

The state of the facilities in Hartley Park has become so bad that a group of volunteers decided that something must be done. The Council Parks Department has had no significant funds to spend on upgrading the small children's play area where items of equipment and the play surface are below current safety standards, nor have they been able to maintain the playing surface or the boundary netting around the public tennis court, basketball and football areas so that they are to all intents and purposes unfit for use. Damage is caused by vandalism and the rowdy behaviour of some young people is distressing to users of the park and residents around the perimeter. Despite the occasional presence of Park Rangers and after attempts by residents to get Council and Police help it is clear that resources are not available to solve this problem. Efforts to use the Local Social Capital funds for money were rejected by PCP and the Group was started after that. There is a strong feeling in the area that local people have been let down badly compared to the time when the Park was safer, more fun and better fitted out for sports activities so that it attracted more use and contributed to the morale, health and sense of well-being of the local community. This helped to promote social interaction between all age groups who then took more pride in the Park.

So after over a year of work by a small founding team there is now a fully fledged group of 'Friends' that have promised support and provided funds, not forgetting a few generous donations from local business, for the administrative costs of applying for grants from local and nation-wide sources. 'Friends of Hartley Park' has applied for membership of the Plymouth Community Partnership which will mean access to advice and some resources in furtherance of the main aim of the group which is **"To achieve improvements to Hartley Park (Hartley Pleasure Grounds as listed in older documents) so that all members of the local community will be able to use it safely with pleasure and pride."** After 2 public meetings, 1000 questionnaires were delivered in the spring of this year, by hand of the founding group of 6, to all homes around the Park in order to research what people thought should be done. The result of this survey was that a majority voted for the renovation of the Small Children's Play Area closely followed by worries about Safety, Vandalism and Cleanliness. The Managing Committee of the FoHP agreed to take these as their top priority items for funding and improvement. As money becomes available then other aspects of the Park will receive the same attention.

The group has had the support of Compton Ward Councillor David Stark from the beginning, with advice and help also available from the PCC Parks Dept. who have attended two recent meetings inviting the group to work with them so that lessons can be learned from improvements in other city parks. Two 'Friends of Victoria Park' have given excellent advice which should prevent some mistakes but it is clear that an important step is to recruit one or two volunteers to research the History of the Park for us and any information or memories on this topic will be very welcome especially if photographs or newspaper articles are available. Approaches have been made to work with local schools so that the children can become involved in the future of the Park. Informal contact suggests that this may be possible. We are also looking for a small team to set up a fun day in the Park perhaps next summer with advice and resources which should be available to us. Further small teams are needed to divide the task of fund applications into smaller parts so that with guidance and resources provided, the load on any one person should be quite small and can be done in an informal friendly atmosphere. While we already have a group of volunteers involved in various projects, including setting up a web site, anyone else who is keen to join us and has a little time to give for an ambitious but worthwhile project then please come along to our next meeting at 7 PM on 2nd December in the Day Care Centre of the Pearn Trust in Eggbuckland Road, Hartley. Anyone who cannot attend but is prepared to contribute some time and/or expertise then please write to either the Chairman or the Secretary.

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