



CHESTERFIELD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

*Community, Customer and
Organisational Scrutiny Committee*

Scrutiny Project Group

report on

Friends Groups

Date: December 2016

Project group members:

Councillors:

Lead	Kate Caulfield
Group Members	Jenny Flood Shirley Niblock Gordon Simmons

1.0 Introduction and review aims

- 1.1 This review looked at how friends and community groups¹ work with Chesterfield Borough Council to improve local parks and open spaces.
- 1.2 A friends group is a group of local residents and other interested parties who dedicate their time, skills and knowledge to improve their local park or open space. The project group notes that other groups and organisations may use the term " friends ", for example the Friends of the Pomegranate Theatre, however these groups did not meet the project group's definition of a friends group, and were therefore not considered in the group's research.
- 1.3 While the council works as landowner and public service provider with and offers support to these groups, how this relationship is managed has not been previously reviewed. The project group wanted to see if this relationship was enabling the best possible outcomes for both the groups and for the council's parks and open spaces.
- 1.4 The review also aimed to evaluate how the various friends groups from across the Borough worked together in order to share best practice, and also look at how open and accountable the groups were .
- 1.5 The project group set out to achieve the following objectives:
 - To have increased and productive communication between the council and individual friends groups.
 - Better communication and the sharing of best practice between friends groups, and for a more consistent method of operation to be taken by the groups

¹ Referred to as "friends groups" throughout the report.

- Increased support and training being made available to enable all friends groups to be effective and successful.
- For friends groups to have the support and resources to engage with all local residents.
- That all friends groups have strong, robust and inclusive constitutions in order to be accountable to local residents, and that the groups have the resources and training in order to do this.
- Greater synchronisation in the work and priorities of friends groups across the Borough, so as to maximise positive outcomes for the council's parks and opens spaces and for local residents.
- That friends groups have the tools and training to make sure that equality and diversity is considered in their decision making processes.

2.0 Reasons for the review and link to priorities

2.1 The review of friends groups was established as a result of the new annual work programming process. This process involved Cabinet, Overview and Scrutiny and all backbench members, as well as the Senior and Corporate Management teams working together to create one overarching Overview and Scrutiny work programme for the municipal year 2016/17.

2.2. The review links into the Chesterfield Borough Council Corporate Plan 2015 – 2019 objectives of:

- Vision: Putting our communities first.
- Priority: To improve the quality of life for local people.
- Objective: To increase the quality of public space for which the council has responsibility through targeted improvement programmes.

3.0 Introduction to recommendations

3.1 The project group sought in the review to learn how examples of best practice from elsewhere could be applied to Chesterfield so that all friends groups could play as full a part as possible in the care and

management of the Borough's open spaces. The group was also mindful that any changes recommended to the processes and resources needed to encourage new groups to form, and for established groups to succeed, should not create excessive demands on officers' time and workloads. The group's recommendations have been formed with consideration to both these objectives in mind.

4.0 Recommendations

The Project Group recommends:

- 4.1 That an up-to-date data base of Friends of Groups is maintained by officers and that all Friends of Groups are given a single point of contact at the council to facilitate streamlined , effective and accountable channels of communication between groups and the council.
- 4.2 That an annual survey with Friends Groups be carried out to collect information on their activities and achievements to enable the council to see how their work is contributing to the delivery of the councils objectives, as set out in the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy.
- 4.3 That all Friends Groups should have an agreed Management or Master Plan which has been developed in consultation with both the Council and the local community which clearly sets out both the group's and the council's role with regards to the development of the park or open space.
- 4.4 That Friends Groups be provided with information and guidance, as required, from the Communications and Marketing Team on how to publicise their activities to, and engage effectively with, their local communities.
- 4.5 That the documentation made available to new Friends Groups by the council is reviewed and refreshed, and that a knowledge bank of templates and guidance documents are made available to assist groups to put key documents and policies, including a strong constitution, in place.
- 4.6 That to facilitate effective communication channels between the council and friends groups, and between friends groups in Chesterfield, that a Friends Group Committee be established, also

that a bi-annual Friends Group newsletter be published which will also enable the work of Friends Groups to be shared and celebrated with a wider audience.

