourable growing season and inadequate grass cutting were to blame for the poor outcome so further thought is needed before trying to create the remaining two meadows. A small area in the Community Orchard has been seeded by the friends group and has had some success.

In trying to create meadows on Midsummer Common, the cattle have an important role. This means keeping them grazing on the entire Common for as long as possible and minimising their absences for events. During the 1980s the Common was not grazed but was regularly mown instead. This restricted the plant growth and flowering opportunities and it is likely that a number of species would have been lost during this time. The current grazing regime does allow more plant species to flower and set seed and there has been an obvious improvement in the species-richness of the grassland since the cows were reintroduced.

#### Bats

The Wildlife Trust has surveyed the area and found that noctule (*Nyctalus noctula*), common pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*) and daubenton's bats (*Myotis daubentonii*) use the Common and its surroundings for foraging and potentially roosting. Daubenton's bats have a preference for foraging for insects over water and were observed over the River Cam. Although this is not part of Midsummer Common, their presence must still be considered with any changes in habitat management. Common pipistrelle and noctule bats feed in a variety of habitats including woodland edge, hedgerows and suburban gardens. These species were seen foraging over the eastern end of the grassland where the trees and taller ground vegetation provide a suitable habitat for prey insects.

All of these species are known to roost in trees and buildings. Bats require a surprisingly small crevice in which to roost and the males often roost alone. Although the trees on Midsummer Common offer few opportunities for roosting bats (i.e. no dead wood, few cracks) it is likely that individuals utilise nearby buildings and bridges for roosting.

### **2.3 Buildings & Structures**

There are 3 buildings close to the river on the Common: Ferry House, the Fort St George Public House and Midsummer House Restaurant. The first, next to the pub, is a single occupancy Council house needing regular garden maintenance; it could be put to better use. The public house is a listed building owned by Greene King Brewery and the Michelin 2 Star restaurant is privately owned. There is a small walled garden next to the restaurant that is owned by the City Council and is used to corral the cattle and store wood. Being land locked, all must rely upon vehicular access across common land for which there is a footpath which is classed as a right of way.

There is a fourth building on the Common. This is the relatively new public toilets built alongside Victoria Avenue. As a building it has received architectural acclaim. Four plane trees have been planted to soften its visual impact from the houses overlooking the Common. Two footbridges are distinct features on the Common. The one next to the Fort St. George pub is partly hidden by the restaurant. The Cutter Ferry bridge



and its access slope and stairs is more pronounced. It serves as a visual barrier between the main Common and the eastern Pound.

Vehicular access to the two commercial premises is a narrow pathway from Victoria Avenue. Despite a recent legal agreement, signed between the City Council and Greene King (the owners of the Fort St George pub), parking issues remain. As the businesses develop, the number of delivery and maintenance vehicles needed to service the premises continues to increase. A balance needs to be found between allowing the continued working of these businesses and the preservation and improvement of the grassland. Renovation of the path and grassland area around the pub and restaurant is needed as part of the larger scheme to renovate the paths.

Careful monitoring is required from the City Council to look out for the condition of its own buildings on the Common and the effects of construction work on the privately-owned buildings. There are a series of underground service lines running across the Common. Access to these is sometimes required but often inadequate measures have been taken to make good the ground afterwards and care need to be taken in order to minimise the disruption caused by the works.

Over the last 5 years there has been a major residential development on the eastern edge of Midsummer Common. Once fully occupied, the Berkeley Homes development will impose new pressures on the Common and the neighbourhood will need improving. About 600 people will reside on the 1.5 hectare site and Midsummer Common will be outside their back door. A thoroughfare will attract pedestrians and cyclists off the Newmarket Road through the site and onto the Common. What can be done to alleviate these combined pressures and improve the appearance and amenity of the Common?

When given planning permission, Berkeley Homes agreed to give the Council s.106 money to help ease these new pressures. The Council's Planning Obligation Strategy sets the rules for using this money. Projects must primarily provide or improve facilities to cater for increased usage and needs arising from residents of new developments. Some of this money can be used for the improvement or provision of open space and recreation facilities. The Council encourages groups, individuals and officers to suggest ways of spending this money and these are assessed each Autumn by Council officers. These assessments lead to recommendations being made to Area Committees and eventually via scrutiny to the Executive Councillor for Arts & Recreation. Midsummer Common is a perfect candidate for this money.

Thought should be given to establishing a new Open Spaces Centre in one of the buildings on Jesus Green or Midsummer Common. If establish on Midsummer Common it could display some historic photos and articles in, perhaps, a café environment. It could also be home for a Park Warden who would manage various activities on the Common.

Midsummer Common is relatively flat and consequently any buildings, structures or furniture can damage the view. Little can be done with buildings or structures in place but new structures and furniture must be carefully planned to ensure they do not detract from the Common itself.

## **2.4 Access**

Midsummer Common is enclosed by the river to the north and a Cambridge design metal fence elsewhere. Recent painting of the fence has enhanced its appearance. Together these serve to keep grazing cattle in and unauthorised vehicles out.

Public access to the Common is provided at many places and in various forms. Pedestrians gain access through pinch points with pram guards or self-closing gates; cyclists cross cattle grids. There is a limited number of locked gates for vehicles all but one of which are controlled by the City Council. The exception gives vehicle access to, and is controlled by, the pub and restaurant. This gate was installed recently but has had regular technical difficulties and has been damaged on several occasions.

During 2007 the City Council decided to remove or alter some of these pedestrian access points to comply with the *Disability Discrimination Act 1995*. The Council's stated aim was to make gaps at least 1.0m wide so that they are passable by those persons using wheelchairs or mobility scooters and those with wide

pushchairs. The only pedestrian gate that now restricts access is down the bank near Victoria Bridge and the gate into the Community Orchard from the main Common.

