

Friends Group and cemetery Lodge owner at loggerheads

Phillipa Berry owns Dalry Cemetery Lodge and thought this would be a peaceful place to live.

But now she is involved in an ongoing legal dispute with The City of Edinburgh Council over a shared repair of a boundary wall.

She has also alleged harassment and breaches of her privacy by the Friends Group who started to work in the cemetery during the pandemic.



Philippa Berry who owns Dalry Cemetery Lodge House claims the Friends of Dalry Cemetery are harassing her ©2023 The Edinburgh Reporter

Some matters are the subject of legal dispute, but tensions have recently arisen from the Friends laying down three large logs in the area where Ms Berry reverses to when exiting from her property. Her own access gateway lies just inside the cemetery gate and Ms Berry says by reversing out of her driveway she needs to use the area of the cemetery drive where the logs are now positioned.

We asked the Friends group for a comment but were told: "As there is ongoing legal action between PB and CEC, we can't comment on any of this."

Cllr Denis Dixon said: "I have spoken with Ms Berry and tried to help with the situation, and have been trying to support her as her local councillor. I hope that relations with the Friends will improve and that they can find a way forward."

Previously, Ms Berry has complained about council vehicles

blocking her access on the narrow shared driveway from Dalry Road. She also says that the Chair of the Friends Group has approached tradespeople working at her house claiming they were guilty of 'a parking infringement'. There has been a raft of correspondence, which we have been shown, about the installation of a shed and refuse bins which were placed by the Friends group opposite Ms Berry's house, and which she viewed as an infringement of her privacy.

She also pointed out to the council that the rubbish placed there would encourage rats, and said that rodents had caused damage to her house by burrowing underneath. The shed and bins have since been removed.

Ms Berry also claims that the Friends at first requested water and power from her property (which they said she was obliged to provide in terms of her title deeds) but that request was denied to them and she believes they now have other sources for these services.

The council has offered to pay for one-way blinds for Ms Berry's windows as a means of settling some of the issues, but otherwise Ms Berry told us that a council officer had suggested that the parties should "just get along".



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The Friends Group

Friends of Dalry Cemetery was established during lockdown in May 2020, by Jakob Assarsson and Norbert David who initially suggested starting up a community litter pick. The Friends put out an appeal last year for new volunteers to join them to do practical work in the cemetery and also to research the history of the garden cemetery. There are no longer regular burials in the cemetery, with only ten recorded since the council took over this previously private burial ground in 1988. The Friends Group usually meet every Sunday from 2pm.

This group – and all such groups – are overseen by the council with rules which monitor their activities in spaces owned by the council. The general guidance for all Friends groups is [on the council website here](#). One of the main aims of engaging

with Friends Groups is stated to be "Strengthening links to the local community".

In reply to one of her FOI requests the council told Ms Berry: "The Friends of Dalry Cemetery are a completely independent and autonomous group. There are over 70 groups registered on the Council's database, (all autonomous) who work voluntarily to support, maintain and improve their particular areas. They all work with their Bereavement Services Officer who approves any proposals to ensure their aspirations align with those of the Council and adhere to our Friends Group code of conduct. They are on the Friends of Greenspaces mailing list to which the Council sends a variety of information regarding activities, funding opportunities and other relevant information."

The Friends of Dalry Cemetery have a private Facebook Group which only members of the group can join.

Friends of Edinburgh Greenspace groups are managed centrally by the Senior Programmes Officer in the Parks, Greenspace and Cemeteries Service of the council and all groups must firstly register with them which the Friends of Dalry Cemetery have. The officer administers the programme, provides links to the other Friends groups, distributes information on potential funding bodies, national events, and helps with wider publicity, project planning and events.



The Friends of Dalry Cemetery as photographed in 2022 in the cemetery. F: Lexi Knott, Elizabeth Greenberg, Yvonne Wighand Lyle, Victoria Beall and Jacob Assarsson. B: Ryn Branch, Tom Kielty, Ian Sumner and Norbert David. Photo: © 2022, Martin P. McAdam www.martinmcadam.com