- 4.7 That officers work closely with, and provide advice and guidance to Friends Groups who are bidding for external funding in order to reduce duplication, increase coordination and ensure better outcomes from the bids.

5.0 Review approach

5.1 The review was carried out by:

- a) Reviewing and analysing the current resources and officer support available to friends groups provided by Chesterfield Borough Council.
- b) Reviewing and analysing the current resources and officer support to friends groups provided by other local authorities. This included a visit to Karen Lewis, Community Partnerships Officer at Sheffield City Council.
- c) Project group meetings to review findings.
- d) Meetings and discussions with Cabinet Members and officers including:
 - Councillor Chris Ludlow, Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing
 - John Ramsey, Principal Green Space Strategy Officer
- e) Consultation and discussion with friends groups via an online survey and face to face meetings with members of local friends groups.

5.2 The information received from the survey with the friends groups was collated and analysed for trends. This data together with the information gained from the subsequent meetings with friends' group members was considered by the project group in formulating their recommendations.

- 5.4 The project group selected a set of other local authorities to examine how they worked with friends groups. These were selected on a basis of either demonstrating best practice or having a similar demographic to Chesterfield.
- 5.5 The project group also referred to the extensive report "What are Friends for?" published by Cambridge City Council in 2013 as part of their research.

6.0 Review findings and analysis

- 6.1 At the start of the review the project group recognised the importance of talking with existing friends groups in Chesterfield to learn how they operated and about the types of activities they were involved in. The project group also wanted to learn how the groups communicated with council officers, and about the level of support officers provided to the groups.
- 6.2 The group agreed that to gather this information a survey should be conducted with members of friends groups in Chesterfield. Initially the council's website was checked to see if it contained a full list of friends groups and contacts. When it became apparent that the web site did not have a complete list of groups in the Borough the green spaces team were contacted in order to obtain a full list of friends groups.
- 6.3 The group subsequently received the list of friends groups currently held by the green spaces team, however it became apparent that this list was incomplete, with some contact details missing or out of date, as well as there being some doubt as to whether some of the groups were still in existence. The Committee and Scrutiny Coordinator then worked with group members to update the list so that it could be used to send a survey to key contacts in every active friends group.
- 6.4 After the survey had been completed by the friends groups, the project group invited representatives of each group to meet with them at the town hall. These meetings allowed the project group members to discuss the data collected directly with the friends groups

as well as to hear their thoughts regarding how the relationship between friends groups and the council could work most effectively.

- 6.5 The representatives of the well-established groups were of agreement that council officers were able to be contacted, and were helpful and supportive when they interacted with them, however representatives of a group that was in its early stages of development did note that initially it had been difficult to find which officer they should contact when setting up their group. All the groups noted that it can also be difficult to know who to contact at the council about specific enquiries that may not be the responsibility of the green spaces team. The green spaces team does have an online information pack on setting up a friends group which contains a list of key officer contacts; this list however is very out of date and needs to be reviewed.
- 6.6 Friends group representatives, as well as project group members were of agreement that while officers were very helpful when contacted, especially the Principal Green Spaces Officer, that one officer should not be expected to deal with all enquiries from all of the groups. Project group members were of agreement that friends group and officer communication should be organised in a way that provided groups with a single point of contact, but at the same time did not put all the responsibility on one officer to deal with all of the enquiries from all the groups. This could potentially be facilitated by each group being allocated an officer contact at the council who would then take responsibility for dealing with that group's enquires

Recommendation

That an up-to-date data base of Friends of Groups is maintained by officers and that all Friends of Groups are given a single point of contact at the council to facilitate streamlined , effective and accountable channels of communication between groups and the council.

