

STRAWBERRY FAIR

Annual Report 2011



It's a Love-a-Fair

Justin Argent Strawberry Fair Chair

Strawberry Fair 2011 was one of the best fairs in terms of creativity, music, organisation and atmosphere. To quote local news reports the 2011 Fair was "incredibly successful" and "set the tone for future fairs." Since the event we have received congratulations and messages of support from local residents, organisations we have worked with, and visitors to the Fair both new and old.

In September of 2009 the committee embarked on a process of appraisal within in the Fair called The Strawberry Shake-up. The concepts and plans laid down were intended to be implemented in 2010 but due to licensing difficulties that fair did not take place. It was decided that the plans suggested in 2010 would be brought forward as the blueprint for the 2011 Fair. In brief the concept was to increase activities that engage the public and to make the fair a rounded event for all the people attending, particularly families. The committee as a whole took these ideas to heart and came up with a great fair this year.

The inclusion of the Village Green and activities to encourage more participation really worked. On the other end of the entertainment spectrum Colonel Mabeys Mechanical Menagerie showed us all that you can have high quality acts and characterful décor on a tight budget. With the help of our fantastic site team the new layout and fencing worked and allowed us to deal with trouble makers more effectively.

The team that plan the Fair, the production office, radio control and stewards team as ever were excellent. The amount of paperwork that is required to run an event seems to double year on year and this year was no exception. The media campaign this year was also brilliant, and the success was clearly visible as you walked around a Kids Area bursting

at the seams with families who had read about the packed programme. The event was calmer and the people attending all knew about the alcohol limits and the gate policy.

Our relationship with the public bodies again improved vastly this year with the Police and the Council both being incredibly supportive to help us achieve our goals. Our relationship with local residents continues to improve as we move forward in partnership to iron out the problems they have previously suffered.

As it is my last year as Chair I would like to thank you all for the support and energy you have dedicated – you are an extraordinary crew of people and it has been an absolute pleasure working with you. Strawberry Fair is run entirely by volunteers and this year everyone came together to produce a fair that was more exciting, more colourful, safer and more rounded event.

And finally, unusually, I am going to mention a name in this years report as it is such an exceptional achievement. I would like to personally congratulate a Suffolk roofer and his team on successfully reaching 20 years of the Wigwam at Strawberry Fair. Thanks to Dougal the Wigwam has always maintained a quirky, slightly haphazard originality that in so many respects represents the image and the idea of the fair as a whole. It's the Fair's very own Pyramid Stage – its throbbing heart and I love it!



About the organisation

Drew Park Strawberry Fair Secretary

Since no Fair was held in 2010 it meant that the members could concentrate on not only redesigning the Fair, but also look at and improve the structure and governance of the organisation.

To resolve issues and improve lines of communication between elected officers, sub-groups and members, various actions were taken as detailed below. With the agreement of members the Fair's constitution was tweaked to support the new changes.

Management

The past few years have shown that in order to secure a licence to hold the annual event, more intensive work is needed to produce a management control document, liaise with statutory agencies and generally ensure the event is well organised. The majority of these tasks fall to the Fair's steering group (traditionally made up of the elected officers – chair, vice-chair, secretary, treasurer and other members of the organisation invited to attend steering group meetings).

Previously decisions on policy and governance needed to be ratified by a meeting of members. This arrangement became impossible especially when the chair, for example, needed to represent the view of the Fair at a meeting with a statutory agency or when interviewed by the press. Quick decision-making was needed without waiting for a general meeting of members six weeks hence.

Delegated responsibility to a smaller body of Fair members was needed. The steering group increasingly found that at general meetings, it was required to ask the meeting/members to agree a decision that ideally should have been made a lot earlier. To complicate things further members indicated that the frequency of general meetings, at which all decisions were discussed, was becoming onerous. There was an opinion that fewer meetings were necessary if the steering group was to be given delegated responsibility.

Change in constitution: The Fair elects a Chair, Vice-chair, Treasurer, Secretary, Chair of communications, Chair

of programming, Chair of infrastructure, Chair of event management and one other member to form an executive committee with responsibility for directing the Fair.

Membership

Previously the Fair's constitution stated that any person who had contributed to the Fair for one year was entitled to become a member and by default be part of the Fair's governing committee and vote on proposals. A person who volunteered to become involved with the Fair had to wait, according to the constitution, until the following year to take a full part in decision-making. The increase in people attending general meetings meant that many attendees could not vote despite taking on important roles within the Fair. A change to membership rules was needed to enable these people to partake fully.