## **2.5 Footpaths**

The growth in traffic across the Common is a problem. Every effort should be made to discourage walkers and cyclists from creating their own paths across the Common and for cyclists to encourage due consideration of pedestrians when on the footpaths, especially at night. The problem with cyclists is exacerbated by the poor maintenance of the paths. The excessive camber on some of the paths, together with numerous potholes and large puddles at various pinch points means that the full width of the existing paths cannot be used, funneling cyclists, walkers, dogs and pushchairs into spaces that are far too narrow for safety, which encourages some people to go ‘off-road’.

Many of the metalled footpaths on Midsummer Common are in a very poor condition. Wear and tear is inevitable but made worse by heavy vehicle traffic on the Common. Pedestrians and cyclists are the main sufferers.

One of the major causes of damage to the footpaths is vehicle traffic. Much of this is localised but some travel across the entire Common. City Council litter vehicles are the main offender here. Their daily journeys can cause ruts especially alongside the footpaths which they tend to follow. If new, smaller vehicles were acquired for the daily collection of refuse and litter from the traditional bins on the Common, this would reduce the continual damage to the edges of the paths produced by the existing vans.

Four footpaths converge on the Cutter Ferry bridge from the west (two of these are public rights of way), two converge from the east (one is a public right of way; the other comes from the Berkeley Homes site), 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. Traffic from the Berkeley Homes site will add to this number. Grazing cattle on the Common dictate the need for gates and cattle grids.

The present junction is hazardous - pedestrians and push chairs must cross the bike lanes to use the gates. Cyclists travelling in both directions along the tow path must cross the same cattle grid 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. Discussions are required as to the best way to redesign this area for the benefit of all.

The many footpaths that cross the Common are mostly surfaced with asphalt or resin-bonded gravel to achieve a subtle hard wearing surface. Although these are suitable for cyclists and pedestrians they do not cope with heavy vehicular use and the surface and edges tend to crack and break down. This gives the green space a neglected look and safety risk and requires sympathetic repair work. Some are in a very bad condition and need urgent attention. This task is complicated by some paths belonging to the County and others to the City.

To keep the natural feel of the Common, lighting is kept to a minimum; there are lights along the riverside, on one major footpath and at main intersections. Any more than this would create a false sense of security. There is one CCTV camera looking over the main Common and this is linked with the City Council control room.

## **2.6 Benches, litter bins and notices**

Many of the benches around the Common were in a bad condition and have been replaced in recent years. Six new ones have been installed in vacant spaces by the City Council and FoMC has renovated two released from Victoria Avenue and installed them in the Community Orchard.

The number and location of litter bins should be kept under review, especially in the light of the new compression bins that have been introduced recently. These are well used but are not particularly attractive especially in their prominent location near the Cutter Ferry bridge.

Littering is a criminal offence but, together with fire scars, it is a perpetual problem on Midsummer Common even though warning notices are on display. It is the City Council's responsibility to provide a sufficient number of litter bins, to locate them in the right places, and to clear them on a daily basis. The City Council also needs to make regular litter sweeps to clear rubbish from the ground.

All the traditional litter bins have a strutted wood caging; many are capped with a metal grill to stop the cattle and dogs from foraging. Some new solar powered compression bins have been introduced to store more waste and ease regular emptying.

Dog walking is a popular activity on Midsummer Common. Most owners clear up their dog mess but disposal bins are not always readily available. Requests have been made to the City Council for more bins at various locations on Midsummer Common.

Dog fouling is a potential health hazard. Cambridge City Council has adopted and enforces the *Dogs (Fouling of Land) Act 1996*, which makes it an offence for any one in charge of a dog to allow it to foul on any land within the City unless they clear it up. Under the *Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005*, local authorities can make Dog Control Orders dealing with dog fouling.

There is pressure for picnic and barbecue areas to be established and notices to be rationalised and improved. Before notices can be rationalised there is a need to clarify the rules. Lighting fires and barbecues can damage the grass and leave visible scars. Unauthorised camping or overnight sleeping is forbidden on the Common. Under section 193 of the *Law of Property Act 1925*, any person lighting a fire or camping on common land shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine. Under Schedule 2 of the *Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000*, a person is not entitled to be on any common land if he "lights or tends a fire or does any act which is likely to cause a fire" or if he "engages in camping" or if he "uses or has with him any metal detector". Local authorities are empowered by ss.77-79 of the *Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994* to direct unauthorised campers to leave the land and remove their property.

Picnics and barbecues are popular activities on many Cambridge green spaces. There is already a demand for picnic/barbecue sites on Midsummer Common and residents in Berkeley Homes will add to that demand. The area at the back of Cutter Ferry bridge in the eastern Pound would make a good location for a trial site. It is very tatty area and would be much improved by clearing the nettles from behind the bridge and planting a wildlife friendly hedge along the wall and fence onto the Common. A couple of picnic tables could be placed in this area (one in open ground, the other under a tree) together with a permanent barbecue on a raised platform. Suitable rubbish and litter bins would need to be provided if this were to go ahead including bins specifically for the removal of temporary barbecues. There is also room for an additional bench facing the river. An existing light in the area will add to the scenery and improve safety. This area cannot be seen from the main Common but is much frequented by cyclist and walkers who should keep anti-social behaviour away.

There are many different notices at the entrance points to the Common including signs banning fires, litter control etc, these look cluttered and take away from their ability to clearly inform users on how they can use the Common.

Although there is detailed information about the history of Midsummer Common on the FoMC website, casual daily visitors and those arriving in great numbers for the major events on the Common have little idea of its historic nature. A well-designed notice board could be erected at the Newmarket Road entrance to the Community Orchard, with information about the Orchard and the fruit trees that have been planted there and upcoming FoMC activities.

