



Sunnybank Park Newsletter: Issue 1

Keeping the 'sunny' in Sunnybank



Did you know there is a gem of a park on your doorstep?

St Machar Outdoor Centre, better known to some as Sunnybank Park or the Gibberie Wallie, is undergoing change!

The centre use to consist of tennis courts, a putting green and two bowling greens. Last year the Council closed the centre, intending to sell off the land. The result was that the area started to be vandalised. The pavilion has been so badly damaged that it is now considered dangerous, and the Council will demolish it in April.

Towards the end of last year, locals protested against the loss of their park, demanding that the Council keep this valued greenspace. The Council gave the community six months to come up with proposals for the maintenance and use of the area. These proposals have to be presented by the end of March.



Sunnybank Park, looking down at the pavilion

The Wildlife of Sunnybank Park

Imagine, if you will, an early morning stroll along a hedgerow. Birds are singing all around you and on the dew-covered grass you can still see where a fox has left his tracks. You might think I'm in some rural setting, but no, I'm in Sunnybank Park.

There is a fantastic variety of bird life all year round, from dunnocks to magpies, green finches to blue tits. It's worth a walk round the park to see how many varieties of birds you can spot. And yes, there is a fox that has the park as part of his territory. At dusk you may even see the two breeds of bats that are in the area, flying around the trees and feeding.

Wildlife in Aberdeen is for everyone to enjoy. It enhances our quality of life and the environment around us.

Andy Coventry

What you said - feedback from the questionnaire

The first step in putting together community proposals was a questionnaire, which was distributed around Sunnybank, Powis and Old Aberdeen. The questionnaire asked how people used the land, which features they would like to see in a park and what they would like done with the pavilion (which the Council had not decided to demolish at that point).

The answers revealed that the park was popular with residents for walking, lazing around and playing in. A few determined souls replied that they still used the tennis courts, even without the nets.

People were asked to rate how likely they were to use various facilities and also to make their own suggestions. Grass and trees were the most popular, suggesting that the area is strongly appreciated simply as greenspace. The children's play area was the next most popular, followed by a community vegetable garden or allotments. Interestingly, much of the site was allotments before it was turned into an Outdoor Centre. Sports facilities were the least popular overall, but resurrecting the tennis courts got a strong vote. Where people suggested their own ideas, play and wildlife were most commonly mentioned. The next most popular suggestion was to plant fruit trees or a 'community orchard'.

For the pavilion, a café and toilets were easily the most popular options. This obviously won't be possible now that the Council are knocking the structure down, but it does give us ideas should we ever manage to raise the money for a new community building in the park.

Finally, if you missed the questionnaire but would still like to comment, don't worry: there is a feedback form in this newsletter where you can give us all your ideas.



The Bedford allotments

So what's happening with your ideas?

The Sunnybank Park Group has tried to put these ideas together into a plan and find funding for them. Our suggestion is that the St Machar Outdoor Centre should be kept as a public greenspace and officially renamed Sunnybank Park.

We would improve access by creating new entrances and steps, and also by upgrading paths and putting in a circular walk around the park. We want to plant more trees, make a community orchard and keep open areas of grass. This would improve the area for natural life as well as for people. Other wildlife improvements could include managing the wet area and erecting bird boxes.

We would restore the courts for sports use, either for tennis once again or for different activities, depending on what people want.

The children's play area would be kept and improved. Sunnybank Park is very popular with dog walkers, so we would make a secure area for dog walking and put in dog bins. We would restore the Firhill Well or Gibberie Wallie, and make a formal garden in the bowling green adjacent.

We have also been talking to our neighbours. Aberdeen University own the bank of ground between the Park and the medical centre. They have agreed that they will manage this land as a wildlife garden with access from Sunnybank Park.

We have found potential funding for much of this work. Despite this, the park will still need volunteer input. This will help us to prove to the Council that people are interested in keeping it.

If you would like to volunteer in any way, please let us know by completing the enclosed feedback form and returning it to the address below.

One option we had to rule out was keeping the Outdoor Centre in its original form as the Council have said that there is no money for this and we believe that pursuing this option would lead to the land being sold.

What now?

We're hoping to have an open day in conjunction with the Sunnybank School Fair on the 24th April 2010. Please come and meet with us. There will be opportunity to chat, share your ideas and have a walk about the park with one of the group.

Further information...

Sunnybank Park will soon have its own website - www.sunnybankpark.org.uk and if you have any questions or suggestions, you can email the Sunnybank Park Group at sun@sunnybankpark.org.uk