

## Annual Report Friends of Dunwood Park April 2016 – March 2017

When I presented the Annual Report for the first time back in January 2011 it included Mike McGrother's vision of Dunwood Park becoming a living community.

As I now report on last year I hope that you will recognise that all that has been achieved this year could not have happened without that sense of community being real.

Last year Dunwood Park saw the return of a programme of events. The Park came alive with families at four varied events run by Oldham Play Action Group. You might have seen the children deeply absorbed in creative activities or more actively den building amongst the trees. Fathers remembered their days in the cubs as they helped secure the dens with ropes and knots while many adults rediscovered their youth playing swing ball or bouncing on a space hopper! It was great to see whole families having fun together. I am very pleased to be able to tell you that, paid for from the Community Support Fund, OPAG will run 4 more events during the coming year, this time with new attractions like a water fight or card board city!

This year saw an important development when Oldham's Peace Pledge Forum, Shaw and Royton Rotary and Shaw and Crompton Parish Council all approached the Friends about running their own events in the Park. When the Lottery granted the money to refurbish Dunwood Park they wanted the long term result to be that more people would come and enjoy the Park, doing things for themselves rather than simply having everything laid on for them. This wish is becoming real.

At the Peace Picnic, the initiative of Richard and Maria of the Peace Pledge Forum, The Friends and Mandel's Cafe both signed a Pledge of Peace. This does not involve waving banners and demonstrating! Put simply the idea of the pledge is that people commit to taking one action during the year that will help to promote peace. The Friends pledged to explore the creation of a Peace Sculpture in the Park and also to run an event which would use the Dunwood Park Labyrinth to promote Peace.

The Friends have collected over 60 drawings and ideas from children and adults visiting Dunwood about what a Peace Sculpture might look like. Amanda will be working with design students at local colleges and schools who will create designs based on these ideas, before a panel selects one, which a professional tree carver will then create. A long process but one which will involve the contributions of a lot of people. Our hope is that it will be good to look at and perhaps remind people to do the small things within their power to create peace in the local community.

The Labyrinth event will happen on World Labyrinth Day, 6<sup>th</sup> May, and you are all invited to walk the Labyrinth at one o'clock in a spirit of peace and unity with people around the world who will also be walking - as one at one.

Regular dog walkers are an important part of the Dunwood community, many seeing each other every day. The Friends have always wanted there to be a special event for dog owners and so welcomed Shaw and Royton Rotary's offer to run a dog show. A more homely event than Crufts but organised to a high standard by Derek and supported by the Friends it was a brilliant afternoon with over 100 beautiful dogs. We are very pleased that

Rotary will be repeating the Dog Show this autumn.

Sadly there are some irresponsible dog owners who use Dunwood Park, and the problem of dog fouling is difficult to improve despite posters, free dog bags and fines. We keep trying. Enforcement Patrols will shortly be back in Dunwood Park, acting on local intelligence, aiming to catch regular offenders and issue fines. Dog walkers are very welcome in Dunwood Park which is here for everyone to enjoy. The top thing that spoils peoples visits is dog fouling and so we will continue our efforts to ensure a visit to the Park is a pleasure for all.

Over the years Shaw and Crompton Parish Council have been very supportive of the Park. At the end of November the Parish Council ran their own pre-Christmas event in Dunwood, supported by the Friends. Children made lanterns, there was a fantastic firework display which received many compliments and a procession to switch on the tree lights for the people of Wrens Nest. It is all too easy for adults to miss the magic of these events – unless - you look at the faces of the young children or are lucky enough, as Pauline was, to suddenly find your arm being crushed in a vice like grip by a small child full of excitement and wonder as they breathed – 'Father Christmas is here'.

Events help bring more people in. I've mentioned some of our plans already. Discussions are under way to run another pre Christmas event with the Parish Council and it is good to report that Shaw Events Committee will be joining OPAG in the Park to celebrate St George's Day adding table top games like hook a duck to the attractions. In July Dobcross Brass Monkeys Band will be in concert creating an afternoon reminiscent of traditional Sundays in Dunwood when the old band stand was in regular use.

Later this evening I am sure Glenn Dale will be speaking about Oldham's success in Britain in Bloom and North West in Bloom. I hope you all shared my pride in Dunwood Park being chosen this year as the start point for the judges tour, giving the judges that all important first impression. Three members of the Committee were allocated a bare five minutes to explain to the judges how the local community were actively involved in the Park – a challenging task. As you know Oldham did win two Golds and it felt great to have played a small but direct part in that success.

The prestigious Green Flag Award has to be re-won every year and thanks to Glenn and his team – Nik, Stan, Phil, Andy and Franco - plus the level of community involvement that exists, Dunwood Park retained its Green Flag status.

All sorts of people make Dunwood Park the community it is. Although the Sewing Ladies now meet in Victoria Gardens the link with them is still strong and I'm pleased to welcome them to tonight's meeting. Yes, they share and learn sewing skills but more importantly they know and care about each other.

In November our Treasurer Ron was 80. He has decided that now is the time to stand down from the role having done it for 13 years. The sewing ladies organised a surprise party for Ron who walked into what he thought was a sewing session with a smile breaking on his face declaring 'now I know why Margaret said we were too busy for lunch!' The

party was a lovely opportunity not just to sing Happy Birthday but to thank Ron for his long and faithful service. Chris, one of the sewing ladies who joined the Committee last year has expressed her willingness to be the new Treasurer.