- 6.7 The council's Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2015 – 2024 is a key document that links with the council's key corporate priorities as set out in the council plan. The strategy is primarily concerned with the management and development of publicly accessible green space that has recreational value within the Borough. The strategy aims to direct and prioritise resources in order to gain maximum benefits in areas such as health and wellbeing for all of the communities across the

Borough through the provision of high quality and accessible green spaces.

- 6.8 The work of friends groups has played a significant role in delivering and achieving the objectives of the strategy by attracting external funding in order to drive improvements and attract more people to use parks and open spaces. However from the meetings held with the representatives of the friends groups it became apparent that most were unaware of the strategy and how their work was contributing to the achievement of its objectives. Some groups did note that they were aware of the strategy but had not used it when setting out their objectives. Only two groups advised that they were both familiar with the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy and had used it when drawing up their master plan so to ensure that their priorities and objectives supported those of the council.
- 6.9 As previously noted the project group used a survey in order to consult with and gather information from friends groups in Chesterfield. The survey was written by the group members with the support of the Policy team who set up the survey on the council's specialised survey system to enable online completion. This approach meant that the results could be collated quickly and easily for the group to consider. The survey sent to the friends groups is attached at **Appendix A**. The survey received a good response from the friends groups with eight groups completing the online survey.
- 6.11 The survey responses resulted in a significant amount of quantitative and qualitative information about friends groups and their activities being gathered. The full results of the survey are attached at **Appendix B**. The survey results, when collated, provided in a single document a comprehensive record of the activities of friends groups in areas including activities, community engagement, fund raising and bidding to external organisations.
- 6.12 Currently the green spaces team is generally well informed with regard to the activities of friends groups. For example if friends groups are holding a fundraising event this needs to be arranged in advance with officers. There is however no strategic over-arching data collection exercise with regard to friends group activities and subsequent evaluation of this data against the objectives of the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy.

- 6.13 Sheffield City Council, who has strong and constructive relationships with their network of friends groups, conducts an annual survey of friends groups. This allows data to be gathered on group composition, activities, fund raising and information on how many hours group members have spent on site as volunteers or organising events. The survey used by Sheffield City Council is attached at **Appendix F**.
- 6.14 Project group members were in agreement that the actions of friends groups operating on council owned land must support and be in alignment with council priorities and that for this to happen council officers must be fully aware of the each group's activities and objectives.

Recommendation

That an annual survey with Friends Groups be carried out to collect information on their activities and achievements to enable the council to see how their work is contributing to the delivery of the councils objectives, as set out in the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy.

- 6.15 One of the key areas that the project group were keen to review was how the relationship between friends groups and the council was managed. The group found from their discussions with both the groups and officers that the relationship was generally good with open channels of communication. Friends' group members consult with officers regarding their plans and officers attend friends groups' committee meetings.
- 6.16 As previously noted the majority of friends groups advised that they were unaware of the content of the council's Parks and Open Spaces Strategy, and as a consequence did not know how their activities were in alignment with council priorities. It should be noted that communication between the council and the groups is at a level where it would be extremely unlikely that a group's activities would be totally contrary to the objectives of the council. However it is possible that some groups could be carrying out activities that are not as strategically focussed and aimed at meeting the council's objectives for parks and open spaces as they could potentially be.
- 6.17 From the responses received to the survey only 20% of the friends groups in Chesterfield stated that they had a current Management or

Master Plan for their park or open space. The groups that did have a plan advised that they had been developed and agreed with the Green Spaces Development Officer and had been drawn up with full regard to the council's Parks and Open Spaces Strategy. These groups advised a Management/Master Plan had positively assisted them in producing better outcomes for their park or open space. These plans had also been beneficial in clearly defining the relationship between the council and their group, as well as assisting to clarify each party's role and responsibilities with regard to the development of the park and open space.