Change in constitution: Membership of the Fair is open to anyone, at the Fair's discretion, who agrees to abide by the objectives of the Fair. To avoid confusion members no longer, by default, are called the committee but still retain overall control of the Fair. Volunteers, on becoming members of the Fair, no longer have to wait one year before being able to vote.

Structure

Traditionally volunteers would put themselves forward to run an area of the Fair, such as a stage or co-ordinating stewards, at general meetings. They would report back on progress at general meetings. Overall responsibility of ensuring deadlines were met, agreed expenditure adhered to etc was left with each area. The steering group took responsibility for the rest of tasks needed to run the event. The structure was "flat" and it became obvious that a rethink was needed.

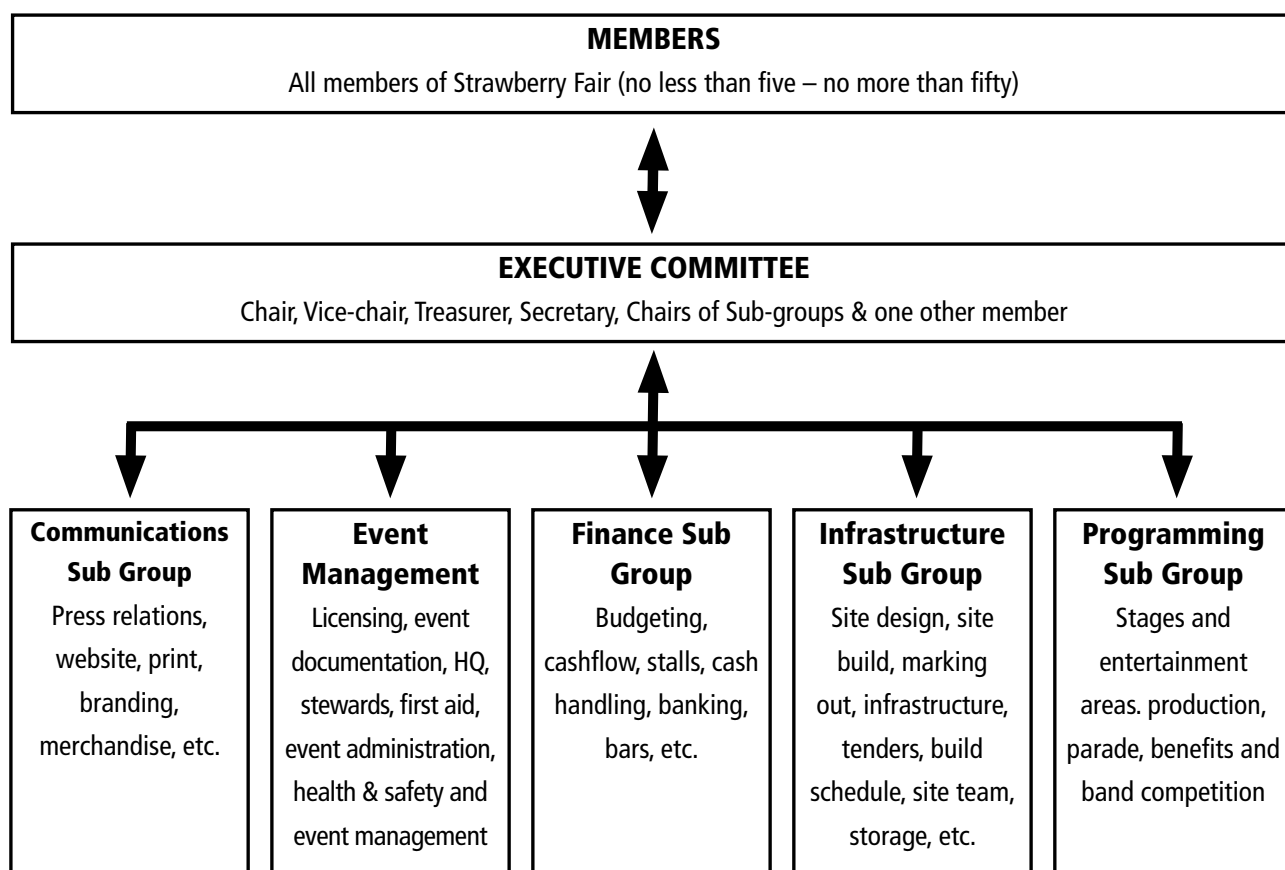


The opportunity came along when the Fair held its "Shake-up" and out of this came the desire to become more business like whilst still retaining the friendliness and camaraderie amongst members. Added to this was a wish to have members elected with special responsibility for coordinating sub-groups such as programming, public relations and infrastructure.