## **2.7 Grazing**

Midsummer Common has provided grazing for animals since at least the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Under an 1861 Common Seal of the Borough, the Rights of Common on Midsummer Green were for geldings, mares and cows from Old May Day to Old Candlemas Day. Registration under the *Commons Registration Act 1965*

says that persons residing, owning or occupying land in the City of Cambridge have the right to graze geldings, mares and cows from 1st April to 30th November in each year to a total of 20 beasts over the whole of the land known as Midsummer Common. The *Cambridge City Council Act 1985* allows the Council to prescribe the procedure for the registration of commoners entitled to graze animals, to set the number of grazing animals, and to make a reasonable charge.

Grazing cattle are a feature on the Common during the summer months. Barely a day goes by without a family stopping to watch or even stroke them. The presence of cattle on the Common does come at a cost - new trees have to be protected by expensive tree guards which are not particularly pleasing to the eye and cattle grids must be maintained at the cycle and vehicle access points. The cattle are generally well appreciated and are suitable to the more natural feel of the Common.

## **2.8 Events**

There is considerable pressure from various groups to increase the number of events held on the Common, both major events such as fairs and circuses and charity events such as fun runs and cycle races. The City Council receives a considerable income from this source through licence fees and parking. At the same time it takes Council resources to prepare the site and clear up after each event. Mowing the grass and moving the cattle has financial and environmental costs. The increasing size and weight of many of the lorries arriving for these events can cause damage to the grass structure and paths. Compacting of the soil inhibits drainage and increases flooding, especially in winter. All such events have a detrimental impact on the sustainability and enhancement of the biodiversity of this open space.

One of FoMC's objectives is to encourage the public use and enjoyment of Midsummer Common. Another objective is to work with event organisers and the City Council to ensure that these events have minimal impact on local residents. Preventing anti-social behaviour - littering, noise, public urination, illegal fires and camping, alcohol and drug abuse - must always be a high priority.

These events can cause damage to the grassland and compaction of the soil, especially when the weather is bad. Damage extends to the footpaths when heavy vehicles stray from designated routes. The state of the grassland should be carefully monitored before and after each event. The City Council should ensure that the clean-up process after each event is conducted as quickly as possible, and the cattle should be returned to the Common as soon as it is safe to do so. Damage to the grassland and footpaths should be rectified. This may involve the laying of protective reinforced matting and the ploughing and re-seeding of damaged areas.

### Management of minor events

These are one day events such as Fun Runs and charity Bike Rides. These are very popular events, and encourage many people who would otherwise not take regular exercise to get fit and enjoy a sociable day out in the open, often raising money for good causes. The increased traffic and noise from many of these events, which are often held on Sundays, can produce problems for local residents wanting to enjoy time at home over the weekend. They can also cause damage to the grassland if not properly managed.

City Council guidelines for the management of such events should be made available to organisers. If avoidable, cattle should not be removed from the Common for these events; the Eastern Pound can be used to contain the cattle for a limited period if needed. To reduce damage, car parking on the Common should be restricted to organisers and confined to the Butt Green area. Other participants should be directed to local car-parks, which are generally not fully used on Sundays. Noise levels from loud speakers should be monitored and adequate toilet facilities provided. Contact phone numbers and other details should be given to locals in case problems arise on the day some of these details will be available in this document under the 'summary of operation' section.

### Developing other events and activities

There are a very large number of societies and voluntary groups actively working within the local community to encourage wildlife conservation, biodiversity, sustainability and the green agenda, and Cambridge prides itself as being a leader in this field. However, there are few events taking place on our open spaces to encourage members of the general public to get involved and increase their understanding of these important issues. FoMC has started in a limited way by hosting a school group studying the planting of fruit trees and

organising a successful Bug Hunt to study the insect population on the Common and by liaising with the local Wildlife Trust to lead an evening Bat Hunt.

Such activities are difficult to organise out in the open without an indoor facility to act as a base. It is recommended that an Open Spaces Centre be established using one of the buildings on Midsummer Common or Jesus Green to allow local societies and voluntary groups to run activities and lectures for schools and the general public relating to conservation and sustainability issues. This could attract funding from the many firms and businesses in Cambridge actively developing areas of sustainable engineering.

Midsummer Common is one of a series of historic Commons adjoining the river Cam in the heart of the city, giving city dwellers much needed easy access to a wonderful open space. It is large and flat enough to allow traditional major events, such as the Midsummer Fair, Strawberry Fair and Bonfire Night, to be held safely in an area where large crowds can be controlled. Smaller fairs, circuses, bike rides and charity runs occupy space at other times in the year. The City Council has an annual programme of these events on the Common. This will require continuing maintenance and attention to the condition of the field following heavy vehicle access and parking on the grass as the traffic can cause ruts and damage to the paths particularly in winter.

## 2.9 Vehicles

Laws govern the right to drive vehicles on common land in England. Under s.34 of the *Road Traffic Act 1988*, a person is prohibited from driving a motor vehicle onto or upon any common land or footpath without lawful authority. Under s.193 of the *Law of Property Act 1925*, rights of access to common land "shall be subject ... to any byelaw ... made thereunder or under any other statutory authority". Under s.20(e) of the *Cambridge University and Corporation Act 1894*, the Council may make byelaws "preventing or regulating ... driving on the Commons". Under Schedule 2 of the *Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000*, a person is not entitled to be on any common land if he "drives or rides any vehicle other than an invalid carriage". Driving restrictions might be eased for property owners whose sole means of vehicular access to their property is across common land. The City Council has given permission for delivery vehicles to service the pub and restaurant and residents therein to drive and park on their own land. It is for the Council to enforce these laws.

Controlling motorised vehicles on Midsummer Common will likely remain a long-term challenge. It is difficult to see event vehicles becoming fewer and smaller but every effort should be taken to restrict their numbers and movements, especially in wet weather. The City Council vehicles also cause damage on the daily litter collections that cross the Common. The greatest challenge will be controlling delivery vehicles going to the pub and restaurant - keeping the numbers down and ensuring a fast turnaround. There will doubtless be a need to review the working of the recently installed gate that controls this traffic.

