

Chair's Report for AGM

We calculated that, some 700 people had been involved in the organization of the Fair, either in shops, organizing or taking part in performances, at venues such as Argyle Street Co-Operative or Lifecraft, entertaining in one way or another, with an additional 70 or so stall holders.

The Fair cannot proceed without the active involvement of this huge number of people. We provide a central co-ordination, providing publicity, looking at safety issues, trying to bring some sort of cohesion to the organization but *you* are what makes the Fair.

Road Closure

The various reports will all reflect the importance of the road closure to the 2009 Fair. Special thanks should be made to the Safety Officer, Jonathan Goodacre, and his deputy Clare Hedges, for the enormous amount of effort which they put into this. Their report will, in turn, thank others who made this possible.

The pleasure of seeing the enormous crowds thronging the streets was enormous. It did make me wonder how on earth we had conducted the Fair without such a road closure in the past. The potential danger to visitors to the Fair always worried us. The 2009 Fair, without such a closure, would have been a high risk event.

Support for the idea of extending the closure has been expressed, and Jonathan and Clare will try to take this further this year.

Feedback

I warned the Committee that, if we had a road closure, we would get numerous complaints. I have eaten my hat. We received some 150 e-mails expressing support for the closure. One complaint was received the day before about signage. Jonathan put him in charge of the signage concerned! One or two motorists complained, but mainly because of the detours rather than the closure itself. Many cyclists did not dismount, though the closure did also apply to them.

Weather

One of the many things over which we have no control on the day is the weather. Last year we all kept an eye on the long-term weather forecast, which stated that the Saturday would have torrential rain and high winds, with gusts up to 90 mph. To our intense relief that forecast held off until about 4.00 pm. This year part of our planning will be to try to think up a contingency plan. However, much of the design of the Fair is to have street performances and buskers so that visitors can easily see what is happening where. And there is a shortage of indoor space to which we could move performers in the case of sudden onset of bad weather. Nonetheless, we do require a contingency plan.

Signage, Flags etc

Some visitors to the Fair express disappointment that they do not know where things are going on. We produce a large brochure listing every event in over 120 venues. This was delivered to 13,000 houses two weeks before the Fair. We do provided signage for events off Mill Road, which members of the Committee put up the night before the Fair. One year we advertised premises participating in the Fair by putting up flags. Both these jobs are time-consuming and can really only be done the night before the Fair. The flags were substantially damaged and/or removed when we put them up earlier, and we had to go out again to put up more. It would be good to get a team of people together who would handle all this on the Friday night, and remove them afterwards. The flags were very popular and worked well and we would like to revive that effort.

Suggestions on how to keep people moving down Mill Road towards Misfits, Cutlacks and Romsey Mill would be greatly appreciated. We feel more activity in the street and in traders beyond the Co-Op would help. The road closure persuaded more people over the bridge, and stewards are asked to do all they can to move people along Mill Road with news of what is happening further along. But there is a long, quiet area which is not very enticing.

Special thanks

Firstly, I thank Andrew Bush for his continued support of the Fair as our main sponsor. He has already agreed that he will continue this commitment this year. His contribution is fundamental to our planning for the year to come. We also thank the many local traders and organizations on Mill Road who advertise in the brochure. These combined funds, together with a grant which the Council kindly provides funds everything that is required to run this event.

Apart from the Committee, there are some people we know about who make our lives a lot easier and make a great contribution. In addition to the individuals thanked in the various Committee reports, I should like to thank Christine Pearson of The Salvation Army Community Centre for making space available for our numerous meetings; Sam Motherwell for his generosity in allowing us to use his illustrations for our various PR materials and the brochure; Aiysha Malik for putting the brochure together for us in one frantic week in November, when I frequently saw e-mails from her timed at 3.00 am; Judy Linford, Daisy Zoll and Sarah Robson for other design-work; Felicity Macdonald-Smith and Susanna Fleet for looking after the Collection boxes – which reminds me – there is a quite full one at the Post Office in Al-Amin's. I'd like to thank Sue Fitzgerald of Ditchburn House, who always says 'Yes' when she could so easily say 'No'. Thanks are also due to Lenore Muskett for co-ordinating the applications for stalls that came in thick and fast as the Fair approached, and Mike Tabrett and others for working things up at the Argyle Street Housing Co-operative

I should also like to thank the various Councillors and Council Officers who are so helpful to us, and to the Police. I don't doubt that there are many others we don't know about, to whom we also extend thanks.

LAST BUT NOT LEAST

So thank you again. The Fair seems to grow, whilst maintaining that very special, unique sense of being 'local' – but local in a quite extraordinary way as Mill Road is home to people from all over the world.

Some of the growth occurs as we now have various groups based around Mill Road who, independently, are seeking grants and support to do special things for the Fair – groups like the organizers of the HATS competition. We have worked closely with them so that our publicity could be integrated, of benefit to both groups. But the important thing is that they are still local. So we can grow, but still maintain that magical, particular Mill Road feel.