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Hills Reserves need protection Hender Reserve under threat

Councillors at the Adelaide Hills Council meeting on 16th December voted nine to one in favour of proceeding with the Mt. Lofty Community Recreation Centre in the Heathfield High School grounds.

As part of the development, Hender Reserve will fall under the bulldozers to provide an access to the Centre.

This is of vital concern to every member of the Friends of Stirling Linear Park, as well as to everyone with an interest in our natural environment and the future of Hills reserves.

For those who are unfamiliar with this issue, the area in question is the triangle of Hender Reserve wedged between Longwood Road, Hender Road and the High School boundary fence (refer map).

The plan is to construct a road from Hender Road,

through the Reserve southwards to the oval area. It will be a two-lane heavy service sealed roadway, with drainage lines each side and most likely accompanied by a shared pedestrian/bicycle track. Part of the route will be along the old unmade foot trail connecting Hender and Longwood Roads.

The scale of this work will severely compromise the biodiversity and habitat values of this section of the Hender Reserve as well as the excellent remnant bushland within Heathfield High School grounds.

Friends committee is not opposed to the Recreation Centre itself

At our meeting also held on 16th December, your committee voted unanimously against this proposed access, while reiterating (as we have done on several previous occasions) that we are not opposed to the development of the Centre itself. It is important to stress this because a vicious rumour is being circulated that we hold a contrary view.

This blatant attempt to belittle the good name of the Friends claims that our objection to the Hender access therefore means that we object to the whole development. This mischievously misrepresents our position.

While our general membership may individually support or oppose the Centre, this was not the concern

of the FoSLP committee. Our over-riding concern is, as always, for the care and preservation of all the Stirling Linear Park habitat.

We regard this present threat to Hender Reserve as serious, and urge all our members to reflect on the Council's impending destructive action.

Rare plants

Hender Reserve contains a number of rare plants. A recent assessment by the well-accredited Threatened Species Network of the area affected found *Olearia grandiflora* (Mt Lofty daisy-bush, which is endemic to the Mt Lofty Ranges and rated Rare) and *Callitris rhomboidea* (Oyster bay pine, also rated Rare in South Australia). The Network also pointed out that fragmentation [of the habitat] is an issue should the access proceed.

Several species of orchids are also found in the area.

Advocates of the Hender access claim that no significant vegetation occurs along the existing track through the Reserve. They also state that 'only one or two trees may need to be removed'. Both of these statements appear to lack a clear understanding of the structure of indigenous habitat. Its complex and irreplaceable understorey is considerably more than its trees. Bulldozers are not known for their selectivity.

Obviously, there are unlikely to be any significant plants along the existing foot trail. But the adjacent bush does contain significant vegetation, which would be destroyed by the proposed access.