The main challenge facing Midsummer Common over the last few years was how to manage the increasing use of the Common by various groups of people. The Common is under constant pressure because it is a floodplain yet hosts recreational activity and a wide range of public events which can have a negative impact on the Common. Heavy vehicles cause soil compaction resulting in poor drainage and surface water. The same vehicles can cause damage to the meadow grassland and the trees. Cyclists and pedestrians create their own paths across the grassland and worn areas beside the footpaths; both can harbour water

A close watch needs to be kept on bicycle traffic. How best can people be managed to avoid danger to each other. This means looking at the busy footpaths and deciding whether they should be upgraded and possibly separate cyclists from pedestrians. A look at some of the congested crossing points, such as around Cutter Ferry bridge, could ease conflicts. This issue cannot be ignored in the years ahead, especially if traffic increases following the opening of the Chesterton rail station.

There are a number of vehicular access points around Midsummer Common. These areas are particularly susceptible to damage from vehicles as the movement is concentrated here. Gates should be kept locked to prevent non permitted use. The gates by the public toilets on Victoria Avenue (leading to a hard standing), off Maids Causeway, at the end of Parsonage Street, off the Newmarket Road (into the Community Orchard) and by the river on Walnut Tree Avenue are controlled by the City Council. The gate off Victoria Avenue leading to the public house and restaurant is controlled by those two establishments.

Vehicles access the Common for a variety of reasons. The City Council makes a daily collection from the litter bins. Contractors have a 2-week cycle for watering the newly planted trees. Utility workers have rights of access to repair their underground pipes and cables. Boaters and adjacent residents are given servicing permission. The pub and restaurant have been given a right of way for delivery vehicles (but not to park on the Common). Some of these delivery vehicles can cause damage to the grassland and overhanging trees as many do not keep to the hard surfacing and use the grass areas to turn around. This is an area where a redesign would benefit both the commercial businesses and the condition of the paths and grass in this area. The emphasis should be on designing an efficient space for vehicles without adding to the existing area of hard standing significantly. Soft landscaping could be used to discourage or even prevent vehicles from travelling over the grass.

Much of this traffic is controlled by the City Council. Problems arise at the access point to the pub and restaurant. They are under instructions to restrict access to delivery vehicles but the gate is often opened for casual visitors who park on the Common.

## **2.10 Site Use**

Most of the day to day activity on the Common is pedestrians and cyclists who use the paths as a commuting route and to avoid the roads to travel from Chesterton and the east side of Cambridge towards the city centre. Because of the grazing by the cattle and relatively rough condition of much of the grass there is not a great deal of picnicking and games on the Common with people more likely to use Jesus Green for this. Kite flying and dog walking, however, are popular. The paths are relatively narrow, two bikes can pass each other but as both pedestrians and cyclists use the same routes there is often a need for some users to leave the path entirely to avoid collisions. This has led to bare patches to either side in some areas where the grass has been worn away.

Other less frequent activities would be the numerous events that visit the area each year including the fairs, circuses and Council organised events such as bonfire night.

### Community Groups

Friends of Midsummer Common (FoMC) was founded in 2006 to work with the City Council to 'encourage the good management and responsible use of the ancient grassland, Midsummer Common, maintaining a balance between the protection of the physical environment and the use and enjoyment of the Common and its facilities by members of the public'. Its membership includes residents from around the Common on both side of the river together with Cambridge citizens from wider afield. The Council has delegated to FoMC the development and management of the Community Orchard.

Brunswick and North Kite Residents' Association (BruNK) represents local residents' views on the use of Midsummer Common, with particular concerns relating to the good management of major events on the Common and how they impact on local residents.

## **2.11 Management of the site**

The management of the Open Space described in this Management Plan is the responsibility of Streets & Open Spaces team at Cambridge City Council. However with a few exceptions the paths on the Common are the responsibility of the County Council highways department.

The Streets & Open Spaces team is located within the Environment Directorate. Key functions of the Streets & Open Spaces team are identified as follows:

- Horticultural Maintenance
- Open Spaces Development
- Tree Management
- Sustainable Drainage
- Nature Conservation and Ecology
- Environmental Projects

- Community engagement
- Management of hard landscape / street furniture

### 3. SITE MANAGEMENT

#### 3.1 Vision Statement

The vision for the future of Midsummer Common will be to continue to provide the quality of open space at Midsummer Common and to be lead on this by the Friends group, stakeholder and local community.

General objectives are:

- to offer a well maintained and quality open space for active recreation and relaxation;
- protect the biological assets and increase biodiversity;
- reduce antisocial behaviour;
- realise the potential of the open space as a cultural and historically significant place to visit with publicity, information and events; and
- to work with the local community in identifying priorities for improvement in the open space and where funding can be most effectively spent.

#### 3.2 Objective 1: To maintain and enhance the overall habitat diversity of the Common and to increase the number of species using it.

##### Rationale

Midsummer Common is an important wildlife corridor adjacent to the River Cam, However, its diversity of habitats is limited. There is little native scrub/hedge habitat to provide food and nesting sites for birds, invertebrates or mammals.

The grassland provides limited sources of nectar for the insect life present and still lacks sward diversity. The presence of more wild flowers would improve the aesthetic appeal of the grassland and enhance visitors' experience. It would also improve the biodiversity value of the Common. Since grazing has been reintroduced there has been a marked improvement.

##### Proposed Actions

Grazing has contributed towards improving the quality of the Common's grassland and should be continued indefinitely. The current grazing regime is greatly influenced by the needs of other sites in Cambridge on which the cattle also graze. The grazing needs of Midsummer Common must be considered as part of a city wide grazing programme for this herd. This programme would provide both the landowner and grazier with guidelines as to how many beasts the site could support and for how long each year. The current grazier is keen to continue to use Midsummer Common and this should be encouraged by the City Council. The events programme does largely dictate the management of the grassland so periods when the Common can be grazed must be taken advantage of. For the safety of the cattle, litter bins must be emptied regularly and not left to overflow. When it is necessary for the Common to be mown, the arising should be removed from the site. If they are left to rot *in situ*, the nutrient level of the soil will be such that rank species such as nettles and thistles will thrive.

