

Notes on Green Forum July 2011.

This year's SOS organised a green forum with the Theme of Trees in Green Spaces. Those present were treated to four very good talks dealing with different aspects of the role and threats to trees in Cambridge itself and more generally in urban environments.

Dr David Brown, a local arboriculture consultant gave an excellent illustrated presentation which was wide ranging in its coverage of the history and role of trees in the different settings in which they grow. He explained clearly the need for selecting the right ones for the location and taking into account its history and its function.

The need to ensure a properly ordered succession of planting was stressed; also the different strategies to combat diseases and infestations, particularly those caused by the increasing rate of globalisation. He generously answered many questions from the audience.

Mr D. Brooks, from Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook, described the history of the brook area with pictures and fascinating maps. He meticulously traced the increase in tree and plant cover over more than a century. It was very heartening to realise how much can be done in a seemingly 'unpromising' urban environment within a hundred years. The increase in wildlife and biodiversity is considerable and the implications should be taken as a lesson for the future.

Mr R. Baxter from Friends of Midsummer Common described the long struggle of the group to achieve a programme of tree replacement and increase around the Common while preserving its historical role as an open space with multiple uses. The Council has responded in the last few years and the results show how perseverance can pay. The planting of a community orchard is an additional feather in the group's cap as it is hoped that younger people will get more involved with the green aspects of Common use.

Mr A. Davey from the Alexandra Gardens Trees Group gave a passionate report of the ongoing campaign to save the plane trees on the fringe of the park. It is a very good example of spontaneous community action which involved many people and succeeded in achieving a 'stay of execution' by persuading the City Council to re-examine the issues, particularly the role of insurance companies in trying to blame trees for damage to buildings based on insufficient technical evidence. The fact that the council did pay attention to local concerns is very encouraging, and the group hopes that after the further investigations the trees will be left undamaged.

The mid-summer date meant that attendance was lower this year, which was unfortunate since these were truly fascinating talks. We hope to convince some of the speakers to return for future Green Forums, and intend to improve our publicity in order to reach a wider audience.