



# **Friends of the Meadows and Bruntsfield Links**

## **NEWSLETTER 22** **Summer 2009**

### **Convener's Comment**

I hope you are encouraged by all the support we are getting for our campaign to save the Meadows. Thank you for your part in it. Don't give in to cynicism and despair! Let me summarize our response to the 'official' Council line:

We agree that the Meadows are more than a local park. But the opposition to the Council's emerging policy is also more than local. The Meadows are not a large place. They are not suitable for long and large commercial events, on top of all the other public use, especially with our changing climate.

### **The environment must be sustained**

The balance we have to keep is that between the environmental impact of all the uses and sustaining the special character of the Meadows and Bruntsfield Links. That must be put ahead of short-term financial interests.

Keep caring and keep campaigning! There are signs that the Council is beginning to realize the strength of local opinion, and there may be a chance for Friends of the Meadows to make a delegation to the full Council meeting, to be held on 28<sup>th</sup> May. Each Councillor will receive a copy of this newsletter, which carries several striking examples of strong views held by some significant local citizens, including our Member of Parliament. It's not over till the fat lady sings!

*Chris Wigglesworth*

### **Motion from South Central Neighbourhood Partnership**

**To CEC Full Council, 11/05/09**

The SCNP deplors the Council's failure to produce an overall policy on Events in the City's Open Green Spaces. The situation was debated on 20th December 2007 and a Motion calling for a Report on the effect of overuse of the Meadows for Events (Cllr MacLaren) was sent to Full Council. The large events lasting more than one month went ahead on the Meadows in August 2008 and the area used was again very badly damaged. It still has not recovered (eight months later).

With regard to the Meadows and Bruntsfield Links, we propose that the Council does not allow any large-scale, lengthy events to take place on the Meadows until the Report has been published. We suggest that available gap-sites should be seriously investigated, e.g. Caltongate.

We further suggest that any Events Policy developed should protect the Meadows & Bruntsfield Links for the use of both Edinburgh residents and visitors for sports and relaxation. It should not be turned into an area where commercial events are over-riding the priority of sustaining a high-quality environment. Such events take the ground out of public use both during the event (31+ days) and for a lengthy recovery period.

**The Summer Meeting of Friends of the Meadows and Bruntsfield Links will be held on Thursday 11 June 2009 at 7.30 p.m. in the Croquet Club Pavilion (adjacent to Leven Terrace). It will be the AGM, at which we shall elect a new Committee. Those willing to serve on the Committee should make themselves known to the Secretary, Hamish McKenzie, in advance of the meeting. The evening may include an introduction to Croquet.**

## **SOME OPINIONS about the Meadows**

### **From our MP**

Meadows residents are quite right – the overuse and abuse of the Meadows is robbing local sports groups, residents and local children of the use of damaged areas from one Festival to the next. It is clear that the Council are incapable of protecting the Meadows from being churned up and badly damaged by these large shows. Guarantees in the past have shown to be worthless, and I urge the Council to think again before permanent damage is done to the much-loved public area.

*Nigel Griffiths, Labour MP, South Edinburgh*

### **Hospitality issues**

My husband and I are members of Friends of the Meadows, and we own and run Elmview, which is classed as a 5star Bed and Breakfast by the AA. We have also been awarded a prize by Trip Advisor as one of the top ten Bed and Breakfast establishments in Europe, twice in the last four years. As a result we receive visitors from around the world. Tonight [14 May] for example, we have a family from Canada, and couples from Spain and Russia.

### **Location, location**

Fortunately for us, Edinburgh is one of the few cities in the world that attracts people from every corner of the globe. When looking for accommodation visitors often screen their wish list and choose us because of our location - close to the Old Town and yet surrounded by the green area of the Meadows. We always advise our guests to walk into the City via the Meadows, and we hear appreciative comments of the crocus and narcissus planting in spring, and the cherry blossom last week; and what amazes visitors is the use of the Meadows by so many people the minute the sun is out.

By the middle of summer the positive comments are scarcer, as we are asked to explain why there are so many encroachments by ‘amusement, or entertainment’ venues, spoiling what is such a wonderful amenity. ‘You should get yourselves organized’ is a remark that sticks in the mind.

As residents we know how lucky we are to live by the Meadows, but often it takes a stranger to remind us that such an amenity has to be appreciated and safeguarded.

*Nici Hill*

### **Bread and Circuses**

*‘Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose.’*

In Imperial Rome, according to R.H. Barrow, writing about the ‘shows’ of antiquity, ‘it is remarkable how educated men, whose whole sympathies were on the side of humanity and decency, were prepared, when convention or ambition demanded it from them as politicians . . ., to provide entertainments whose barbarity shocked them as individuals. . . they were organised on a colossal scale. . .’ (*The Romans*, Pelican Books 1949, p. 108) Anyone who has visited Rome will know that the buildings erected to accommodate these shows were correspondingly colossal, and permanent.