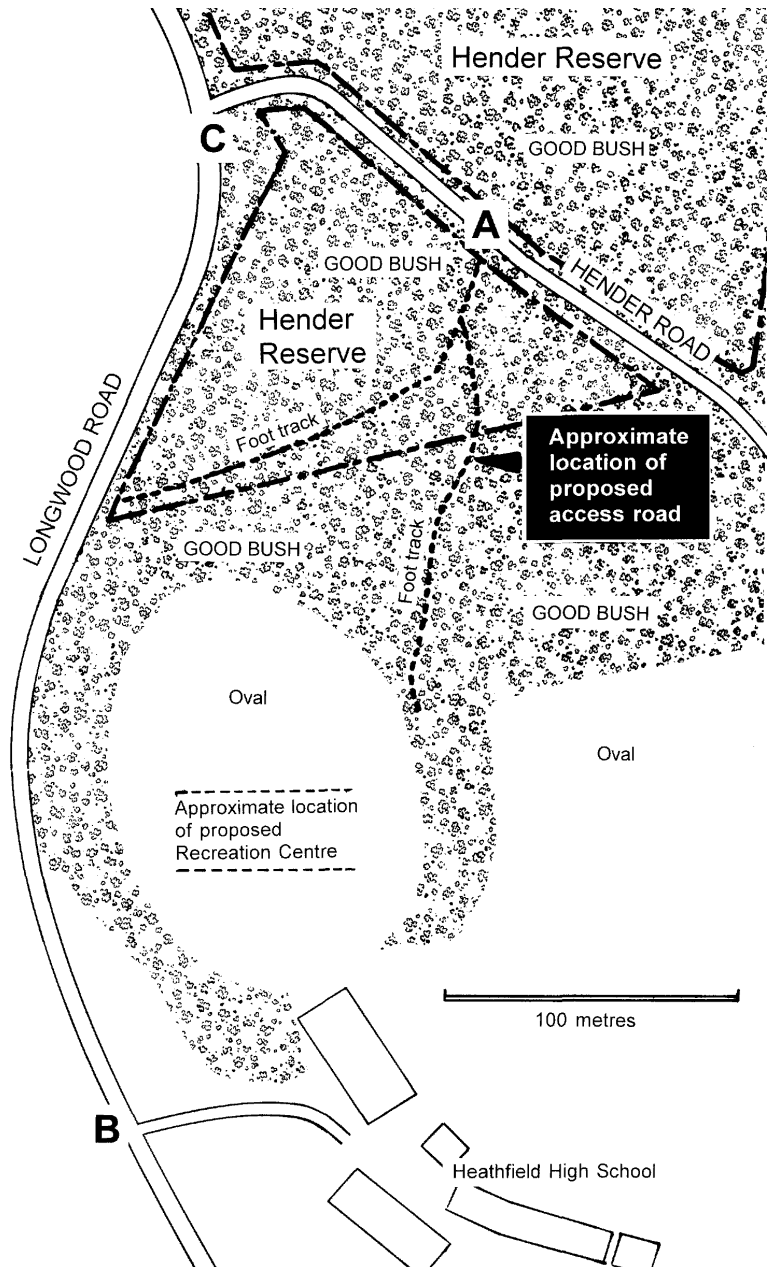
An important consideration is that this part of the Reserve, although split from the main reserve by Hender Road, serves as an ecological buffer to the habitat of the larger park zone.

Alternative access routes

A number of alternative access routes to the Centre have been proposed. Some were rejected on so-called 'safety' grounds. Other routes were opposed by residents anxious to avoid increasing traffic volume outside their properties.

We understand the proposed access commences off Hender Road at point A (refer map) and continues southwards through native bush for some 150 metres, generally following the alignment of the old foot track. Given a sealed road width of six metres and allowing for drainage lines, a footpath and damage to adjoining bush, the total area of native bush destroyed would be in the order of at least 1500m².

There is a logical alternative to this proposal. From point B on Longwood Road a sealed road leads



to school outbuildings. This could be easily modified and partly re-aligned to serve the Recreation Centre at considerably less expense than the Hender proposal, and with no significant damage to the native bush.

Safety considerations

Aside from the environmental considerations, there is an issue of safety. The Hender Road access would force traffic leaving the Centre to negotiate a T-junction (point C) on a blind bend on a major road. The use of the existing access on Longwood road would be much safer. It lies within a long-established 25 kph school zone, is a secondary and not the main access to the school, and has clear traffic visibility in both directions.

Friends never consulted

At no time were the Friends group asked to contribute to the discussions leading up to the access proposal, or were even invited to express an opinion about it.

Surely the three main protagonists (the AHC, the Recreation Centre committee and the Heathfield High School) should have welcomed the Friends of Stirling Linear Park as an interested and qualified stakeholder?

An important principle is involved here. Any part of Hender Reserve is part of Stirling Linear Park, ie. a public asset that is set aside for conservation. Our view, which we know is shared by many others, is that such a community asset should remain sacrosanct. Slicing off a part of it for development should not even be on the agenda.

The threat to Hills reserves

The AHC's action on 16th December indicates it appears to have little regard for conserving our parklands and our dwindling reserves of natural bush.

The precedent has been set. The natural assets that remain in the Hills — much of it unique to our region — can be sacrificed. No community open space or conservation reserve will be safe from development. All it takes is a show of hands at a council meeting.

The 16th December 2003 was indeed a sorry day in Council affairs, and one which this community group at least will not quickly forget.

