



Friends of Queens Park



We live in exciting times, parkwise. Bolton Council's vision for the future of Queens Park promises to restore the park to its former Victorian glory and more. With new vistas, a restored Park Lodge, an

expanded children's play area and a brand new community pavilion, are amongst the many proposals which, if the Council is awarded Heritage Lottery Funding, will turn round the fortunes of Bolton's magnificent town centre park.

Urban parks have had a history of neglect. There are many reasons for this and I think it is perhaps unfair to lay the responsibility entirely on the door steps of local authorities. In the 1960's and throughout the 70's and 80's, life styles changed.

The population became more mobile, the motorway network expanded, making the far flung rural areas of Britain greatly accessible. And together with the advent of cheap package holidays, people could spend their leisure time further a field. This left many parks under used and so neglect was inevitable.

It is only in relatively recent times, spurred on by the green revolution, that we have rediscovered the value of the wonderful open spaces close to where we live. Parks are now seen as a vital contribution to healthy urban living and may well regain their past popularity as more stringent times are upon us.

Work towards improving Queens Park is not a recent phenomenon, but began with an all important public meeting organised by Bolton Council and held at Bolton School in December 1996. This led to the founding of **Friends of Queens Park** in August 1997 and the group has worked closely with the council ever since to improve the park.

Measures were gradually brought in to improve the appearance of the park and increase safety by taking out the dense growth of rhododendrons and self seeded trees, thus opening up the vistas to give clear sight lines.

It is true that Queens Park acquired a reputation for harbouring undesirable people and, following a number of high profile incidents, gained a negative perception in the

public's mind. However, terms that have been used to describe the park such as– desolate– intimidating silence– are hopefully just echoes from the past.

There is now a full time Park Ranger, Andy Edwards, who is based at Park Lodge, with more volunteer rangers to be recruited soon. The police are also considering basing an officer at the lodge.

Last year, as part of the BBC Breathing Places Initiative, **Friends of Queens Park** received a Big Lottery grant to improve the wild life corridor alongside the river with the help of the council. This included hard surfacing a large part of the path and providing benches. As a result more people are using this route to and from the town centre. Work is also in progress to improve the pathways throughout the rest of the park.

A new initiative is in the first stages of development to encourage greater use of the park. **Friends of Queens Park**, together with the council, plans to create a Queens Park User Group (similar to that started at Moses Gate Country Park), comprising smaller specific interest groups such as dog walking, natural history, art activities etc. In fact anything local residents can come up with. The more people using the park, the safer it will feel.

My message is– forget the ‘credit crunch’ use your park! Take a picnic or sit by the river and see if you can spot a Kingfisher or Heron.

John Harding  
Chair, Friends of Queens Park