- 6.18 The friends groups that did have a Management/Master plan did note that the community should be involved and consulted in their development to ensure that the group's priorities were aligned to those of the local community as well as to those of the council and the friends group members.
- 6.19 Sheffield City Council, which the group used as an example of "best practice", had in the past considered using a formal partnership agreement between the council and friends groups to set out mutual expectations. This approach however was never implemented as it was feared that it could become a contractual relationship that might not be sustainable in the long term. The project group does note that expectations between the council and the friends groups should be clear from the start of the relationship.
- 6.20 The scrutiny project group appreciates that each friends group has varying levels of expectations of both their role and of the balance of responsibility between the council and themselves with regard to the upkeep and development of parks and open spaces. All groups were in agreement however that the relationship between themselves and the council, as well as each group's objectives needed to be clearly defined for each party by using a mutually agreed Management/Master Plan. This approach would help define the relationship between the groups and the council, provide a basis for mutual accountability and understanding and also assist with the setting of clear, targeted and realistic objectives for both the council and the friends groups from the outset.

Recommendation

That all Friends Groups should have an agreed Management or Master Plan which has been developed in consultation with both the Council and the local community which clearly sets out both the group's and the council's role with regards to the development of the park or open space.

- 6.21 The project group, at an early stage in their research looked at friends' group websites and social media activity to gain information about each groups activities. The project group found wide variances in how each group was using websites and social media, with some groups having both their own websites and social media accounts while others had no web presence at all. There were links to some group's websites from the council's website, but not all groups' websites were listed.
- 6.22 During project group meetings with the friends groups, the representatives noted that maintaining an up-to-date and professional looking web site was very time consuming and that not all friends groups were fortunate enough to have the expertise available to their group in order to do this type of work. Several groups noted that while they still had a website their primary method of online communication was via a Facebook page as this method of online communication had numerous advantages over a traditional website. The representatives noted that a Facebook page was both easy to set up and maintain, as well as having the benefit of being easier for members of the local, and wider community to access and subsequently get to know about the activities of the groups.
- 6.23 In addition to using websites and social media the different friends groups had mixed approaches to how they communicated with their local communities. The friends groups noted that it was important for them to engage with the wider community beyond those who came to their meetings or sat on their committee, so as to learn about what the community wanted for their park or open space.
- 6.24 The methods of communication that the groups had used included leafleting their local area, public meetings and using community events on their park or open space so they could talk face to face with local residents to learn about what they wanted to happen in their park. The success of leafleting had been very disappointing for many of the groups as the activity was very time consuming and had resulted in very low response rate. Public meetings had also been

held by some groups in the past, but these had been discontinued due to poor attendance. All of the friends groups that were spoken to thought that face to face communication with local residents was the most effective method of learning what they wanted for their park or open space.

- 6.25 In order that friends groups' activities are to be focussed on the priorities of their local communities the project group members and the friends' groups' representatives were in agreement that there must be effective communication between the group and their local community.
- 6.26 While information on the friends groups' activities can be found by following links from the council's website to individual websites, the representatives of the groups did feel that the council could do more to promote their activities to a wider audience. This could be done by including news stories on their activities in council publications or promoting their events on the council's web site or via social media activity.
- 6.27 The project group believes that for friends groups to be effective and to engage with all sections of their local community they must have the skills and knowledge on how to communicate effectively. As already noted the expertise available in each group varies and for equality of outcomes to be achieved for parks and open spaces, as well as for the communities across the Borough, all friends groups should have access to resources to enable them to communicate and engage effectively with their communities.

Recommendation

That Friends Groups be provided with advice and guidance, as required, from the Communications and Marketing Team on how to publicise their activities to, and engage effectively with their local communities.

- 6.28 The Chesterfield Borough Council website currently invites anyone considering setting up a friends group to contact the council by phone or email and includes a link to the document "Establishing a Park Friends Group". This document contains information and guidance to new groups and example documents such as a model constitution for groups. However due to officer resource this document has not been

reviewed for some time and contains out of date information, especially with regard to officer contact details.