Detouring around the law

Bulldozing a road through quality remnant bushland in Hender Reserve and Heathfield High School grounds defies the spirit and letter of:

- **Heathfield High School Vegetation Management Plan;**
- **AHC's Planning legislation;**
- **AHC's Open Space Plan;**
- **AHC's Road Reserve Management Plan;**
- **The SA Local Government Act;**
- **The Onkaparinga Catchment Water Management Plan;**
- **The Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan;**
- **The SA Native Vegetation Clearance Act;**
- **The Australian Environment Protection & Biodiversity Conservation Act.**

Wilful destruction of this natural habitat also ignores the recommendations of the *SA State of the Environment Report* and the Australian Government's identification of the Mt. Lofty Ranges as one of the major biodiversity 'Hot Spots' in urgent need of better environmental management.

Yet despite this mass of legislation, the AHC has decided on the most damaging route for an access road to the proposed Mt. Lofty Community Recreation Centre.

It sends a clear message to the community and Heathfield High School students that the policies of catchment and resource managers are of little account and that local, State and Federal environmental rules can all be disregarded.

Hender oval abandoned...but for how long?

At the 20th January meeting of the Adelaide Hills Council the proposal to investigate the construction of an oval in Hender Reserve was finally abandoned — after 'laying on the table' of council business for five months. Surprisingly, the vote was unanimous. Friends must draw their own conclusions about this, but it does seem that councillors may have responded to community environmental pressure — this time in the Park's favour. Members will recall our last newsletter which alerted the community to this bizarre proposal.

Such a development would have effectively destroyed about a third of Stirling Linear Park and was immediately condemned by the community as environmentally unsustainable. To even contemplate such vandalism illustrates that the AHC's attitude towards the natural environment is in need of a major overhaul.

It would be wonderful if we could all just get on with our work of planting and bushland regeneration in the Park we all love — without having to continually fight off these senseless proposals to rip into our precious dwindling bushland.

Why can't the Council accept once and for all that Stirling Linear Park — all of it — is community open space set aside for **bush restoration and conservation in perpetuity?**

Whatever the outcome of the present crisis in the life of the Park, sadly it will not be the last.

Silent Summer

When the American biologist Rachel Carson published her book: *Silent Spring* in 1963, it fuelled a generation of green activists for decades to come.

Back then the villains were pesticides. Carson showed how highly persistent and effective compounds such as DDT and dieldrin, were entering the food chain and causing the destruction of vulnerable wildlife — especially fish and birds.

At first the public could not accept that these insecticides were anything less than benign. After all, had they not helped to win World War Two by cleaning up the mosquito swamps of Burma and the Pacific and keeping the army free of lice?

But then Americans learned that the indiscriminate and enthusiastic use of these chemicals was driving their national icon and top raptor, the Bald Eagle, to extinction. A national outrage ensued, the products were quickly banned and a new surge in environmental awareness was born.

Today, we know a lot more about pesticides. The really nasty ones are no longer available, and the current ones are more carefully targeted with strict conditions being placed on their use.

Yet in the same era when Carson's book appeared, an even more insidious problem for the natural environment was growing in strength — one with the capacity to slowly eliminate entire populations of plants and animals.

Eventually this villain became recognised as habitat loss, as a frenzy of land clearing gripped the world in the last half of the century. While developing nations were being greedily denuded of their forests, here in Australia the destruction of our natural bush was also gathering momentum. In the name of progress our irreplaceable ecosystems were being stripped bare for logging, farming, housing, factories, and all the other infrastructure deemed essential to Western civilisation.

Perhaps we can forgive our forebears for being so reckless. In those days, hardly anyone gave a thought to any species other than *homo sapiens*. Develop the bush was the clarion call (...useless scrub anyway), and the nation rushed willingly to their chainsaws and bulldozers. But that heedless generation spawned an even more mindless one — diehards who today still refuse to recognise the paramount importance of natural habitat in preserving the biodiverse pyramid of life that supports us humans at the top.

Biodiversity? You won't find the word in any dictionary printed before 1980. Perhaps that's one reason why some folks are so slow to learn.

In the Adelaide Hills we're left with a bitter heritage.

In a century and a half of ignorance, greed and plain wrong-headedness, the Mt. Lofty Ranges have lost

some ninety percent of their pre-settlement natural vegetation cover. As a result, nine of our bird species have vanished forever, and according to David Paton of Adelaide University, about half of the original 120 woodland bird species that lived in the Adelaide Hills and Ranges will eventually follow these into extinction. Even if we placed an immediate unconditional ban on all natural vegetation clearance (and it could be rigidly enforced), in addition to the existing restrictions on broad area clearing, the inexorable working-through of the 'extinction debt' (the lag between habitat loss and extinction) guarantees the inevitable loss of most of these species.

