



www.hallaitken.co.uk

Parks for People



people spaces places

Executive Summary 2009



Executive Summary

The Parks for People programme aims to regenerate public parks of national, regional or local heritage value for the enjoyment and recreation of local people. Funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and BIG Lottery Fund, it hopes to build on the successes of previous programmes such as the Urban Parks Programme and Public Parks Initiative. Together these programmes have helped transform spaces on the edge of dereliction, brought new uses to redundant buildings, created new jobs, introduced new audiences to their heritage and overall breathed life into green lungs.

HLF and BIG expect all projects to achieve the five programme outcomes;

- Increasing and extending the range of audiences;
- Conserving and improving the heritage value;
- Increasing the range of volunteers involved;
- Increasing knowledge and skills; and
- Improving management and maintenance.

Evaluating the Parks for People programme

Both HLF and BIG recognise the importance of effective monitoring and evaluation, and they commissioned Hall Aitken and CFP to support projects in collecting data and evidence of the impact of the programme. This is the second annual report and outlines progress made during year 2 of the programme.

Our evaluation focuses on 72 projects;

- 40 are approved at stage 2 and are now in the delivery stage
- 25 are approved at stage 1 and are currently developing their stage 2 applications
- 7 have passed round 1 under the new programme funded by HLF

The focus of the evaluation work in the first two years has been to support projects in collecting baseline data and setting up systems to monitor progress against the programme outcomes. As only a few projects have completed work on-site, it is too early to assess the impact of the programme. However, the data collected does show some emerging trends and we can draw tentative conclusions about the potential impact of the programme. In year 3 our work will concentrate on assessing the progress made towards achieving the programme outcomes.

Supporting projects

In the parks sector there are low levels of experience and understanding of the importance of monitoring and evaluation. Historically, Local Authorities have not collected data to show the value or quality of urban green space. And until recently investment in training and skills development in local authority parks services has been low, resulting in a lack of capacity within project teams. The approach to

evaluating the Parks for People programme is new and is needing a culture shift through the sector.

In year 2, the Parks for People support team provided significant help and advice to enable Local Authorities to self-evaluate their projects. We carried out new methods of support, such as e-bulletins, applications reviews and e-surveys. These complemented the existing suite of support; telephone/email advice, workshops and clinics, guidance notes and the website.

The impact of this support saw an increase in the levels of engagement, with all but 3 projects contacting the support team in at least one way. By increasing this engagement of projects, we were also able to increase the amount and quality of baseline data provided, with 68% of projects in the delivery stage submitting their data. 85% of projects surveyed said that we had improved their understanding of monitoring and evaluation for the Parks for People programme and there is evidence the support provided has resulted in improved project quality and bid development.

There is, however, still a need to improve understanding of monitoring and evaluation before projects submit their round 1 bids and during the development phase.

Programme impact

The work undertaken in 2009 has seen a large increase in the data collected from projects. Although the evaluation focuses on collecting quantitative data, we have supplemented this with qualitative data from case studies and surveys.

At the end of year 2, 65% of all projects had returned some baseline data. Although a significant increase from year 1, there are still issues with the quality of data returned.

Outcome 1 – increasing the range of audiences

On average, the programme is anticipating an increase in visitor numbers by between 10% and 50%. Based on current baseline numbers, this could result in an increase of between 1,000,000 and 7,000,000 visitors a year. 95% of projects surveyed are carrying out visitor surveys, with 60% using GreenStat. Visitor profiles show that;

- Most parks have a greater percentage of female visitors than male
- The most popular reasons for visiting parks are to go for a walk, to get some fresh air or to visit the play area
- 83% of park visitor are White British, however the percentage varies from park to park; from 0% of BME users at Whitstable Castle Park, to 97% of visitors at Spinney Hill Park in Leicester
- Most users fall into the 25-50 age groups, with another peak at 60-74. Under 20s and over 75s are the smallest groups using parks
- On average, 5% of users are disabled.

By comparing visitor profiles to the wider area, parks are able to identify hard to reach or under-represented groups. These include children and young people, BME communities, disabled people, over 60s, asylum seekers or new communities and men. By identifying hard to reach groups and addressing their needs through the

Audience Development Plans, the programme should support Local Authorities in developing a greater understanding of the needs of existing and new visitors. This will result in public spaces which are accessible, meaningful and inviting.