- 6.29 As part of the group's research it reviewed the written resources provided by other local authorities to new groups setting up and compared them to the documents offered by Chesterfield. The group found wide variances in style and content of the written resources available, some were very similar to the document provided on the council's own website, however other authorities' documents were much more comprehensive with regard to content, and were presented in a much more user friendly and modern style.
- 6.30 The set of guidance documents for new friends groups that stood out to the group with regard to both content and presentation were those offered by Sheffield City Council. At the outset of the review project and group members read the report "What are friends for?" which had been commissioned by Cambridge City Council to look at their relationship with friends groups. In this report Sheffield City Council had been praised for demonstrating "best practice" with regard to their collaborative and constructive relationship with its large network of over 70 friends and community groups. To learn more about this relationship, and to see which practices could potentially be implemented in Chesterfield the project group lead member met with Karen Lewis, Community Partnerships Manager at Sheffield City Council.
- 6.31 Sheffield City Council provides a Starter Pack, "Starting a New Community Group" for new friends groups. The document sets out comprehensive but clear information in a series of worksheets which promote good practice for operating a friends group as well as providing templates for key documents such as an example constitution. Sheffield City Council is happy to share this documentation with other authorities to utilise or adapt for themselves. The pack is attached at **Appendix D**.
- 6.32 The pack provides all the resources needed for a group to be set up correctly and to give it firm foundations. The representatives of the longer established friends groups noted that receiving structured support at the outset of forming their group in areas such as establishing a constitution and developing other essential policies and procedures had been key to their groups' success and longevity.

- 6.34 The survey of friends groups showed that while all groups had a constitution only three had public liability insurance and only one had risk assessment forms. When the project group met with the friends groups, lack of available guidance and expertise was cited as the main reasons for not having these documents in place. It is not realistic to expect every group to have the expertise “in house” to create these documents. Consequently the group members feel strongly that it is vital in order to ensure equality of outcomes for different groups that guidance on key documents and procedures, as well as information on running an effective friends group is available to all groups. Other authorities do provide example risk assessments in their start up material in recognition that groups will need guidance in creating these documents.
- 6.35 The project group also reviewed the constitutions of friends groups in Chesterfield and found large variances between documents. While all the constitutions looked at set out the minimum requirements needed to have a formally constituted group, some were much more detailed and specific than others.
- 6.36 The project group understands that each group’s constitution will by necessity vary, and that as each group is an independent organisation it is important that they should have control over their own affairs. To this end the council should not insist that each group’s constitution should contain mandated objectives or commitments; however the council should provide the tools to ensure that each group can build a strong constitution that will effectively meet the needs of each park or open space. This approach will ensure that each friends group is able to work with the council as well as their local community constructively and inclusively, and in a way that is both accountable and transparent.
- 6.37 The project group reviewed several example constitutions provided by other authorities, and again wide variances in style and content were seen. The project group approved of several elements included over different constitutions for example with regard to equality issues and accessibility. While, as already noted the group believes constitutions should not be excessively prescriptive or contain excessive details that could be better included in protocol papers for groups, constitutions should always formalise the working relationship between friends groups and the council. The project group were of the opinion that the wording used in the Manchester City Council example constitution

met this objective effectively as it made it both the friends group and the council's relationship clear and unequivocal, but was worded in a cooperative and "light touch" manner.

"Aims

(that friends groups) work in partnership with Manchester City Council Leisure Department (and whilst recognising that the ultimate responsibility for funding lies with the Council) to identify other funding sources"

Manchester City Council" Friends of Park" Start-up pack

The full example constitution is included at **Appendix E**.

Recommendation

That the documentation made available to new Friends Groups by the council is reviewed and refreshed, and that a knowledge bank of templates and guidance documents are made available to assist groups to put key documents and policies, including a strong constitution, in place.

