

Flags lowered over parks

TRAFFORD'S Friends of the Parks groups have been left reeling by a decision that will see more than half of the borough's Green Flags taken down.

During a parks forum meeting at the George Carnall Leisure Centre last week the friends' groups were informed only six sites - three in the north and three in the south of the borough - would be nominated.

Last year was the tenth anniversary of the national awards scheme that promotes and recognises achievements in green space maintenance and management.

And Trafford received the second highest number of green flag parks in the country, with 14 granted the prestigious award by the Civic Trust.

At the time Councillor June Reilly, Trafford's executive member for environmental services, heralded the success.

She said: "I have seen all the hard work put into the parks by the friends groups and council staff and they fully deserve to be among the highest achievers in the country."

But one year on the friends' groups have been left shocked by the council's very different tune.

At the forum - that was attended by consultancy firm Kendrick Ash, who are currently carrying out a review of Trafford's environmental services - they

The eight that will lose their Green Flag status are:

Altrincham Crematorium and Dunham Lawn Cemetery

Crossford Bridge Recreation Ground, Sale Halecroft Park, Hale Barns

John Leigh Park, Altrincham

Woodheys Park, Sale Flixton Park and Gardens

Gorsehill Park Urmston Cemetery

The six nominated to retain their Green Flag status are:

Denzell Gardens, in Bowdon

Worthington Park, Sale Walkden Gardens, Sale

Ecology Park, Old Trafford

Hullard Park, Old Trafford

Victoria Park, Stretford

were told the Green Flag model was 'elitist'.

The forum was also told money was being 'sucked into the green flag parks at the expense of others' says George Clegg, who is co-chairman of the Friends of Woodheys Park, one of the eight groups affected.

He said: "After five years of hard work this is a big slap in the face. We all feel absolutely gutted - it makes you wonder what is the point?"

"You hear all this stuff about saving the

environment but this is a huge disincentive to all those people who've given up thousands of hours of their time for free trying to do something for the community.

"It's not just the parks that have green flag status already that will be affected, everyone who has been working towards the national standard will also be demoralised."

He added: "It looks as though, like they did 10 years ago, they're going to introduce cost cutting measures. They've got to save money and on top of our local libraries they are now hitting the parks."

The Green Flag scheme looks set to be replaced by the council's in-house alternative - the 'Gold Star' initiative.

Cllr Reilly said: "We're introducing a new scheme which will take us above and beyond the Green Flag scheme and improve all our parks and open spaces in the borough.

"This will mean equally sharing the investment between all parks rather than concentrating on the green flag entrants, raising the overall standard and giving more people a local park they can be proud of."

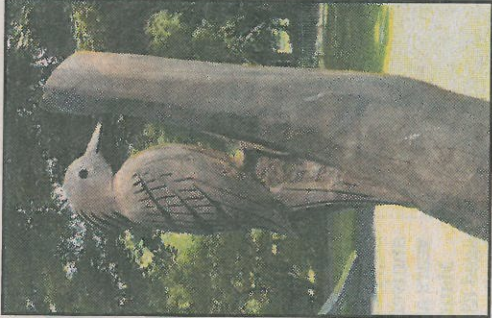
She added: "An active



A colourful scene at Flixton Gardens



Ecology Park at Old Trafford



Chainsaw sculpture at Victoria Park in Stretford

friends group will be essential for any park to achieve Gold Star status.

"Other authorities are also now considering doing the same as Trafford and introducing a local standard so it meets local people's priorities."

Trafford's head of environmental services Bernard Sheridan, the man credited with pushing through many of the borough's park reforms, did not attend last week's forum. A spokeswoman said he had a 'prior engagement'.

The deadline to submit 2007/08 Green Flag applications was December 1. sgreenhaigh@messengergrp.co.uk

What do you think about the council's decision? Read this story at samnews.co.uk and post your comment.