No development, however desirable it is trumpeted to be, can warrant the destruction of yet more habitat.

And that's just the birds. Many ground-dwelling fauna and flora have already disappeared, and more will follow. The threat is now so acute that the Australian government has declared the Mt. Lofty Ranges a biodiversity 'Hot Spot', signifying the urgent need to halt the extinction process.

Those of us who have lived in the Hills for any length of time know the signs:

Scarlet Robins are now only rarely seen; Tree Creepers don't visit the garden as often as they used to. And what has happened to all the Sleepy Lizards we would encounter almost every day in the Summer? When was the last time you saw a Praying Mantis or a stick insect?

All around us the complexity of our environment is being gradually dumbed down (to use a popular expression).

Forty years after *Silent Spring* it must surely be obvious that every scrap of natural bush that remains in the Adelaide Hills must be preserved if we are to help those remaining species that have some chance of surviving the human onslaught. No real estate markup or trick of accountancy can reflect the priceless value of irreplaceable bush. No development, however desirable it is trumpeted to be, can justify the destruction of yet more habitat.

Jack Benlow

Reference: Large scale habitat re-establishment for the Mt Lofty Ranges and Kangaroo Island. *David Paton: The Greening Australian, Summer 2003.*

Youth Conservation Corps for Woorabinda

In March 2002 the South Australian Premier announced the establishment of the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) to provide young people with employment pathways through participation in conservation projects.

The program is funded through the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, and managed by Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA).

On February 8 this year, a YCC team of ten commenced training in the main building at Woorabinda Environmental Education Centre. The team will undertake a range of projects, including the refurbishment and painting of the bunkhouse building for future use by CVA training sessions. They will also participate in accredited training modules in weed control, safety audit and bird observation.

The YCC training courses each run for six months and are designed to:

- Assist young people between ages 15 - 24 to

develop skills which lead to employment and training.

- Assist in the development of conservation projects having significant State and local area significance.
- Encourage young people's commitment to conservation and volunteering.
- Build social cohesion within the community.

Bird observation

Stirling Linear Park is now an officially registered bird observation site. As part of their coursework the YCC students will feed important data to the Birds Australia organisation for inclusion in the Atlas of Australian birds.

This new status for the Park will also enable other volunteer bird observers to contribute their bird data to Birds Australia.

Envirofund delivers...and the cheque's in the mail.

On February 8 at Woorabinda in the Adelaide Hills, The Hon. Alexander Downer presented a certificate of grant for \$10,643 to the Friends of Stirling Linear Park. This follows a successful application by the Friends to the Australian Government's Envirofund.

The grant will help fund a year-long \$32,000 project for '*Stage Two Rehabilitation of Stirling Linear Park Wetlands and Watercourses*'. Major contributors to the project are: Envirofund (33%), Adelaide Hills Council (22%) and Friends of Stirling Linear Park (45%). The Friends share is calculated on the notional value of volunteer time that members will devote to the work.

Over the past six years, intensive rehabilitation of the indigenous habitat in the Park has resulted in greatly enhanced biodiversity. As anyone can see, revegetation has been spectacularly successful. Stirling Park, cleared in early days for market gardening, is now a vibrant young forest that is well on the way to restored bush.

Several groups have taken part in the rehabilitation work. They include the Friends of Stirling Linear Park, Conservation Volunteers Australia, Green Corps, Planet Ark, Onkaparinga Catchment Water Management Board, Onkaparinga Waterwatch Network, Aldgate Primary School and Adelaide Hills Council. Previous funding was supplied by the National Landcare Program, Natural Heritage Trust and the Commonwealth Dept of Family and Community Services.

The restoration of the understorey environment will provide a more balanced ecosystem for the many

living entities that inhabit the wetland environment — from the smallest macro invertebrates up to native fish, amphibians, reptiles, small mammals, waterfowl and woodland birds.

Some 4000 seedlings will be raised from local seeds and planted in Madurta and Hender Reserves. A Conservation Volunteers Australia team will be employed to carry out preparatory weed control.

Ongoing monitoring by the Onkaparinga Waterwatch Network will report regularly on water quality. Baseline surveys of plant and wildlife will continue to record the benefits of the improving habitat. An example is the recent discovery of Southern Brown Bandicoots in Hender Reserve.