- 6.38 With friends groups being comprised of volunteers each group will as a consequence have members with different skills, strengths and experiences that can be utilised for successful operation of the group and for the benefit of their park or open space. Enthusiasm and generosity in giving up their time are attributes that are common to all friends groups, but the project group acknowledge that some groups will have more specialist knowledge than others in key areas such as compiling risk assessments, writing policy documents, obtaining insurance and submitting bids for funding.
- 6.39 The meetings held with representatives of the friends groups also highlighted differentials in experience in that some groups were fortunate in having active members with a broad skill set, and whose groups had clearly benefitted from their expertise in areas such as health and safety, drawing up detailed master plans or having the ability to build and maintain a website for their group.
- 6.40 The project group feel strongly that while the skill differentiation between groups is understandable, it is not desirable. Steps should be

taken to enable the sharing of skills and best practice between groups in order that all groups and subsequently the Borough's parks and open spaces and the communities use them, can benefit.

- 6.41 In order to enable groups to share expertise and ideas one solution could be that groups would have access to a central store of ideas, such as through a website, however this could be resource intensive for both the council and its officers, and friends groups. Another option which the project group considered and discussed with the friends groups was the establishment of a friend's group committee or forum to enable group members to come together and meet with officers to facilitate communication and information sharing. Some of the longer established friends group did advise that a forum for friends groups had been run in the past by the council, and had found this arrangement useful. During the project groups research members saw at first hand the value and potential of friends groups coming together and talking to each other to share ideas and experience. All the groups consulted with said they would like a forum to be set up so that they could meet with their counterparts from other friends groups in order to share information, ideas and best practice.
- 6.42 The project group notes that a committee or forum may initially require some officer time and input to set up, but that with careful planning a forum or committee should in time become self-sustaining with friends' group members taking the lead with the organisation of the meeting. Officers would then be only required to attend the meetings in the way that they currently attend individual friends' groups meetings across the Borough. This approach would also have the benefit of further strengthening the communication channels between the friends groups and the council and also enable officers to give out information once, rather than always needing to meet with groups individually.
- 6.43 Other methods of communication between groups, and between groups and the council, used by other authorities were also looked at. Sheffield City Council and Mansfield District Council, amongst others publish a newsletter. Sheffield City Council publishes an e-newsletter four times a year that it circulates to friends groups, containing news from the council and features on interesting activities that others might wish to replicate. This also gives Sheffield an opportunity to communicate the same messages at the same time to all its wide network of friends groups. Mansfield District Council publishes a

newsletter called "Parklife" quarterly to which all friends groups are encouraged to have an input in. The newsletter enables groups to promote their activities, encourage new members to join and allows them to report any good new stories to other groups and the community in general. The newsletter has been a success and in addition to it being available on their website, their officers are now looking into the newsletter being added to their district wide newspaper to help promote friends groups throughout the district. An edition of Parklife is attached at **Appendix C**.

Recommendation

That to facilitate effective communication channels between the council and friends groups, and between friends groups in Chesterfield, that a Friends Group Committee be established, also that a bi-annual Friends Group newsletter be published which will also enable the work of Friends Groups to be shared and celebrated with a wider audience.

- 6.44 Friends groups play an important role in the life and development of the parks and open spaces in the Borough by applying to external organisations for funds to enable improvements to the parks and open spaces to be made. The funds that are accessed by the friends groups are largely from sources that are not available to the council, so without the work of the friends groups many of the improvements and new facilities in the Borough's parks would not be possible.
- 6.45 Friends groups in Chesterfield have been successful in securing substantial grants in recent years to enable several schemes to be implemented; including the Stand Road friends group receiving £13,000 from Viridor to fund a wetland area project, and the Somersall Park friends group receiving £8,000 from Tesco Bags of Help.
- 6.46 Friends groups are encouraged before making a bid for funding to initially speak with the green spaces officers at the council to see if the council can support the bid and to offer technical guidance. This is a critical part of the process as some grant giving organisations require some funding for the project for which the bid is being made to be in place before an application is submitted. The Council has in some cases been able to assist with providing the up-front funding required enabling friends groups to make bids for grants.

