

Campaign to fight loss of parks jobs

HUNDREDS are joining a battle to safeguard parks jobs.

The 'Save Our Parks' campaign has been launched in response to 27 proposed redundancies.

So far, 600 people have signed a petition against the planned job cuts, part of a wider shake-up that affects environmental services, including parks and cemetery maintenance and street cleaning.

Labour politicians including Councillor Jane Baugh and MP Paul Goggins, bowling clubs and Friends groups from parks - including Walkden Gardens, Ashton Park and Victoria Park - fear the cutbacks could send the borough's green spaces into decline.

Coun Baugh said: "Ten years ago we introduced, under a Labour administration, qualified staff into our parks with the professional

by Bethan Dorsett

expertise to train, develop and support gardeners to achieve the highest standards.

"We achieved 13 green flags and the creation of over 20 Friends' groups.

"Ten years ago, for example, Walkden Gardens was a derelict park - are we going to go back to that?"

"The Tories intend to delete these posts and this will result in no permanent staff situated in our parks and a deterioration in standards."

Shelly Quinton-Hulme, Friends of Victoria Park chairwoman, described the job losses as 'appalling'.

"Friends' groups across the borough are just reaching a point where their work and that of the gardeners is bringing the parks back to the standard they should be at after



FIGHT: Coun Barry Brotherton, Coun Jane Baugh, MP Paul Goggins and campaigners in Walkden Gardens
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years of decline and neglect," she said. "Any cuts to the parks are short-sighted as our

green spaces are so important to all of the community."

The council is currently in

consultation with Unison over the redundancies, which could be compulsory if the authority does not find enough volunteers.

Welcoming the community's backing is branch secretary Paul McDermott.

He said: "These are people who will be disadvantaged by the proposals along with the staff who may be made compulsory redundant."

The council says the redundancies would affect 27 members of staff out of a department of 190 but are part of a drive towards the creation of a 'single, multi-skilled workforce'.

John Lamb, environment strategy director at the council, says a department restructuring would ensure there is reduction in frontline staff.

He said campaigners are due to meet with officers and councillors to discuss the changes later this month.