Meanwhile a photomonitoring program, commenced five years ago will continue to provide a record of the changing visual landscape of the Stirling Linear Park wetland.

Our Friends group understands that no human intervention can ever completely replace an indigenous environment that has been destroyed or severely degraded. Nevertheless a great deal can be done to restore much of the original habitat. No area is totally beyond hope, and a dedicated community of environmental enthusiasts using modern rehabilitation techniques can over time return the landscape to a near-original condition.

But the message is clear. Don't destroy the bush in the first place.

From the park bench

Vanishing ducks

Visitors to Woorabinda may have noticed that the feral ducks are nowhere to be seen these days. Sometime around the end of October last year they were captured and removed to a good home.

Not that they will be missed of course. Their presence on the lake was having a negative effect on the other wildfowl, especially the Pacific Black ducks, who were often seen to be harassed by the male Mallard.

No one in our committee could throw any light on the ducks' disappearance until a chance encounter with a Friend in late December cleared up the mystery. The greedy Mallards, unable to resist a free hand-out of bread crumbs, were lured by an eco-friendly duck-catcher into the wire pen near the lake and shut in.

The female escaped and flew back to the lake. But the drake, who perhaps was lazy as well as greedy, decided against freedom and allowed himself to be carted off with the promise of a free feed.

With her partner gone, the female grew disconsolate and careless, and was soon recaptured. She has now been reunited with her partner, and both are now in the care of a duck-loving family in the salubrious surroundings of Hawthorndene.

Trails upgraded

In December last year, a CVA team got busy with barrow loads of dolomite and surfaced more of the Park's walkways. The trail leading from Ethel St is now upgraded with dolomite extending most of the way down Stirling Park, providing a pleasant walk among the rapidly growing new plantings.

Dolomite was also laid on the Woorabinda trail from Keroma Avenue towards the lake. Except for a short stretch of 35m, this walkway is now completely surfaced.

As we go to press (or rather photocopier) we can report that the Council intends to upgrade the pathways around the lake. Several complaints have been received, especially from our more senior citizens that the large stones erupting underfoot are making walking hazardous. Sprained ankles are a distinct possibility.

Let's hope that council staff can soon get onto this.

Walkways...5 years on.

The Park's walkways (we now tend to refer to them as 'trails') will be five years old in March.

Recent visitors will be unaware of the controversy that surrounded them in the days before the easements were resumed by AHC and developed into walking trails. Many residents adjacent to the easements were vociferous in their objections. Fears

were raised that the walkways would increase vandalism; young thugs would have easy access to private properties; fires would be lit...and so on, and so on. But eventually, things settled down, as they usually do. The trails were constructed and steps on the steeper grades gradually appeared.

Much of the work was carried out by volunteers — Green Corps mainly, under the able tutelage of Alan Dickens, a Landcare Officer with the Council in those early days.

Five years on, and the trails have now bedded down with the passage of many feet. Surfacing with dolomite is almost complete, steps and boardwalks are mostly built, and interpretive signs are in place to explain the mysteries of the surrounding environment.

The increasing popularity of these easy trails, so handy to the city and Hills communities, does stress them to a degree, but by and large they are holding up well. Unwelcome users such as horse riders and mountain bikers have been strongly discouraged, and the main problem is the annual weed invasions that have to be dealt with.

Walkers keep to the trails fairly well, and there has been few signs of vandalism. Adjacent residents have not experienced the surge in crime that many expected, and as far as juvenile destructiveness is concerned, much of that has been confined to the bird hide.

Irresponsible dog owners however are a continuing problem.

Although more people are observing the requirement to keep their animals on a lead, too many of them continue to leave Fido's do-dos on the footpath as a trap for the unwary. And the problem appears to be getting worse.

It's not a pleasant task to remove a dog's poo from the public footpath, but every owner is legally required to do so. It should not be necessary to remind them that this is part of the civic responsibility of owning a dog. When will these people learn to do the right thing?

Broken glass

Speaking of canine matters, an irate dog lover recently stuck a dire warning to broken glass scatterers on the 'Dogs on Lead Only' sign at Hender Reserve entrance. Let the perpetrator be aware that the Friends have for many years picked up broken glass etc. wherever they find it — particularly near the Hender Road entrance area, which in the past was misused as a rubbish dump.

