

Chairman's report of LARGA to the 2024 Annual Meeting.

The past year has been fairly normal as years go in the running of the Little Aston Recreation Ground.

The volunteer gardeners have planted several hundred more crocus and snowdrop bulbs and work very hard every Monday and Thursday to help to keep the whole area looking tidy and beautiful.

We are fortunate at LARGA that the site is very well respected and cared about by the community that uses and loves it, and generally our visitors all take the same pride in it that we do.

We are also fortunate that we do not suffer from vandalism, this could in part be that over the 34 years of its existence, the children attending the neighbouring school have grown up with a sense of 'ownership' and are in a way protective of it.

Unfortunately, as with many areas, we do suffer from a considerable amount of un-cleared dog mess, some of which I am sure is unintentional but sadly there seems to be a growing element of dog owners who seem to not care. The problem has certainly increased since Covid during which time dog ownership escalated.

Sadly however, we have been the victim of theft. Adjacent to the storage containers we have constructed a small compound using Harras fence panels and in an effort to blend them in to their surroundings we purchased and attached fine net decorative screens depicting woodland scenes. Unfortunately all four of those screens have been stolen in two batches. We have replaced them with the same images but with the LARGA logo etched on them. The replacements cost over £300.

Another even greater loss we have suffered is that of our paid head gardener, David Milburn. David has worked for us tirelessly, through all weathers, twice a week for over ten years but he has decided to expand his business and needs to move on. He will be greatly missed and incredibly difficult to replace. If you know of anyone that might be a suitable replacement, please let us know.

This year we re-calculated the cost of running the LARGA site and were shocked to discover that it is in the region of £22,000 per year...to stand still...without repair, replacement or improvement costs.

We are therefore incredibly grateful to the Parish Council for the financial support they give us in paying for the grass cutting, bin emptying, insurances etc., and for the add-hock support with things such as defibrillator maintenance, poster making etc.

We do obtain a small amount of funding from our donation boxes around the site and also a trickle via just giving and the Lichfield Community Lottery but our main fundraising comes from our very successful Party in the Park event, known for the past 12 years as Littleastonbury.

This 3000 ticket music festival takes place in July and costs in the region of £50,000.00 to put on with top tribute acts such as Abba, Queen, Elton John, The Stones etc.. Thankfully, ticket sales and sponsorship more than covers the cost and a profit of around £25,000.00 is usually achieved.

The 2023 Party in the Park was another huge success, despite it being halted at about 9:00 when all of the electrical equipment blew due to a torrential downpour and rain getting into the system. Thankfully the technicians managed to get backup systems up and running and within half an hour, the rain had eased and the show went on. The 2023 Littleastonbury also successfully went 'Green' with the use of 60 large recycling bins around the site which were kindly provided to us for the event by Lichfield District Council. Tickets for this year have just gone on sale by application via the website. This year's acts include UK Bee Gees, Johnny2bad and with headliners The Faithettes who are Paloma Faith's actual backing group and are flying in from America to perform.

We have not installed any new or replacement play equipment this year but instead have completed the replacement of the safety surfacing under now all of the existing units. Instead of the basic rubber matting which was looking very tatty and starting to fail in respect of its impact absorbency, we now have bonded rubber mulch surfacing which is much safer, much longer lasting and repairable. Approximately half of the equipment was resurfaced in the 2022/23 year and we have just spent another £22,000.00 to finish the job.