Change in constitution: The executive committee (directors) can set up sub-committees as needed. All minutes/decisions taken of committees are available for members to see.

The new constitution can of course be further changed to suit the needs of the Fair as required. Members can vote to do this.

Strawberry Fair structure



2011 post holders

Chair Justin Argent

Vice-Chair Mike Wilson

Treasurer Ian Ralls

Secretary Drew Park

Head of Communications* Amy Wormald

Head of Event Management* Jo Scott

Head of Finance* -

Head of Infrastructure* Ian Haynes

Head of Programming* Richard Brown

**Please note elections for these posts will be at a general meeting in October not at the AGM*



Finance

Ian Ralls Strawberry Fair Treasurer

In summary, the main financial challenges and opportunities for Strawberry Fair in 2011 were:

- **Increased infrastructure costs, mostly in relation to licensing requirements to provide distinct entrances/exits**
- **VAT increased to 20%**
- **Reduced stalls income due to a possible loss of confidence from traders due to the cancellation of 2010**

It should be noted that the Committee was aware from the start of planning that 2011 was going to be financially challenging. This was seen in the context of the relaunch of the Fair and the outcome has been broadly as expected. Credit to all those involved in all areas of the fair; the ground work carried out in cutting costs and financial efficiency in 2011 has put us in a stronger position than ever for future years.

Strawberry Fair has always been about more than money and this was never truer than in 2011. Strawberry Fair have

carried on, focused on what we do best and put on one of the best Fairs ever; truly inspiring.

Finally thanks to everyone who donated to Strawberry Fair, whatever the amount, including Winter Comfort, the Argyle Street Housing Co-operative and the TGWU and Amicus trades unions. Also thanks to Cambridge City Council for considering us for both Sustainable City and Safer Cities grants and last but not least anyone involved in raising money for the fair, especially the organisers of the Band Competition, benefit gigs and merchandise seller.



A new look for 2011

Richard Brown Chair of Programming

Following 2009's fair the committee as a whole wanted the event to change. Although the fair had many positive outcomes the committee felt that long-term radical change would be necessary to counteract some of the negative aspects of the fair. So, we all gathered together for an away-day where we discussed the future of the fair to find a common vision that we could all work towards over the next five years.

The Strawberry Shake-up identified three key areas for change:

- Layout – The layout of the Fair should build in managed open spaces and meeting areas incorporating cafes and performance spaces.
- Stalls – We should move away from just thinking about stalls as a way of making money, and recognise that they are a vital part of the Fair. The focus should be on quality with more emphasis on local stalls.
- Entertainments/programme – There was a strong and shared view that the programme should be much more diverse and participatory, and open to lots of smaller groups and activities, moving away from the 'area' approach to a site-wide programming plan. Practical ideas included an open arena/performance space, shifting away from activities heavily dependent on infrastructure, and where possible needed sharing infrastructure so that resources could be focused on creative activity.

For the purpose of this part of the report I will only focus on the Entertainment programming at the fair.

Village Green – Jay Webdale & team

Through discussion and debate this germ of an idea, taken straight from the Shake-up document was developed to become 'The Village Green' – a space for the many and varied communities of Cambridge to celebrate and a space for people to relax in and enjoy some spectacles. The Village Green eventually included:

- An arena with performances, historical re-enactments, community games and a finale

- A series of community marquees which housed local community groups who wanted to show off what they do to the wider community
- A village pub – The Kings Arms with a range of pub style entertainment all day
- A community cafe with low-key performances providing a place to sit and relax
- A circus display and workshop area

The Village Green really lived up to the many and varied expectations which were laid on it by the committee. A small team of very experienced event workers helped the vision of an ancient meeting space which proved to be very popular with families and young people alike and offered something for everyone.

