

## **The Society for the Protection of Urban Green Space**

### **Annual Report**

#### **November 2010**

The retiring officers would like to thank all the members and affiliated organisations who have contributed to the work of the society over the past year. We also extend our thanks to the MEPs and their staff members who have been supporting our work and the many people who have shared their knowledge and research findings with us. We are particularly indebted to the Vice Chancellor of the University of Plymouth, the staff of the Centre for Sustainable Futures and Simon Payne and Jason Lowther of the Law School for their collaboration and expertise.

Public awareness of the problems inherent in the depletion of urban green space has grown enormously during the last year all over the world. We believe that in a small way our campaign has contributed to this growing global awareness of the problem. Many other pressure groups have been formed during the last year both to protect local green spaces and to confront the underlying problem on a much wider front. Academic research is being conducted into various aspects of the role of urban green space in several countries. Politicians are becoming aware of the issues and encouraging decisions have been made in British courts. Over the last few months there has been increased reference in European courts to the 1998 Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters.

<http://www.unece.org/env/pp/documents/cep43e.pdf>

The Society was constituted in November 2009 to organise and effect a campaign throughout Europe with the goal of collecting one million signatures to submit to the European Commission as a Citizens' Initiative, as described in article 11(4) of the Lisbon Treaty, asking the European Commission to propose legislation to protect all urban green space in Europe.

A fund-raising dinner was held in January and various private donations have been received. The detailed accounts of the society will be available for inspection at the AGM.

The Society is registered under the Data Protection Act.

A website was set up giving information in English, French, German, Dutch, Polish, Greek, Arabic and Italian. The campaign was well received and quickly gained support. Emails and letters were received in support not only from the EEC but from places as far afield as Greenland, Australia, New Zealand and Canada. A facebook group has been set up and the society is represented on Twitter by UGSCampaigner. The society has been contacted by groups in the UK, France, the USA, Switzerland, Australia and Sweden who are working to protect their local urban green spaces. We have replied to these groups and provided them with information and assistance where possible.

The University of Plymouth affiliated with the society in December 2009 and was quickly followed by other institutions of higher education and research and various associations who all enthusiastically embrace the hope of obtaining effective European Law to adequately protect urban green space. A full list of affiliated groups will be available for inspection at the AGM.

It had been planned to launch the campaign to collect one million signatures with a conference and exhibition in April 2010. The University of Plymouth offered the society the use of the Levinsky Building and the planning of the event got underway. However, the campaign had been based on information provided by the European Commission in August 2009 regarding the regulations governing the submission of petitions and those likely to govern the submission of Citizens' Initiatives and a Green Paper was published in Brussels on 11.11.2009 proposing regulations that were considerably more challenging than had been anticipated.

The link to the Green Paper is given below:

[http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/secretariat\\_general/citizens\\_initiative/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/secretariat_general/citizens_initiative/index_en.htm)

The Green Paper contains recommendations that went through a period of consultation in February 2010, to which members of the society submitted written representations, and will go before the European Parliament on 22 November 2010. The content of the Green Paper made it clear that it would be premature to launch a campaign in April 2010. A Special General Meeting was therefore held on Tuesday February 2<sup>nd</sup> 2010 at which it was decided that the launch event should be postponed.

Since February our work has concentrated on raising awareness of the value of urban green space and the problems inherent in losing green spaces within our cities to the march of concrete.

Bill Adams has been our Public Relations officer this year. He has prepared films of the wildlife in Central Park which have been shown to various groups in Plymouth. He has also given illustrated talks about the birds who visit his city-centre allotment. Exhibitions of his photographs have been on display, both to local groups and to the general public. He has given several interviews on Radio Devon on the importance of urban green space and in particular of Central Park to the city of Plymouth. The BBC is currently preparing a documentary about Bill's work which will be broadcast this winter. Bill has also been working with one of the students from the University of Plymouth who is doing research into urban biodiversity.

Bill Adams	(Public Relations Officer)
Colette Crielesi	(Coordinator)
Christine Fice	(Treasurer)
Wendy Miller	(Website Administrator)