

Friends group confident of swift changes at park

WORK on the £10 million revamp of a popular Aberdeen park could start in just four weeks. Around 5,000 trees are to be planted to launch the makeover of Hazlehead Park. The Friends of Hazlehead have outlined their ambition to make it the “best park in Scotland”. Council specialists, community groups, climate experts and school representatives met to discuss the immediate projects. Friends of Hazlehead trustee Gary Walker said major improvements would be made before the Easter holidays.

He said: “It’s great we are now at the stage of launching this project and being able to start work in the next few weeks. “We have had a year of a lot of meetings and hard work. We will see some major improvements in the park in the next few months. “We’ll be planting the trees on March 1 and 2 and we will possibly be putting bark into the kids’ play area as well as doing some litter clearing. “We want it to be a weekend of enjoyment for kids and adults.” Greenspace have been given £10,000 by the Scottish Government to launch the project. The meeting also heard that a £250,000 roads and pathways improvement could get the go-ahead by April.

The Piper Alpha Memorial rose garden works will be completed in July, at a cost of about £120,000. It’s understood oil firms will help cover the costs and yearly £80,000 maintenance. Gary, 48, felt the people of Aberdeen would welcome the speedy makeover process, after the sagas of Union Terrace Gardens, the Aberdeen FC stadium and the city bypass. The Friends of Hazlehead Park committee has met in private during the past year to discuss the revamp. They hope to achieve Gold Standard with Aberdeen City Council– the best desired level for planning permission. The plans include improved walkways, new signage, better transport links and three cross-country running routes. A visitors’ centre is also being looked at, as well as the possibility of improving both rose gardens and the Hazlehead golf courses. Council chiefs last week backed the makeover of the 445-acre site, which opened to the public in 1920. The Friends of Hazlehead hope to have the refurbishment complete by 2018. The proposals could mean the green area will be the first Climate Change Park in Scotland.

The initiative is run by Greenspace Scotland and aims to help park managers adapt design and management of parks. Deryck Irving, programmes and partnership manager for the eco-friendly group, said: “It’s great to work with Hazlehead because the group is very active and the council is willing to do stuff. “It’s unique. The facilities are quite unusual and most parks have lost that in Scotland. The Pets Corner and red squirrel presence is the main selling point.” Three Olympic standard running routes have also been identified in the draft plans, which have already been backed by Scottish Athletics. The charity also aims to bring big events and concerts to the park in the future. In the past the venue has seen acts including McFly perform.

Internet bins have also been added to the proposals. Cllr Martin Greig, said: “Aberdeen has few tourist attractions. Hazlehead has huge popularity with residents and visitors so it makes sense to make the most of this wonderful treasure in the city. “It is a public amenity and we all share a responsibility for looking after and inspecting this much loved space so offers of sponsorship to the Friends of Hazlehead charity would be hugely appreciated. “These contributions would be spent on priorities which have been identified by local people and would be money well spent for the benefit of all.”