

Report to the Friends of Spencer Park and Recreation Ground AGM, 7 September 2013

Paul Smith: Chair

This has been the first year of the Friends of Spencer Park and Recreation Ground as an independent organisation. Building upon the work of the sub-committee of the North Earlsdon Neighbourhood Association (NENA), the committee (elected at the founding meeting) has discussed how to renovate and promote the use of the park and recreation ground. Minutes are placed on our website. Meetings with relevant Council officers have been held on a regular basis. I want to thank Council officers and staff for their support during the last year.

Over many years, incremental cuts in staff and funds, together with vandalism and anti-social behaviour, combined to degrade the park, which as a result was avoided by many people. The committee's intention is to bring people into the park and recreation ground through creating a hospitable and safe environment, hosting a range of activities. We do intend, however, to preserve the park as a 'quiet' area in the best sense of the word.

The last year has seen things begin to change. Thanks to the local police and park attendants, vandalism and anti-social behaviour have declined significantly. (This gain can, however, easily be lost; the closure of the pavilion, except for bowls bookings, from 12 September rather than 30 September, will pose a challenge.) Regular gardening sessions by volunteers have extended the planting in the park's west and northeast borders, and approximately 85 per cent of the Spanish bluebells have been removed. (This is essential if we are to establish native bluebells in the west border; thanks to residents who have removed theirs.) Three thousand crocuses (funded by NENA), planted in the recreation ground, along Spencer Avenue, presented a good display in March and April. This summer, all four tennis courts have been open, the bowling greens are in good condition and used regularly (the Albany Bowling Club has attracted new members and uses the crown green on many evenings). New litterbins and signs have been installed. Twelve bird boxes, built by local children, were put up last October; this was followed by a 'bird feed' session on 23 February. As part of the Earlsdon Festival, bowling and tennis classes were held on 4 May (we also had a stall on 3 May), and repeated, with other activities, at the Big Lunch on 2 June. The Council has organised a number of successful concerts.

From the outset the committee has been concerned to expand existing provision with new activities for the very young (up to 8), teenagers, and the older members of the community. We organised an extensive consultation exercise, which revealed widespread support for a range of activities (see separate summary). With the support and advice of Coventry Council, and after visits to a number of playgrounds and extensive discussions with equipment suppliers and contractors, we have submitted a grant to WREN (a non-profit-making environmental body registered to fund projects which are eligible under the Landfill Communities Fund) for play equipment for young children. Earlsdon School has used the recreation ground and park for recreation, and is drafting plans for their use for outdoor-learning and sports.

We are pressing for new footpath surfaces (which are in poor state) and for the height of hedges to be lowered. Future projects include a multi-use games area and exercise equipment on the recreation ground.

Over the autumn and winter we will continue to improve the visual appearance of the park by extending the west border, build a 'bug-friendly' garden in the south-west corner, plant a variety of bulbs in the park and recreation ground, and install more bird boxes. New trees are to be planted.

We have discussed establishing the Friends as a charity in order to allow donations to benefit from gift aid (reclaiming tax paid on the amount given) and to permit us to apply to those very many charities that only give grants to charities.