##### Meadow Creation

To improve the species diversity of the grassland, two further areas of meadow will be created and the seeds allowed to spread naturally over the rest of the Common. This is following the one attempt to create a wild meadow which had mixed success. This is the most cost effective method and is feasible in terms of labour required. A proposed area for one meadow is the eastern Pound where, because it is separate from the main Common, the mowing pattern can differ to better suit the diversity of species. The seeds will be sown in strips to minimise disturbance and integrate the meadow species into the existing grassland. The seed used will be sourced from a nearby Cambridge flood meadow such as Skater's Meadow. If insufficient local seed is available, other British native origin seed will be sowed.

The process of creating the meadows will fit in around the events and should cause little disturbance to people using the Common. The creation of the meadows is an exciting project that would lend itself to volunteer involvement. A volunteer group could be set up to assist with the creation and monitoring of the meadows. This would provide individuals with an insight in to the process involved, how the Common is managed in general and its importance for biodiversity. Volunteers could be recruited through FoMC, BruNK and contacts of Cambridge City Council.

To aid the establishment of the meadows, the nettle cover could be addressed in the months prior to seeding. Where herbicides are not to be used, nettles should be regularly mown to suppress their growth and importantly prevent them from flowering and setting seed. If herbicide is to be used, it should be done so soon after the nettles are mown. This will be most effective as the plants are taking up nutrients (and consequently the chemicals) for growth and repair. See below for timetables for the creation of the meadows.

#### Pound meadow

Identify the extent of the meadow and hand pull undesirable species. This area already supports some meadow species so spraying with herbicide would not be recommended. Identify the strips and mow to a sward height of 2cm. Remove the arisings. Because the vegetation is much denser in this area, the strips may also need rotovating to open up the soil. Scatter a mix of meadow seeds over the prepared strips and roll so they are in contact with the soil.

Mar – Oct 2015	Throughout the early establishment of the meadow, undesirable species (e.g. nettles and thistles) must be hand pulled.
Apr – Aug 2016	The meadow should be closely grazed or regularly mown to maintain an average sward height of 2-5cm.
Mar – Oct 2016	Hand pulling of undesirable species.
July 2016	Hay cut taken from whole eastern area. Arisings removed.
Sept - Oct 2016	Mown to control late Summer and Autumn grass growth and achieve a sward height of 10cm high. At least 20% of this area should have a sward height of 15cm high. Arisings removed.

In subsequent years this eastern area will receive a hay cut in July and one or two cuts in September/October as described above for 2016.

There has been an attempt by the friends group to develop a meadow area in the Community Orchard with some success. The area is less disturbed and exposed then the first attempt at meadow seeding and a big difference was seen depending on what seed were used. This knowledge can be used in the future implementation of the next wild flower seeding which is hoped to be around the entrance from Newmarket road once the changes there are complete.

#### Bird and bat boxes

Placement of swift boxes on the undersides of both the Cutters Ferry bridge and Elizabeth Way bridge and in the synagogue eaves being built next to the Community Orchard. This option is more affordable than building a swift tower as seen in other areas and will also not have as large an impact in the natural setting. The swift boxes could be constructed/built by volunteers or individuals from the FoMC group as part of a project with Action for Swifts. Self build kits are available relatively cheaply or a grant could be obtained for the purposes of buying boxes or having them locally manufactures to suit the bridges. The boxes would need to be placed out of direct sunlight. Guy Belcher has confirmed that these are potential spots and suggests that the City Council, FoMC and Action for swifts meet to discuss proposed actions. It is also suggested that is may be more affective to ask for volunteers on Brunswick walk who would accept putting up swift boxes and callers on the eves of their houses as this would be preferable as a nesting site. There is also interest to include Jackdaw boxes in this scheme.

### **3.3 Objective 2: To maintain the trees so as to contribute to the character of the Common and its value for biodiversity.**



### Rationale

The trees on Midsummer Common are a dramatic feature that create important habitats for wildlife. They are not only aesthetically pleasing but also provide shade for visitors and cattle. Trees require removal due to disease or age and it is important these are replaced appropriately to maintain the habitat.

### Proposed Actions

The current tree planting scheme respects the desire to see the full length of the Common and acts as an effective screen to the surrounding buildings. An important view is that across Victoria Avenue to Jesus Green. The high crowns of the horse chestnut trees provide an avenue along the road whilst allowing pedestrians to see underneath. This maintains connectivity with Jesus Green and is a reminder that it used to be part of the same Common.

Any future planting should continue to follow this approach and maintain open views of the Common. Replacement trees should be located as near to the previous tree's position as possible and protected from the cattle and people by timber fence guards. The areas within these guards are prone to dominance by nettles and thistles. These weeds compete with the tree for resources and have a detrimental effect on its growth. It is therefore important that the weeds are controlled through hand pulling and careful strimming. Each young tree will be fitted with a tree gaiter and watered at least once a fortnight throughout the Spring and Summer. Trees will be monitored for signs of stress or dehydration. The tree gaiters will stay on the tree for three years after which time it should be well enough established to draw sufficient water from the ground. Due to their size, the younger trees are prone to being vandalised, particularly during the Summer events. Experience on the Common has shown that using taller stakes (approx 150cm) to support the trunk deters vandals and should be used as a standard.