Outcome 2 – conserving and enhancing our diverse heritage

Through the application forms and reports, projects are able to describe in detail the work they will undertake which will conserve the heritage value of the park. So far the programme has seen over £160m of investment to conserve and improve heritage features and buildings, such as;

- Repair or restoration of buildings such as park lodges, houses, pavilions and museums
- Repair or restoration of historic features, such as bridges, monuments, fountains, gates, bandstands, boathouses
- Conversion of buildings or historic features
- Improvement of landscape features, such as lakes, vistas, shrub and tree planting

Projects will measure the success of this outcome through before/after photos and condition surveys. So far, the programme forecasts 18 buildings or monuments removed from at risk registers. Projects are raising awareness of the heritage value through promotional leaflets, new signage, interpretation boards and guided walks. However, most projects have not researched local people's understanding of the park's heritage value or have developed ways to measure changes in understanding.

Outcome 3 – increasing the range of volunteers

96% of projects surveyed had existing volunteers involved in the park, most of which are members of a Friends group. On average, projects have around 50 current volunteers and forecast to increase this to around 140. Overall, more women volunteer than men and 16% are from BME communities. Most volunteer hours are spent on either management activities or one off events, however projects expect this to shift more towards maintenance and horticultural activities as projects move from development to delivery.

Based on current baseline numbers, the programme anticipates an overall increase in volunteer numbers by 22%, nearly 1,000 extra volunteers. This will result in a significant number of local people taking an active role in managing and using their park. An increase in volunteer numbers should see an increase in community ownership as well as help to sustain the improvements.

Outcome 4 – improving skills and knowledge through training

Based on the baseline data received so far, the programme will result in an extra 300 staff and 440 volunteers receiving training. The programme will provide 580 work placements, and 740 new qualifications achieved.

96% of projects have a training plan in place and so far staff and volunteers have benefited from the following training courses;

- Project management and risk management

- Horticultural skills
- Community governance and development
- Developing a programme of guided walks and events
- Green Flag award

This increase in training will result in up-skilling of people working in the parks sector, while providing volunteers with essential qualifications and work experience. However, further work is needed to collect information about the impact of this training, as most projects don't yet have systems in place to measure anything other than training numbers.

Outcome 5 – improving management and maintenance

The programme expects all projects to achieve Green Flag status within a year of completing the capital works. Currently, only 13 projects have submitted a baseline Green Flag score, which shows that on average projects are scoring 50, against a pass-mark of 66. The Parks for People funding will see an increase in the revenue budgets for most parks, with 58% of those surveyed citing an increase of more than £30,000 a year.

In general, projects have adopted three ways of sustaining the capital improvements; extra staff, increased frequency of maintenance or improving maintenance processes and the use of volunteers.

The programme will result in better managed and maintained parks, leading to increased customer satisfaction. On average, satisfaction levels are expected to increase from 71% to 81%.

Conclusions and recommendations

During year 2 we refocused our efforts on supporting projects to evaluate the impact of their projects. We have seen levels of engagement increase and support from HLF staff has helped to reinforce the message. Most projects have found our support to be useful and we have been successful in improving knowledge and understanding of monitoring and evaluation for the programme.

Although most projects are still in the development stage, there have been some early signs of progress towards achieving the programme outcomes. The baseline data submitted has helped us to develop a useful picture of the make up of park users and volunteers. The targets set have also enabled us to predict potential impacts once activities are complete.

However, there are still gaps in the data, and projects continue to need support in understanding what we require of them. Our work has helped to identify the importance of the development stage for setting a clear baseline and targets. Many projects have not included clear proposals or resource allocation for monitoring and evaluation work during the development stage. Projects need more guidance at the pre-application stage to ensure they are aware of the monitoring and evaluation implications of the programme.

Our challenge for year 3 of the evaluation is to ensure that we build on the momentum created in year 2, and to create a legacy for the programme moving forward. Our focus will shift from supporting projects to supporting HLF to take on

this role. We will also be focusing our efforts on assessing the impact of the programme, with changes made to the case study approach.