John and Jean run the Nordic Walking Sessions every month and never miss regardless of the weather. They always arrange an interesting speaker who joins the walk. These sessions are fun but also create friendships, improve health and educate. We were happy to be able to support Jean's Community Support Fund application which will cover the cost of her qualifying as an Instructor. This will enable the Nordic Walking Group to expand and enable more people with health issues to join the group and break out of the isolation that poor health so often creates. John and Jean's enviable enthusiasm underpins the ongoing success of this group.

The Dunwood Bowlers are also great enthusiasts with 7 adult teams and 3 junior teams playing regularly during the season. Harold, Ian and Barbara deservedly always get a special mention in this report. Harold now 93, refuses to age and continues to run the round robins on Sunday afternoons, encouraging new people into the game. Ian and Barbara had a record number of 148 children this year attending the free junior bowling sessions held each morning of the six weeks holiday. The increased numbers meant that more junior bowls were needed and The Friends were more than happy to help Ian to successfully apply to the Community Support Fund for these. The Junior bowling is a heart warming demonstration of how a personal interest can be shared to the benefit of so many others.

When thinking about Dunwood Park we need to remember the many young people who attend events and are happily playful and creative, or who play bowls, kick a ball about on the MUGA pitch, play tennis, delight in Forest School sessions and create our colourful bird boxes. We need to remember the young people who volunteer at Mandel's - learning skills which will help them to enter the world of work. It can be a difficult for young people to find their way in the modern world. Dunwood Park can only supply a small part of the solution but a positive experience can help a young person succeed. For example one young man volunteering at Mandel's used to walk through the Park for years avoiding eye contact and never smiling or exchanging a greeting. Since volunteering he has gained confidence, smiles and greets people – that is a life changing result.

In the Shaw and Crompton area there are a minority of young people who move around, usually once the streets or Park are quiet and empty, causing a nuisance or worse vandalising things. Unfortunately it is inevitable that at times they will target the Park. Reports from people who live around the Park, about destructive behaviour, are taken seriously and responded to but it is a challenging problem, not easily resolved and not helped by spending cuts.

The Dunwood Steering Group which you will probably remember consists of OMBC Officers and the Friends, have organised a Survey of Park Users which will take place this summer. We want to update past surveys to ensure that we have an accurate overview of how people feel about Dunwood Park and what they would like to see in

future. An important part of that Survey will be ensuring that young people are included and asked for their views. Young people are part of the community and as well as deterring them from bad behaviour, as the adults in this situation, we need to try and find ways of working with them, aiming to arrive at positive solutions.

Mandel's cafe is now an established part of Park life. Amanda's belief in community involvement means that the cafe is much more than somewhere that just serves good food. In addition to the involvement of young people as volunteers, local school children worked on the herb garden and told the Britain in Bloom judges all about the plants, there are Mahdlo outreach sessions on Monday evenings, craft activities for children, run by volunteers at the weekend, Tuesday strolls and knit and natter for older people organised by Age UK. Mandel's is also a venue where local people can celebrate occasions like Mothers Day or enjoy a continental evening together. A new initiative, which touch my heart, will enable Shaw Side residents to take afternoon tea once a month at Mandel's. 2017 will also see Amanda launching the growing hub where local people can learn how to grow fruit and vegetables. And of course the cafe is a vital part of events days.

Shortly before Christmas it felt as if the whole of the wider community in Shaw and Crompton were united in opposition to the draft Greater Manchester Spatial Strategy which proposes building housing on surrounding green belt land. The plans covered very extensive areas including land adjoining the Park. The Friends responded to the consultation by raising concerns about the capacity of the Park to meet peoples needs if other green space, currently used for recreation, was lost and about the impact on the Park's wild life which uses the surrounding fields to hunt for food. We also highlighted the increased risk of flooding which is already a problem in and around the Park. The consultations are ongoing and the Friends will be alert to further opportunities to feed in their views.

Not many of you will be aware that the Friends of Dunwood Park have a European arm! Robin McGrother lives in France but whenever we need to put updates on our website he does it for us. The Friends rely on Robin to do this important job and of course we are really hoping that Brexit won't affect this cross border arrangement!!

There are so many people who form the Dunwood Community, like Jo in OMBC's Regeneration Dept, our local Borough Councillors, the District Partnership Team, local schools, the shops who display our events posters, – if I haven't included you personally, I'm so sorry but please put it down to me getting older and making mistakes – everyone's contribution big or small is essential.

The Friends Committee help to make good things happen in Dunwood Park. Of course, what the Committee does they do in the name of the members of the Friends. This annual meeting is always my opportunity to thank you, our members, for your support, without you we could not have achieved what we have.

Our efforts have and will go on creating that living community that Mike hoped for. We never forget that without Mike and the original members of the Committee the Lottery

Grant would not have been won, we owe them huge thanks. Since then the Committee has been on an incredible journey together, no two years have been the same, there have always been some new people and some stalwarts to face new challenges and new ideas. What has remained constant is the Friend's vision, their commitment and their ability to rise successfully to the challenges.

Everyone's personal contribution is very individual, there are different views, different abilities and varying ways of contributing but the magic of Committees is that all those individual contributions combine to create something that is bigger than any of us.

I am confident that as I stand down as Chair the new Committee will continue to succeed. But I do want to publicly say thank you to each and everyone of you for the help and support you have given me over the past six years. You are great committee.

There is one other person I want to recognise and thank tonight, someone who is a quiet, constant, hidden figure but an essential support to me. Without them I couldn't have been as involved in Dunwood Park as I have been – someone I now hope to spend a bit more time with – my husband Bill.

Thank you.