The tree species on the Common have been selected to have a positive visual impact and contribute to the ecology of the Common. The horse chestnut trees along Victoria Avenue are approximately 100 years old and have recently been targeted by the chestnut leaf miner moth. The larvae of the moth live within the leaves and inhibit the tree's ability to photosynthesise. Consequently the tree becomes weak and more susceptible to other pathogens. The trees will require close monitoring and potentially need to be replaced in the near future. The replacement trees will need to provide the same level of impact so large-leaved limes (*Tilia platyphyllos*) would be a suitable choice. The replacement trees should be planted prior to the removal of the horse chestnuts to ensure the tree-lined avenue is maintained and loss of aesthetic impact is minimal. The choice of species for this avenue should be mirrored on Jesus Green. Elsewhere native trees will be planted where possible however, this is not always suitable. Elm trees were once a familiar sight on the landscape but Dutch elm disease has severely reduced the number of mature elms. The two large elms (*Ulmus spp.*) adjacent to Maids Causeway are believed to have the disease and may need to be removed. In anticipation of this, replacement American Princeton elms have been planted as they are proven to have a resistance to the disease.

It may be necessary to have a larger discussion about the future species that should be considered on the Common as the native tree stock may be severely affected by the rapidly growing number of pathogens and diseases. Consideration needs to be made towards both diversifying the tree stock on the Common to lessen the impact of any one disease on the total population and also perhaps towards the sympathetic choosing of non-native species which are known to be resistant to certain pathogens which are already present in the trees in the Common.

The tree line in front of North Terrace has become fragmented where trees were not replaced. This line could be reinstated with horse chestnut or elm trees to complement those already present. The white willow trees along the river are part of an important linear willow habitat that stretches along the river from Waterbeach to Cambridge. Unfortunately they lack the necessary pollarding programme that would help prolong their life-spans and improve the quality of the habitat they provide for other species such as invertebrates. Pollarding creates a habitat of old and new wood on the same tree - a characteristic that is valuable for invertebrates but increasingly rare. An assessment of the willows is required and a programme for pollarding should be produced.

Many of the willows are lapsed pollards which will need careful tree surgery to get them back into a pollard cycle. Initially the crown should be reduced, leaving sufficient foliage for photosynthesis but removing much of the weight of the tree. In subsequent years the tree would gradually be brought back down to a pollard. The willows will need pollarding every 5-7 years depending on growth rates and the health of the tree. This work should be staggered in order to maintain a strong willow presence and to lessen the financial demand. Where willow trees are removed, replacement trees should be planted in a similar position. White willows or black poplars would be appropriate choices. To retain the local gene pool, cuttings could be taken from existing trees and grown on as the replacement trees. If this proves labour intensive and not to be feasible, trees of local provenance should be bought.

The trees are at greatest risk of damage during the events. Vehicles frequently drive and park close to the base of the trees, causing ground compaction around the roots. Prior to any events taking place, clear boundaries for vehicles and people should be established and then enforced whilst the event is on. There are many mature trees on the Common and therefore a full inspection should be carried out early each year to enable any necessary works to be completed before the busy Summer months.

Three bat species have been observed foraging over the Common and River Cam and may be roosting on the site too. All British bats and their roosts are protected by law under the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981*. In summary, an offence will be committed if someone:

1. deliberately captures, injures or kills a bat;
2. intentionally or recklessly disturbs a bat in its roost or deliberately disturbs a group of bats;
3. damages or destroys a bat roosting place (even if bats are not occupying it at the time);
4. possesses or advertises/sells/exchanges a bat (dead or alive) or any part of a bat; or
5. intentionally or recklessly obstructs access to a bat roost.

Prior to any significant work being undertaken to trees or buildings on Midsummer Common, a bat survey must be completed by a licensed bat worker. This will determine if the feature in question is used by bats and the necessary mitigation required. The management of the trees on Midsummer Common requires careful planning and specialist knowledge of the site and the trees already present. It is clear that the level of detail needed demands an arboriculture strategy for Midsummer Common. This should be produced by Cambridge City Council in consultation with other stakeholders.

The FoMC have requested a further three trees to be planted. One by the Cutters Ferry bridge behind the new compacting bins. This is to reduce the impact of the bins and soften the area without reducing the visibility if the bins to passing pedestrians. The second tree is to be placed near to the fort St George to surround the area of hard standing there (position to be discussed) there is also a need to replace dead trees that have not established. The third tree is to be placed at the junction of Brunswick Walk and North Terrace to replace two acers that being felled in the garden of a house. One hazel in the Community Orchard has been removed and needs replacing and one new tree near to the access gate to the Fort St George needs removal and replacement.

### **3.4 Objective 3: To maintain and improve the site infrastructure.**

#### Rationale

Midsummer Common is an important link between residential areas and the city centre. It is well used by cyclists and walkers throughout the year so footpaths must be kept open and in good condition.

#### Proposed Actions

The existing footpaths are suitably placed on the major routes across the Common. A series of desire-lines are evident but these are used to a lesser extent so do not require hard surfacing. Large areas of the paths require repairs or replacement. The City Council will need to collaborate with the County Council as the carers of the majority of the paths on the Common to create a program of works to refurbish the paths.

The area of path to the corner of the houses on Brunswick Gardens would be a good spot to trial changes to the cycle paths including some subtle solar lighting to mark the junctions without a large impact on light pollution. These could also be considered to replace the single lamp post at one of the main junctions in the

paths near Butt Green as it is not particularly attractive and any negative effect of removing the light source could be rectified by the additional of more sympathetic lighting. These features have been trialled on Lammas Land and the response has been very positive overall.

The area under the Cutters Ferry bridge is potentially dangerous as several paths meet and those coming down from the bridge are unable to see around the corner and could end up colliding with traffic moving in the perpendicular path. The arrangement of this area needs to be rethought. The City and County Council will discuss a more efficient solution to this area's design.

There are also wheel chair strips missing from one of the cattle grids that need replacing.

The new bins near the Cutters Ferry bridge make the older timber clad bin obsolete and looking untidy as it now sits in the middle of the tarmac surface. This needs to be removed. There is a sign post that is also in the middle of the tarmac, this needs to be moved to the edge of the path. This area has a great deal of hard surfacing which is not necessary and can be reduced as part of the resurfacing of the paths.