The Parade – Amy Wormald & team

This year the parade was structured differently allowing us to make new links with the community. We worked with the UK Centre for Carnival Arts in Luton as part of their regional Carnival Crossroads project. A series of artist-led workshops took place from April to June giving young people the opportunity to make costumes and learn dance routines. During the week before the fair we invited local people of all ages to take part in a Mas Make on the Common, creating costumes and decor to launch the Fair. Arco Iris led the parade, joined by dancers from local schools and youth clubs, plus Park Arts Stilters, Cambridge Community Circus and many more costume wearers. The parade featured over 250 participants and the route was extended this year to ensure that the day started with a bang!



Colonel Maybe's Mechanical Menagerie – Tom Allanson & Team

We decided to cancel The East Stage – it was felt that this had become too much like a 'main stage' and had become too much of a focal point for people who were less likely to move around the fair and interact with the full range of entertainment on offer. Although CMMM should not be seen as a like-for-like replacement CMMM did offer the serious music lover a place to go to see high quality local, regional, and national music. However, rather than simply using a traditional stage structure the CMMM team devised a radically different stage drawing on influences from Glastonbury's Shangri-la village to create a unique stage area which can grow and develop in the years to come into a distinct area offering not just stage shows but workshops and more interactive activities for music lovers to engage with.

Kids' Area – Drew Park & team

Putting the Kids' Area roughly in the position that the East Stage had occupied proved to be an inspired decision. It signalled that the fair had changed its priorities and moved the fair back towards the families that we felt we were beginning to lose. The Kids' Area was a huge success with a great deal of help from the Cherry Hinton community of volunteers this area was much larger than in previous years, fenced in to offer more protection for young children and packed full of workshops, shows and walk-a-bouts aimed at children and families. Visitor numbers were much higher than we could have ever imagined ensuring that we got the message that this area needs to be even bigger next year.

Film Show, Acoustic & Cabaret

One of the ideas in the Shake-up was that we wanted spaces which could house many different creative opportunities, spaces that would act just like a venue. The Portland Arms bar was to provide just such a space. This 50m marquee housed the film show on Friday where Simon Mullen and JC presented 30 films to a packed house. With over 300 films to pick from they did a sterling job to compile a programme which reflected this ever growing and constantly moving art form.

On Saturday morning the Acoustic crew led by Phil

Pethybridge & Kevin Charlesworth took over the space to host some great live music. Although the Acoustic Tent has been part of the fair for nine years this year's line-up was a triumph and kept the tent busy all day long.

As evening fell the space was handed over to Polly Griffiths and her team who transformed it into a stunning Cabaret Club with performances from some of the UK's finest acts. Given that Polly only had two months to put the programme together and a tiny budget her performers surpassed all expectations and was a resounding success.

This area was stunning and hugely popular in all its manifestations ensuring that the fair catered for many niche programming groups who shared infrastructure costs to ensure that as much time and money as possible went towards the art that they were presenting.

The Wigwam – Dougal Connor & team

The Wigwam is synonymous with Strawberry Fair this unique structure and its creator, Dougal, have graced the common with their presence for over 20 years. The Programming sub group decided early on that although this year was mostly about change, some things should always remain the same. The Wigwam put on a popular range of bands throughout the day. The eclectic programming played a part in keeping the crowd moving and resulted in a very peaceful area despite the very high numbers of people enjoying the show, something which the fair can look to with considerable shared pride.

The Green Area – Tim Neate & Team

During the Shake-up the Green Area was roundly applauded for its ability to entertain and educate without ever getting too preachy! Several people voiced the concern that the only problem with the Green Area was that it should stretch across the whole fair – that the whole fair should be a Green Area. This is definitely something that we will work towards in the coming years and whilst it has been said that the Green Area is 'a fair within the fair' it is perhaps also fair to say that the Green Area's sense of independence is the very thing which makes it so popular. Whilst devising the new site plan consideration was given to moving the Green Area but on reflection leaving it just where it is but helping it to expand should be one of the recommendations from this year's fair.



The Future

We are looking forward to building on the success of this year to create an even better Strawberry Fair in 2012. If you think you could help make this happen there are so many ways to get involved. From site crew to performers, production team to stewards – we are all volunteers who passionately believe that Strawberry Fair is a fantastic event and important to our community.

We would also love to hear your thoughts about the Fair. The heart-shaped summer fruit which the Fair is named after, combined with thirty seven years of love-related fair memories, have inspired us to create the Love-a-Fair campaign. To share your stories and photos find us on Facebook or contact loveafair@strawberry-fair.org.uk

