

Friends of South Park

Chair's Report 2025

Friends of South Park (FoSP) is a local amenity group made up of volunteers. Its role, as stated in its constitution, includes the following:

- acting as consultee for events in South Park
- organising community events
- having a say about the park's appearance and its facilities

This year we have held six committee meetings and we are grateful to the Oxford Golf Club for the use of their committee room during the spring and summer months. In addition, two of us from the committee were also present at the Memorandum of Understanding meeting of Oxford City Council and Oxford Preservation Trust.

There are currently 85 members of FoSP and the membership subscription is £1. We will be discussing raising the subscription later in the meeting.

This report outlines the activities of FoSP over the past year and our plans for the coming year.

1.) Events held in the park

a. Round Table Fireworks:

These took place shortly after our last AGM. FoSP's involvement in consultation with Oxford City Council under the previous committee and the organisers influenced the following

- Absence of bonfire (and thus use of heavy vehicles in its construction)
- Extensive use of protective tracking
- Entry points at the lower end of the park

These measures greatly reduced the event's impact on the park and FoSP acknowledged the efforts made by the organisers in this regard and thanked the Round Table.

The committee formally recognised the help of those who supported the clear-up process after the event.

b. Oxford Pride Festival:

This was held in June. FoSP was pleased to note that following the event, there was no residual damage and that the area of the park used was left spotless.

c. The Foodies Festival:

This was held over the August bank holiday weekend again in the lower park.

Although a three-day event, this was well-managed and also had little residual effect on the park. We were concerned, however, that the event notification and request for our views was very last minute. (Not the first time that this has been the case.)

d. Oktoberfest:

Although anticipated this Autumn, it did not take place.

FoSP received details of three event applications over the course of this year, notifying FoSP members and inviting comments. Comments were forwarded to OCC events team and/or the event organisers.

2.) **Forthcoming event: Round Table Fireworks, November 8th**

- There will be no large bonfire again this year, a decision supported by FoSP
- There are, however, plans for 6 separate 'pallet type fires'. In response to comments received during the consultation process and the committee's concerns, clarification from the Round Table was requested regarding the precise structure of such fires. This was provided as follows:
 - these fires will be cubes, one pallet in thickness and no more than 36 pallets will be burnt.
 - The pallets will be untreated and delivered via the protective tracking and the grass/turf underneath the fires will be removed before and replaced after the event.
- This year, there will also be a quieter, 'SEN appropriate' display before the main event
- An adverse weather outdoor event cancellation procedure is once again in place

3.) **FoSP events and publicity:**

- OxClean:
FoSP was pleased to take part in this annual citywide initiative to tackle litter throughout Oxford's streets, public spaces and litter hotspots. Many thanks to the FoSP group and the Brookes student wardens who took part and who collected a large amount of litter.
- At the end of May and beginning of June, Pete Edwards, a long time FoSP member led two guided walks on the history of South Park and the wider Headington Hill estate with particular reference to the Morrell family. The walks were very much enjoyed by those who joined and offered fascinating insights into the area. We are extremely grateful to Pete for this undertaking.
- A newsletter was compiled and sent to all on our mailing list and interested parties in June. Thanks to Cindy Carlson and Mel Hamill.
- The FoSP website has been kept up to date. Thanks to Peter Rooke for his help with this.

4.) **Having a say about the park's appearance and its facilities**

FoSP is pleased to note the **current positive appearance of the park.**

- There is relatively little residual damage remaining from past events and although there had been concerns about a track developing down the Morrell Avenue side of the park where the ground was previously damaged and reseeded, this is gradually repairing.
- Problems remain around the **entrances**, particularly the Morrell Avenue gate which frequently becomes muddy and waterlogged and now also the London Road entrance which has become waterlogged due to a water leak.

- The table tennis table, basket-ball hoop and fitness equipment around the park all continue to be well used, as does the zip wire and children's playground.
- In January the expected planting of about 30 trees took place. FoSP welcomed this but did question the choice of trees planted, believing the balance to be weighted too heavily towards non-native and ornamental types. We also raised concerns about infrequent watering of the new trees over the very dry summer months.
- FoSP has sought clarification and has received details of **tree felling and cutting works** including the assurance that trees are only felled if they are dying, diseased or dangerous. We have also been provided with information regarding the dead oak tree in the middle of the park. We understand it has been left because of the many reported benefits of such trees, including provision of habitat for a range of wildlife.
- Work on information board (**'signage'**) to be placed at the five entrances to the park is nearing completion. The committee is grateful to Stephen Dawson at Oxford Preservation Trust (OPT) and Peter Rooke, previously a committee member, for their continued work on this. Stephen will be sharing more information about this a little later in the meeting.
- The poor condition of the **railings** around the park has been the subject of a good deal of thought and discussion for the committee. We believe that on many of the park's perimeters it is important to retain railings and to maintain their integrity.
- We were notified by OCC about the long-awaited work to demolish **the disused toilet block** which has begun. Asbestos removal has been completed and the remainder of the work is due to take place soon.
- FoSP understands that 'The Oxford Spirit Group' have been selected by the City Council to take on the new lease of the **Cheney Farm site** and have recently applied for planning permission to retain the new barn on site permanently. We also understand that OPT and OCC are looking forward to engaging with the new tenants as they develop their plans for the site including the provision of WC facilities and a refreshment offering for park users.
- Over the year, we have continued to address the issue of **litter** in the park and the **use of BBQs** over the spring and summer months. We are grateful to the Oxford Brookes' community liaison team for their work in reminding students about these matters. Litter was a particular problem during July and August when the language schools were in full swing. Frequently huge amounts of debris were left over the middle area of the park. Members of the committee met with EF to discuss the problem and FoSP will continue to liaise actively with the language schools. FoSP would like to thank the ODS Parks Team for their work in removing the rubbish on a daily basis from the park. We are also grateful to members of the local community who voluntarily help in this regard.
- FoSP has also recently received and reported to OCC **anti-social behaviour** of bikes being ridden at speed down the paths on either side of the park.

5.) Priorities

Looking forward, the priorities for the Friends are as follows (in no particular order):

1. To participate in an update of the Park Management Plan for South Park
2. To update the Facebook page
3. Request OCC events team for timely notification of event application and consultations

4. Request OCC that FoSP be consulted with and notified regarding tree surveys and proposed work before it is undertaken
5. Establish clearer recommendations and possible plan regarding railings
6. Consider the possibility of a wildlife survey for the park

It has been my first year as Chair of FoSP. At the last AGM, many of the previous committee stood down, including the Chair, Rob Waterston.

I would like to thank Rob and previous committee members for their work over recent years. I am particularly grateful to Peter and Liz Rooke for all they have done to help and support the transition for the new committee.

Thanks, also to Stephen Dawson at OPT and Chris Bell at the City Council for their help in answering my many questions and to Stephen, also for being on the committee as a representative of OPT

Very many thanks to all who have been on the committee for the last year. Thanks to Andrew Lack who is now standing down as Treasurer: we appreciate all the work you have done for FoSP and hope you will stay active in the Friends group.

Finally, I hope that those present will agree this summary is representative of our work over the past year.

Sue Harmer
Chair, Friends of South Park
October 23rd, 2025