6.47 From the consultation held with the friends groups it became apparent that the process of applying for grant funding was an area of great concern to many of them. Areas of concern highlighted included:

- Lack of expertise and knowledge amongst group members to enable the successful completion of complex grant application forms;
- Difficulties in getting financial support from the council needed in order to make a bid;
- Lack of coordination between groups and the council in the submission of bids, resulting in bids from neighbouring groups being submitted to the same organisation at the same time for similar projects which had resulted in bids being unsuccessful;
- Written guidance or pro-formas not being available to assist groups in writing bids that had a good chance of being accepted and also being successful.

6.48 As previously noted there is currently limited communication and best practice sharing between friends groups in Chesterfield, meaning that the expertise that there is with regard to submitting bids is concentrated in a few groups. These groups have consequently been more successful in accessing external grant funding. The project group members were very concerned about this situation and the subsequent inequalities that it could create with regard to the facilities available in the parks and open spaces, and between the different communities across the Borough.

6.49 All of the representatives of the friends groups advised that more support and guidance from the council being available to groups would be extremely beneficial when they were submitting bids. There are currently some very brief guidelines regarding the bidding process included the start-up pack, however other authorities provide much more detailed guidance to their groups. This can be seen in the document provided by Manchester City Council which is attached at **Appendix E**. The friends groups that had been successful in bidding for grants also advised they would be happy to share their experience to support other friends groups in Chesterfield in the writing and submitting of bids.

6.50 The Project group agreed with the friends groups that there needed to be much greater coordination and communication between all groups and the council with regard to the bidding process. This would ensure that neighbouring friends groups were not simultaneously bidding to the same organisation at the same time for the same money. The project group notes that a more coordinated approach being taken in the submitting of bids could result in more bids being successful.

Recommendation

That officers work closely with, and provide advice and guidance to Friends Groups who are bidding for external funding in order to reduce duplication, increase coordination and ensure better outcomes from the bids.

7.0 Review conclusions

- 7.1 In conducting this review the project group has met with friends groups from across the Borough and would like to acknowledge the positive contribution that they make to the upkeep and development of the Borough's parks and open spaces. The project group recognise that many of the improvements to, and activities that take place in the parks and open spaces would not be possible without the hard work and dedication of the members of the friends groups. The project group would also like to express their appreciation of the work of the officers who work with and support the friends groups with their activities.
- 7.2 In acknowledging the vital role of friends groups in the upkeep and development of the Borough's parks and open spaces, as well as to ensure that current groups flourish and that new groups are formed, the project group notes that there has to be high quality and easy to follow written guidance on key documents and procedures available to all friends groups.
- 7.3 During the project group's research members saw at first hand the value and potential of friends groups coming together and talking to each other. Consequently, for there to be the best possible outcomes for parks and open spaces across the Borough, both the project group and the friends groups think it is essential for there to be structures in place to encourage and facilitate effective

communication between groups. This approach should not only ultimately reduce the demand on officer time but also allow for there to be greater equality of outcomes across all parks and open spaces for the benefit of all communities across the Borough.

Appendices

- A:** Survey sent to friends groups
- B:** Summary of responses received to the survey sent to friends groups
- C:** Mansfield District Council "Park Life" newsletter
- D:** Sheffield City Council guide "Starting a new Community Group"
- E:** Manchester City Council "Friends of Park" Start-up pack
- F:** Sheffield City Council Friends of Green Spaces Survey
- G:** List of Friends and Community groups in Chesterfield Borough.

Bibliography

- What are Friends for? - A report for Cambridge City Council by Phil Back Associates Ltd, October, 2013
- Chesterfield Borough Council Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2015 – 2024

Contacts:

Project Group Lead – Councillor Kate Caulfield

Committee and Scrutiny Co-ordinator - Martin Elliott