The water trough on the fence between the Community Orchard and main Common draws the cattle up the steep bank where they damage the newly built steps. The cattle are not kept in the Orchard area as they once were so there is no need for the trough to be there it could be moved to a different location where the cattle would find it easier to reach and where it would not cause conflict with people using the Common.

A few of the paths on Midsummer Common have been resurfaced recently. The area around the Fort St George Pub need to be redesigned to allow both the right of way required for the pub but also to protect the grassland and paths from the heavy vehicles used in deliveries. Consideration needs to be made so that large trucks are able to access the area but protection needs to be in place to stop some driver from taking the easier but more damaging route across the grass. Edging to the paths, and perhaps some low fencing or hedging may be required to get the desired effect. This would be a good opportunity to discuss the best solution for the groups involved and come to a workable design for the area to solve this long standing problem.

### **3.5 Objective 4: To enhance the visitor experience.**

#### Rationale

Midsummer Common is valued amongst the Cambridge Community so it is important to promote the enhancements to it and any changes in management. For visitors to Cambridge, it would make their visit to the Common more enjoyable if they understood the aims of the work and for example, were able to identify some of the wildflowers present.

#### Proposed Actions

Thought should be given to establishing a new Open Spaces Centre in one of the buildings on Midsummer Common - the Council owned Ferry House being an ideal location. Such a building could be used to display historic photos and written articles in, perhaps, a café environment. It could provide a resource and space for school and family children to gather and learn about common land and biodiversity. It could also be home for a Park Warden who would manage various activities on the Common.

Websites are increasingly valuable sources of information and would be an ideal means of promoting Midsummer Common. Information regarding the habitat creation work could be displayed on the Cambridge City Council and FoMC websites and be summarised in a poster for display in the local pubs/restaurants or on public notice boards near the Common. A notice board for the Community Orchard would be an excellent addition to explain the use of the space to passers-by.

The signage to the entrance paths of Midsummer Common is not cohesive. An effort should be made to rationalise the signs to reduce the number of poles and so make instruction on the use of the Midsummer Common clearer to all. There will however be the addition of a new notice board in the community orchard following the removal of all the fruit so that users can understand the use of the space.

Some areas of the Common are largely unused partially because there is little reason to go there or because lack of consistent maintenance leads to these areas becoming overgrown and unusable. This is of particular issue to the rear of the Cutter Ferry Bridge where weeds have become over grown and uncontrolled and the area is not used though it does have some value as a less disturbed area for wildlife. One option for the space would be to make a small barbecue area. This would require some regular maintenance and street furniture and litter bins both to define and manage the space. The use of this space may also help to deter people from sleeping rough in this area. This is one proposal and further consideration, consultation and discussion of funding will be necessary before any plan is confirmed or implemented.

### **3.6 Objective 5: To manage maintenance and on-going work at Midsummer Common.**

#### Rationale

Midsummer Common has a variety of functions both as a space for events and for more individual pursuit and also the function of a wild space in Cambridge. Vehicles and people use the space daily both as part of maintenance and also day-to-day activity in the park by users. There are however changes that can be made to minimise the negative impact that these activities have on each other.

#### Proposed Actions

Solve the technical difficulties with the gate leading to the Fort St George this should reduce unnecessary or non permitted traffic onto the Common.

Resolve the issue with the Fort St George deliveries and parking on the Common. The Grant of Right of Way agreed with Greene King allows access for vehicles but not parking on the Common. As part of the work on the paths the area around the Fort St George and Midsummer House needs to be re-designed in order to both allow access to the buildings for deliveries and to protect the grassland from vehicles driving over it. The City Council will consult with the Pub and with the local groups about the best solution for this area.

Prevent/repair damage after events, in particular bonfire night leaves an area where the grass has been burned away. Heavy vehicles from events can also damage the grass and/or paths, The use of temporary road or similar grass protection close to the entrance gate during events where damage will be most consistent will help reduce the damage. This is especially important in bad weather and winter where the ground is wet and the grass cannot recover as quickly.

The FoMC have proposed producing a route plan for the vehicles doing the litter pick up to minimise the damage to the paths and grass. Use of smaller vehicles to pick up litter where driving over grass would lessen the impact of the daily trips over the grass and paths, this already happens on Jesus Green.

FoMC requests a regular mowing schedule for the Community Orchard (ideally every two weeks) as the domestic mower struggles with the amount of grass to cut.

### **3.7 Objective 6: To put in place administrative arrangements to ensure the co-ordinated implementation of this Management Plan.**

#### Rationale

Management Plans are working documents that co-ordinate the management of a site and provide a work programme for the near future. The production of a Plan ensures that everyone involved in the management understands what is required. The establishment of a management group will facilitate communication between the various stakeholders and encourage partnership working. For this Management Plan to be implemented successfully, the partners must address issues and share successes together. Ongoing monitoring of the plan and the effects it has is required. This Management Plan will need to be reviewed in 2019, this will involve key stakeholders planning the work for the following five years. Ongoing dialogue and regular Management Plan meetings between these parties will make the review process easier and more effective.

#### Proposed Actions

Establish a Midsummer Common Management Group with representatives from the key stakeholder groups and Cambridge City Council departments. The group should meet quarterly to monitor the implementation of

the Management Plan and address any issues as they arise. The Group should assign responsibilities, monitor resources and provide support to the volunteers involved in the management of Midsummer Common.

#### **4. SUMMARY OF OPERATIONS**

##### **4.1 Trees**

(i) While many trees on Midsummer Common are not native to the UK they are considered ‘traditional’ species for parkland and estates. As far as possible the selection of new trees should be limited to these traditional and native species and decisions about future planting should follow discussion with the friends groups. Where non native, non traditional species would be chosen for example to increase the diversity of the species on the park to reduce the effect of future pathogens, this decision will also be discussed with the stakeholders before work commences.