*Ed.*

### **Parks and Greenspace Survey** by the City of Edinburgh Council

Parks are special places – green oases in our city. They are places where you can escape the hustle and bustle of daily life, exercise, watch wildlife or simply relax. We want to know what you think about your local park or greenspace in Edinburgh. Is it a wildlife haven or a waste ground? Do you love it or loathe it? Is it litter-strewn or is it litter free? To have your say go to: [www.edinburgh.gov.uk/parksurvey](http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/parksurvey).

## **Is democracy alive or dead?**

For years there has been unease about damage caused to the Meadows by large, long-term events, but the number of events, and their impact, has so increased that the damage caused in 2007 has not yet disappeared. In spring 2008 several FoMBL members met with David Jamieson, Head of Parks, to express our concerns. We were assured that our points had been duly noted: there would be a commercial rent charged, strict conditions put in place to prevent damage, and these conditions would be closely policed, and not relaxed.

### **Broken promises**

We all know what happened – conditions were not enforced, the Urban Circus arrived early and were still on site a week after they should have left. Staff who would have been expected to ‘police’ were on holiday for much of the time, and can anyone believe that £11,800 is a ‘commercial’ rent for six weeks’ use of the Meadows? (Rent for an Edinburgh theatre is £18,500 per week.)

### **Edinburgh, the festival city**

Now the Council is keen to further promote Edinburgh as an events and festival city. They propose taking £2,000,000 from the ‘Services for Communities’ budget and adding it to the £700,000 already in the Events Group’s budget. This is the group that decides if an event can come to Edinburgh and use the site it wishes. This committee is made up of Council officials, and two elected councillors, Cllrs Aldridge and Cardownie (the ‘Events Tzar’). It seems that the Council has delegated all these decisions to this group, and that we can do nothing to affect its decisions. The local councillors have no say (eight councillors represent the whole of the Meadows area). The Neighbourhood Partnership and four Community Councils are also disenfranchised.

### **What price democracy?**

When all the legislation from the Scottish Parliament is pushing towards taking decision-making closer to the public, why has Edinburgh Council decided to put in place and give so much extra money to a body which can and does totally ignore the wishes of the public? We don’t want to stop all events on the Meadows, just those that have been shown to do damage. We **welcome** the return of the Meadows Festival in June. At the Policy and Strategy committee hearing on Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> May 2009 it was clear that many, if not most, councillors have great sympathy with us as we fight to defend the people’s beloved Meadows. However, the fear that ‘Events’ will go elsewhere if we don’t subsidise them seems to outweigh any environmental arguments, and democracy is completely lost in this party-political shambles.

*Hilary McDowell*

**Contact us: visit the newly updated FoMBL website: [www.fombl.org.uk](http://www.fombl.org.uk)**

### **Local opinion: what do people really think?**

It was interesting to read in the *Evening News* the results of an opinion poll among readers, who were asked: ‘Should the council limit the number of events held in the city’s green spaces?’ The answers illustrate that members of FoMBL are not just ‘Nimbys’. They were:

<b>Yes, too many events are ruining our parks</b>	<b>60%</b>
No, they bring in money and provide entertainment	10%
No, but <b>they should fine them for any damage</b>	30%

## What are the Meadows for?

A saunter round the Meadows on 14 May produced the following snapshots of people enjoying themselves in the sun. This is surely what the Meadows should be for.



## Forthcoming events on or near the Meadows

**Meadows Chamber Orchestra: Saturday 30 May, 7.00 p.m. at Rudolph Steiner School (70<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations). Conductor and keyboard, Peter Evans; Violin, Uli Fenner. Bach: keyboard concerto in A; Mozart: violin concerto in G major; Handel: Zadok the Priest (with a choir from the school); Copland: Music for the theatre. Next Queen's Hall concert Sunday 12 October.**

**Piano Playing: 1 June onwards: Middle Meadow Walk at junction with North Meadow Walk Taylor's Fun Fair, in conjunction with the Meadows Festival: 3-7 June**

**Meadows Festival: 6-7 June** (two days of free fun in the park) – see website: [www.meadowsfestival.org.uk](http://www.meadowsfestival.org.uk)

**Edinburgh Arrow: Royal Company of Archers' annual archery competition 16 June**

## Useful numbers

**Mike Shields:** Community Parks Officer 0131 529 5126

**Community Beat Officer** PC 4601 Yocksan Bell 0131 662 5022

(to report a crime: 0131 311 3131; emergency 999; or anonymously to Crimestoppers: 0800 555 111)

**Anti-social behaviour (24/7):** 0131 529 7050; Litter: rapid response 0808 100 33 66

**Defective lamp-post lighting:** note number and report to Clarence – 0800 23 23 23

**Environmental Manager:** David Doig – [david.doig@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:david.doig@edinburgh.gov.uk)

**The Autumn Meeting of Friends of the Meadows & Bruntsfield Links will be held on Monday 16 November 2009 at 7.30 p.m. in the Barclay Church. Speakers to include Local Historian Graeme Cruikshank, about Bruntsfield Links. All are welcome.**

**Committee members (please address all correspondence to the Secretary)**

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