We invite the bill sticker to join us in this activity at our working bees. Phone David Ragless (8339-1038) or Bob James (8339-1903), for details.

Recent Working Bees

| Date | No. of volunteers | Area | Work done |
|-----------|-------------------|----------------|---|
| 30 Oct 03 | 7 | Stirling Park | Impromptu planting of 1000 seedlings |
| 9 Nov 03 | 11 | Madurta | Watsonia, Broom, Black Wattle and A.longifolia removed. |
| 14 Dec 03 | 7 | Hender Reserve | Black Wattle and A.longifolia removed |

Another certificate

Certificates arrive on our doorstep with increasing regularity these days. The latest is from a very appreciative South Australian government for our being such industrious greenies.

So, all you working bees — take a bow. Your efforts are not going unnoticed in high places.

Forthcoming Working bees

Please note that in 2004 working bees have been moved to the third Sunday of each month to avoid conflicting with public holiday weekends.

March 21.....Walking trails..... meet at cnr.Bogaduck Rd/ Linwood Ave.

April 18..... Stirling Park..... meet at Branch Road park entrance.

May 16..... Madurta Reserve..... meet at Madurta Ave park entrance.

What's happening in the Waterwatch building?

- Suzy has resigned as she has another job boosting the population. We are sorry to lose you Suzy, and wish you all the best for the future.
- Matthew Cattenach, our new Education Officer, has been appointed to join Sheralee Cox, the coordinator of Waterwatch. Matthew trained as a teacher in Victoria, taught in NSW and is now at Woorabinda. We hope you enjoy your travels up and down the river, Matthew. Welcome aboard.
- We'll display our data maps and results on the Woorabinda board soon.

Waterwatch 2004...Can you help?

Q: What is the Onkaparinga Waterwatch Network (OWN)?

A: A not-for-profit organisation that aims to educate school children in Watercare and to support community groups in the Onkaparinga River catchment - all the way to Pt. Noarlunga!

Q: Why is Waterwatch necessary?

A: Monitoring the quality of our water resources is essential if we are to repair and maintain a healthy catchment and restore biodiversity. The Onkaparinga catchment supplies almost a third of Adelaide's water.

Q: What do the Friends of Stirling Linear Park do?

A:

- We 'watch the water' to record water quality by sampling the Park's lake and creek six times a year (alternate months).
- Sample macro-invertebrates once a year (fascinating!)
- Attend one or two workshops.
- Our records over ten years show there has been no drastic reduction in water quality. However, the last macro-invertebrate sampling was not as good as we expected. (Perhaps it was the weather!).
- The team so far is Marilyn Browne, Ina Mattens and Lorri Ragless.

Q: Who can monitor?

A: You can!
If you have a little spare time ring Lorri on **8339-1038**.

Fridge magnets

Kathy Bowman has produced your 2004 working bee dates per usual in the form of a handy fridge magnet. A copy should be included with this newsletter.

These handy kitchen accessories will neither mock you for being alarmed, nor goad you into maniacal alertness. But they will help to remind you about forthcoming opportunities when you can do your bit for the environment.

Disclaimer: Contributors' views and opinions expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily the views of the editor, the committee, or the general membership of the Friends of Stirling Linear Park Inc.

Contributors to this issue include David Ragless, Lorri Ragless and Jack Benlow.

Not a member yet?

The purpose and commitment of the Friends of Stirling Linear Park is to help restore the Park to natural bushland and to ensure its preservation as a public open space in perpetuity. If you share this vision, why not join us?

Active participation in working bees etc, is entirely voluntary. Membership is open to anyone who has the best interests of the Park at heart. This newsletter is distributed quarterly to all members.

Friends of Stirling Linear Park — Membership application/renewal

I/we would like to join/renew membership of the Friends of Stirling Linear Park (strike out word not applicable).

\$..... membership fee is enclosed.

\$.....donation is included. Donations of \$2.00 or more are tax-deductible. A separate receipt will be issued.

| |
|---|
| Membership fee for both individuals and family: 1 year.....\$5.00 5 years.....\$20.00 |
|---|

Name:.....

Address.....

..... **Phone**.....

Please return to: David Ragless, Friends of Stirling Linear Park Inc., 6 Branch Rd, STIRLING SA 5152.