(ii) Other than routine or emergency work on the trees any major tree work will be discussed with the stakeholders and the general approach to trees on the Common is to preserve the historical nature and look of the Common’s trees and allow them to grow into a natural shape. The exception to this is the willow trees which may need to be crown reduced or brought into a pollarding regime.

(iii) The tree officers plan to implement a 3-5year rotation of tree pruning on all the open spaces. This will include the removal of dead wood, shaping and suitable care of veteran trees. Smaller works such as the cutting back of foliage overhanging paths will be undertaken as needed.

Contact: Kenny McGregor, Tree Officer.

##### **4.2 Biodiversity**

(i) The general aim for Midsummer Common is to continue to increase the biodiversity of plant and animal species.

(ii) The Common will continue to be grazed and there will be implementation of a further meadow area and hedging in the eastern Pound.

(iii) Swift boxes will be installed on the underside of the Elizabeth Way bridge in spring 2015 in collaboration with *Action for Swifts* and the agreement of County Highways.

(iv) Further bat and bird boxes will be installed where appropriate around the Common.

Contact: Guy Belcher, Nature Conservation Officer or FoMC

##### **4.3 Access**

(i) There has been some success with the installation of the new electronic gate from Victoria avenue, however there are still on going issues with this gate that need to be improved upon. There are plans being implemented to change the keys used at the gates onto the Common which will stop the copying of keys, this may be changed again to an automated electronic system on all gates to prevent these issues further though these plans are still some time from being fully operational.

(ii) New accessible gates and railings have been approved for the Newmarket Road entrance to the Community Orchard and should be installed during the winter of 2014/15.

Contact: Julia Anderson, 01223 458520

##### **4.4 Footpaths**

(i) The footpaths on Midsummer Common are currently undergoing a phased plan for repair work. This has already started with the towpath but will continue with other paths, in particular the heavily used path

between Cutters Ferry Bridge and Fair Street the plan for which will be undergoing consultation and work commencing within the period of this management plan.

Contact: Cambridge County Council, Transport and Streets, 0345 045 5212 or Cambridge City Council Projects Team. 01223 452513

#### **4.5 General maintenance: grass cutting, benches, litter bins and notices**

(i) Litter removal will continue on Midsummer Common on a regular basis. With the installation of new larger bins the positioning of all bins should be reviewed. To reduce damage to the grass caused by the daily litter collection vehicles, the route used to pick up waste should be redesigned. When funds permit smaller, lighter vehicles should be acquired which will have less impact of the fabric of the Common.

(ii) Three grass cutting regimes should be established:

- The main Common. Cutting will reflect the needs of the events taking place.
- The Eastern Pound. This is not used for events and so the timing of the cutting can reflect the desire to increase the biodiversity of the plants in this area.
- The Community Orchard. In consultation with FoMC and as needed to maintain the orchard and wild flower areas.

(iii) A noticeboard has been ordered for the Community Orchard for FoMC use. To reduce conflict between common users, notices should be placed at the entrances to Midsummer Common encouraging commuting cyclists to slow down and give way to pedestrians.

Contact: Anna Michell or Dave Bradford, 01223 458520

#### **4.6 Grazing**

(i) Grazing will continue as before between April-October.

(ii) Periods where the cattle are removed should be kept to a minimum. Wherever possible the dates of large events should be clustered to reduce the need for the cattle to be moved regularly. Cattle should not normally be removed from the Common for smaller day events: the Eastern Pound should be used to contain the cattle on these days.

Contact: Graham Gillings (Pinder) 01223 457000

#### **4.7 Large Events**

(i) Traditional large events, such as Fairs, Circuses and Bonfire Night will continue to be held on the Common.

(ii) Large events on the Common are limited both in the number of individual events and amount of days per year that they can occupy the space. This is to reduce the detrimental impact on the fragile environment of the common land, and there should be no increase in the number of such events. To reduce the pressure of events on this site consideration should be given to moving non-traditional events to other parks around the city where practical.

(iii) A hire agreement has already been draw up which is distributed to the event organisers and sets out guidance on conduct while using the open space. This will be made available online

(iv) Environmental health can be called in reactively when there is anything of concern especially noise issues where recording devices will be placed at certain locations (and location of complainant) to ensure the noise level meets standards. Environmental health will act against the operator should the level exceed the maximum recommended.

(v) The Council needs to consider how best to protect the edges of the paths and the grass and tree roots from the excessive damage caused by very large event vehicles.

Contact: Anna Michell or Anthony French, 01223 458520. For Environmental Health call 01223 458517

#### **4.8 Small Events**

(i) Midsummer Common will continue to be popular with organisers of charity walks, fun runs and cycle races. Some events are not appropriate for Midsummer Common and where practical national events which are not organised locally should be moved to other open spaces to reduce the pressure. In some cases this has already been happening.

(ii) The cattle should not normally be moved from the common for one day events: the Eastern Pound should be used.

(iii) Parking for such events should be limited to essential organisers' vehicles, and restricted to the Butts Green area: participants should be encouraged to use town facilities such as the Grafton Centre carpark.

(iv) A hire agreement has already been draw up which is given to the event organisers and sets out guidance on conduct while using the open space. This will be made available online

Contact: Anna Michell or Anthony French, 01223 458520. For Environmental Health call 01223 458517

#### **4.9 Vehicles**

(i) Vehicle use should, where possible, be reduced on the Common to lessen damage to the grass and paths and prevent disturbance to cattle and those using the space.

(ii) The repeated occurrence of non-permitted parking on the Common, particularly around the Fort St George Pub, needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

(iii) When replacing Council vehicles, smaller, more versatile models which will fit more easily on the narrow paths should be considered.

Contact: Asset Management Team 01223 458520 or Enforcement 01223 457000