

FRIENDS OF MILL HILL PARK

Autumn 2010

Circular No. 22

Play Matters

This was brought home vividly in the Spring, when there was a sudden crisis involving the Playground. At the AGM in April, it had been reported that one or two small items had been removed, but had not been replaced. Suddenly, by the end of the month we found the large multiplay unit was being dismantled and that other items had disappeared. We were told that this was because the wooden structures had become unsafe, and that it would also be necessary to remove other items. Replacements for the two multi-play units were to be put in place immediately. This indeed happened, and the larger unit, suitable for age 8+, proved very satisfactory. Unfortunately, the smaller unit proved completely inadequate as a replacement for the previous unit, and although it was said by the manufacturers to be suitable for children up to 4 years, it was reported to be too babyish even for three year olds.

Parents found that there was almost no equipment for children aged 3-7. Alarm bells sounded, and we began to receive frantic phone calls asking us what was happening and when the equipment would be replaced. Our attempts to obtain information were unsuccessful, and in the meantime, one of our members, Clare Zinkin, was so appalled by what she saw at the playground that she opened a Facebook page to communicate with other parents and exchange information. This quickly attracted over 100 signatures (later to go on to 250) and a campaign group was formed. Meetings were arranged with local Councillors and the MP.

Arising from all this, it was acknowledged that Barnet Council did not have the necessary funds to make good what had been lost. If items were to be replaced, it would have to be through charitable money. It was at this point that our two groups joined forces.

Applying for a Grant

As the Friends of Mill Hill Park is a formally constituted group – and has a bank account – it was evident that we would have to apply for the grant. Clare Zinkin and the parents group had given much thought to what equipment should be provided to make good the loss, and were in a better position than anyone to judge the children's needs. In finalising the list, they consulted widely, again through Facebook, and a small group drew up the final 'wish list'.

We were advised by our council officer to approach *Changing Spaces*, a body that awards grants from the Big Lottery Fund and which had already responded favourably to another group in Barnet. This we have done, and the application has now been lodged. The whole process took longer than any of us would have wished, but delays were unavoidable and we felt it was important to 'get it right'. John Smith and Clare Zinkin shared the task of compiling information, and John had the additional responsibility of completing the form and 'signing off'. We had the whole-hearted support of our Greenspaces officer, Rob Wiltshire, during this time, in responding to our requests for information and advice.

This is just a "First Stage Application". If we are successful in this, *Changing*

Spaces will then appoint a facilitator to help us move forward in the final stage. We expect to hear the outcome of this first stage early in January. Two things should be important when considering our claim: (1) it is to replace a vital amenity which has been lost; (2) the strength and depth of the campaign during the summer. (It is necessary to demonstrate that there is a need for the scheme, and also that there is community support for the project proposed.) Additionally, the Council has pledged to pay the installation costs of the equipment (a significant sum), which demonstrates their commitment.

Thanks to everyone who has been involved (you know who you are!), and particularly to Clare, who has shown great dedication and commitment.

Playbuilder

This is the scheme that came about as a result of Barnet Council accepting a grant of £1.1 million from the previous government to develop sites within the Borough in accordance with a particular specification that it should provide opportunities for 'natural' play. It is situated between the playground and the car park.

It has now been up and running for six months, so we can begin to assess the benefits and drawbacks. Overall it could be said to be a success in that children appear to be deriving much pleasure from most of the features and equipment. Although it is targeted at age 8+, some adventurous younger children have been making use of it. Certain things have not worked out as planned, most notably the 'Dusty Ditch Maze', which immediately became a 'Muddy Ditch', and had to be filled in. Later, the turf which surrounded it quickly died in the drought, as there was no means of watering it. There have been problems, too, with one of the most popular items, a maypole type construction with four 'arms'. The

latter have been repaired several times, and the wood has now been replaced by steel.

Criticism mainly concerns the siting of the scheme so near the car park, in a wet area, its messy appearance, and also the fact that it is unfenced and therefore dogs cannot be excluded. We enquired about fencing when the scheme was at an early stage, and were told there would be no fencing (we assumed that this must be because it was contrary to the specifications). We are sorry to see that this area has to be maintained from existing resources – already heavily strained.

Postscript to play: the Council is replacing the **double toddler swing and the double junior swing** in the playground, and we are pressing that this should be done very soon. The junior swing was removed some time ago, and the toddler swing now consists of only one. We were told it would be done quickly. We are asking that a notice should be fixed to the **pedal roundabout** warning parents not to ride on it. (It was absent for a few months earlier in the year, undergoing expensive repair.)

Looking forward to spring: two members planted daffodil bulbs last year (with permission), and propose to do this again. The Friends welcome this initiative and have volunteered to pay for the bulbs.

Committee Members

John Smith (Chairman)	8959 7138
Jean Smith (Secretary)	8959 7138
Joan Telfer (Treasurer)	8959 1499
Peter Keeley, Chelle Paice, Liz Reid, Philippa Welch	

Subscriptions: *renewal forms are attached, only for those members whose subscriptions were due in April 2010.*