

# **The future of the Friends of Victoria Park group**

At the forthcoming joint AGM I will be reporting the decision by the Friends of Victoria Park (FVP) members to wind-up and discontinue the FVP group following my recommendation. I will be standing down as Chair and the assets of FVP will be transferred to the Friends of Clarendon Park reserved for the benefit of the park.

I have listed briefly below examples of my experience over the time FVP has existed which led to the recommendation to end the group. I will be happy to explain more fully at the meeting and answer any questions which may arise.

Douglas Smith

Chair – Friends of Victoria Park

## **The background to this recommendation to discontinue the FVP Group**

Unfortunately, despite continuing efforts, it has proved impossible to establish any form of productive working relationship with the council. More often than not our presence as an interested party, or stakeholder, is unrecognised, suggestions and proposals we make for development are ignored or over-ridden, and responses to council proposals or actions make no difference to what the council has already decided to do. The most recent example concerns the community field.

## **Tree planting on the community field**

We wanted to see parts of this area planted with clusters of small trees, not more than three trees in a cluster, planted in various places to provide discrete areas of shade for people using that field, and especially around the site of the bandstand. A council officer decided to plant three large clusters of trees with about seven trees per cluster, not situated where we had wanted them, with selected species which would grow to a height exceeding 20-25 metres – the same or taller than the perimeter trees. The officer concerned appears unable to explain why these trees were selected, why they were positioned as they are, and what he was trying to achieve for that field.

## **Section 106 funding for development on the park**

We were deliberately excluded from taking part, or being able to make any contribution, to decisions about how the section 106 funding should be used on the park. As part of these decisions the council scrapped a plan we had been working on for about three years to re-use the old play area by the Health Centre as a social and activity centre for young people. They did not feel it necessary to tell us they had done this – we found out by accident.

## **The site of the old play area**

We wished to retain the fenced site of the old play area and re-use it rather than see it removed. Our main plan was to re-use it for young people who used to congregate in that part of the park but for whom there were no facilities at all. Even when that plan was discarded by the council it could still have been re-used rather than destroyed. The council had no interest in alternative uses, it was intent on removing it, and has done so.

## **The London Road cycleway**

We submitted detailed plans for an alternative route through the park which would have meant: the loss of fewer trees; a more direct route close to London Road which would make more sense to cyclists and have less chance of being used as an alternative walking route; better illumination from existing street lights and less leaf fall; it would go behind the bus shelter and connect directly to the existing Toucan crossing at St James' Road; and the sub-standard cycleway on the pavement round the corner from this crossing to Victoria Park Road could be removed. No response to this plan was received and consequently we now have a badly lit cycleway heavily used by walkers but rarely by cyclists, with no access to the St James' Road crossing and with the sub-standard cycleway on the pavement still in place.

## **The removal of the bowling green**

We had no advance knowledge of the closure of the bowling green. At a late stage the croquet club was consulted about where they wished to play and they opted to remain at Victoria Park. It was only then that they were told it had already been decided to close the park bowling green so they had to move. A decision made some months previously, and claimed to be a result of a review of playing pitches in the city.