

Presentation by David Brown – Council Development Officer

David came to update the 'Friends' on the progress made to improve and restore the Park based on the community consultation in 2004 and implemented in 2005 and to present the revised management and maintenance plan to take us forward from 2010 to 2015.

It was a very positive and interesting discussion and the following is a brief outline of the meeting.

The Group feels that from 2005 to 2009 a lot has been achieved by the 'Friends' and the Council together. The Council have attended every one of our General Meetings and most of our Event Meetings to help and discuss the events we are planning and to talk about the latest issues with the park and the jobs that need doing, also to help us access funding where applicable. We have Games Areas for all ages now, the tennis courts have been refurbished. We have new bins and benches and 2 sets of main entrance gates also a resurfaced car park. The restoration of the lower lake has been completed and recently the Princess Charlotte Memorial has been refurbished and a new plaque is currently being made to put on the monument.

Red House Park is a very important 'green space' more and more apartment blocks have been built around Great Barr and the Park is their only green environment to walk in. A lot of mothers with young children visit the play areas and it would be really nice to be able to have a small café (just a hut serving tea and coffee and ice cream in the summer would be fine or space in the Red House!) this would also appeal to the elderly who often take a walk in the park. Perhaps this could go on the plans for the future! The feedback the 'Friends' receive from visitors to the park at their events include the provision of toilets, and safety and security, but they do appreciate the gardens and floral areas. As the Council mention in their report the anti social behaviour is a problem and is ongoing, however the police are aware of the problem and sometimes attend our meetings to discuss what they are doing about it and it is up to us all to report bad behaviour so bringing it to police attention.

During our General Meetings that the Council attend we have highlighted improvements that are important to the 'Friends'. In the main these are included in the Management and Maintenance Plan that the Council have produced for the next five years.

- Our aim is to generally improve the Park to achieve the Green Flag status The Council state in their report that they are working towards submitting the Park for a Green Flag at a point of time in the future
- To improve security by boundary fencing and gates.
- To sort out the flooding at the entrance to the park off the Newton Road
- The Changing Rooms – these are used constantly throughout the season and they look such a mess. In the Council Report they have included improving the external appearance of the building and also to convert the 'garage' into a community room and maybe provide a space for the Police who have shown an interest in having an office here.

A timescale for this was discussed in the meeting and the Council have said by summer 2010.

- The area around the Red House has become very unsightly. The fenced off area is full of weeds and rubbish and is not an attractive site for visitors when they come to park their cars, not to mention the residents who have to look out of their windows at the mess.

In the Council Report they state that the intention is to demolish the Jumping Jack buildings and the squash courts and public toilets so improving the setting for the Red House and to make a much more attractive entrance to the Park.

The timescale they mention for this is summer 2010, although the Friends have had an assurance that the area will be tidied up before this.

- The Friends would also like to see the paths etc kept in good condition, this is also mentioned in the Council Report and their intention is to maintain secondary paths and add more bins and benches. The area around the lakes has become very overgrown and some of the paths that used to be in use by people in the park have almost disappeared. This is also a concern because people won't walk down there as it is so overgrown that it feels unsafe.
- The Red House – The Friends have spent many hours discussing the House with the Council and other parties that have come forward with suggestions for its use. A lively discussion took place at this meeting with David Brown as to its future. One interesting suggestion from a member of the Group was that it could be used as an education and historical site for visiting schools and while it was open during the day for this purpose some of the rooms could be used for community projects.

David Brown did assure the Group that the house would not be demolished, the façade would be kept and so would the surrounding gardens and play areas. A preferred option from the Council is to convert the house into residential units ensuring the exterior remains as it is. A community room with café facilities and toilets could be created using part of the Newton Road Pavilion.

The Group would like to thank David Brown for his presentation and look forward to seeing the improvements in the near future !.

