

Rotary Club facilitates the growth and development of the Friends of Derby Arboretum

In 2015 the club set out to identify a local project to celebrate its upcoming 100th anniversary in 2017/18. The objective was to find a way of working with a community at the heart of the City and add value to organisations that might benefit from volunteer input by our membership. After a year or so of liaising with the City Council Neighbourhood Partnerships team and other voluntary groups the focus was suddenly on an area in the Arboretum Ward. Then, following up on an article in the Derby Telegraph about two artists known as Spiral Arts, a meeting was held to discuss how Rotary could collaborate with them. Spiral Arts had been successful in securing funding for their project titled 'Cultivating Friends' which facilitated meetings with local residents, the City Parks team, Sustrans and other interested parties. Three of our members participated in these meetings to establish how Rotary might help.

Gradually we were able to facilitate the formal incorporation of the Friends group, which with its own leadership team took over from the Cultivating Friends project. With help from the club The Friends of Derby Arboretum (FDA) was constituted as a CIO in late 2017 and a registered charity with its main aim to enhance the Arboretum. It's Britain's oldest public park and the FDA set out to ensure it is a safe and enjoyable space for the local community and visitors. Still looking for a more meaningful project the club's focus was turned onto an abandoned building in the Arboretum that was once a thriving bowling club pavilion. Rather than develop the idea as a Rotary Club it was agreed we should facilitate the FDA in taking over the pavilion as a potential base for the Friends group as well as becoming a community asset. In 2018 Derby City Council and the FDA signed a 20-year lease agreement at peppercorn rent in respect of what was locally known as the Joseph Strutt pavilion. One of the club's members, being a well-established Solicitor, offered legal support in arranging the lease.

The old bowling green in front of the Joseph Strutt pavilion was already being developed by the Parks department as a community garden, offering an opportunity to engage with local nearby groups such as refugees, people with special needs and other vulnerable groups. Some members assisted in the early days in the maintenance and development of the garden.

Rotary club member Richard Benfield put together a bid to the Derbyshire Police and Crime Commissioner's NICE fund (Neighbourhoods Investing Criminal Earnings) in the name of the FDA and secured a grant of £25,000 covering the costs of repairing the roof, removing the chimney at first floor level and replacing all windows. Then, in December 2018 several club members helped to remove the debris that littered the two floors and made available the downstairs toilets for general use. The building refurbishment was then started in early 2019.



This phase of the work was completed in May 2019 but to enable the building to be fully utilised a further grant was needed to install all lighting, power points, ceiling boards, make good plasterwork, supply and fit a new staircase, lay new vinyl and carpet flooring, supply and fit a new kitchen. Bids were submitted to the National Lottery and the Garfield Weston Foundation. Initially we secured a pledge of £7,500 from the Garfield Weston Foundation conditional on securing the balance of funds. With a target for the refurbishment budget of £65,000, in

early 2020 we were pleased receive an award from the National Lottery of £58,000.

The project was completed in September 2020 which coincided with the 180th Anniversary of the Derby Arboretum.

As part of the lease obligations the FDA is responsible to manage the regular monitoring of the building. Richard Benfield and one of Rotary's volunteers, Peter Woolley continue to meet monthly to undertake minor statutory testing as well as oversee any subcontractor work.

The history has been documented in a homemade video held on the FDA's YouTube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wp1wtFjlgYk>

