

Parks for People Case Study: Hale Park, Hale village

This report summarises our findings from Hale Park, Hale village. The case study has been produced following a telephone interview with the project manager and a review of the project's initial application form and monitoring data. The purpose of the case study is;

- To provide evidence of impact and progress towards the programme outcomes
- To explore what difference the Parks for People funding has had on the park and surrounding community
- To highlight examples of good practice

Introduction

Hale Park is a 5km site comprising of a fragment of the 18th century designed landscape of the former mansion, Hale House. The population of Hale Village is only 1,700 so the park is a key focal point and the main area for recreation. However the catchment area of the park encompasses visitors from the major population centres of Halewood, Speke and Widnes.

The public open space retains its character of 18th century parkland, but in addition accommodates sports pitches, a car park, a changing room, a skateboarding area and a youth shelter. Part of the audience development plan included the rebuild of the children's playground and linking this through to the local public house.

It is important for the village to attract visitors to the area as geographically it is situated on the Mersey estuary and the project is keen to highlight the historical context of the park and village.

Outcome 1: increasing the range of audiences

The project envisages a modest increase in the total number of visitors, from a little over 77,000 to 80,000. No targets are set for increasing the BME visitor count or disabled visitors. The key aim is to increase satisfaction rates from 42% to 60-70%.

This will be achieved through a range of activities which include;

- To preserve and enhance its past history as a parkland approach to the Hale Estate and mansion.
- Provide new and much needed facilities for the community, particularly play for very young children and more teenage/youth activities.
- Improve nature conservation generally in the park.

To date, efforts have focused on a leaflet campaign to raise awareness of the park redevelopment. There have also been a number of events, including a 'Viking Carnival' which attracted a lot of people over a short period. Efforts are also underway to build links with nearby schools to incorporate the park's history into classes.

Although no formal surveys have been held, anecdotal evidence does point to greater awareness and a growing sense of ownership of the park. The number of vandalism incidents have reduced and satisfaction has increased from an original 42% to 70%.

The popularity of the park has increased and can be evidenced with individuals attending nature events such as a 'Bat Evening', run in conjunction with a local

wildlife expert, which attracted a number of visitors to the park during the late summer. In addition the local council ran a 'Carnival Day' during the summer of 2010. This included a 'Rose Queen' and a Viking Re-enactment, which 4,000 people attended, nearly twice as many residents as Hale Village.

The Friends Group have discussed a number of potential future events including a farmers' market and guided tours.

Outcome 2: Conserving and improving the heritage value

The Friends of Hale Park are keen to highlight the historical ties of the park's heritage. Notice boards contain pieces of historical information and a 'historical pathway' is being devised to allow visitors to follow a trail around the park and down to the nearby shore. The walk will include a visit to the grave of 'Childe of Hale' a mythical resident who lived in Hale and grew to 9'3". The Friends Group are also planning to collect and display historical films of the park in conjunction with the North West Film Archive.

The park is a primary site for local wildlife including a nesting area for sparrow hawks. A wildlife photographer has been invited to help set up a video link so that the nesting sparrow hawks can be filmed. The park champion is working with the local school to bring children into the park for nature lessons.

After consultation of the local residents, it was found that a separate area for dogs would allow children and families to enjoy the other areas of the park. Design of the new layout incorporated this vision and the park has its own segregated area for dogs to play in.

The physical restoration work has resulted in;

- 75% of park area has benefitted from horticultural improvement such as tree management, replacement planting, lawn drainage, removal of inappropriate planting.
- 100% of paths of have been restored

Outcome 3: Increasing the range of volunteers

The project is trying to double the number of volunteers from a baseline of 25. Volunteers have helped with historical research and were involved in the design stage of developing facilities such as the playground. The Friends Group help with the organisation of events, providing a more direct link between the public and the Council.

Although progress toward targets is difficult, they currently have 15 volunteers involved in the project. Exact numbers within the group has remained more or less constant with a very slight increase. Volunteering opportunities are vastly increased, although group members are not taking full advantage of this. The Friends Group is seen as key to ensuring that the project is sustainable in the long-term and there is an active recruitment policy in place. Friends of Hale Park notice board is also being used to advertise and encourage new members.

Outcome 4: Improving skills and knowledge through training

The project aimed to train 1 member of staff, 25 volunteers and obtain 12 qualifications. So far, a number of courses have been held including;

- Tree identification course.

- General horticultural courses.
- Photographic course - ongoing
- Loan working - how to act and assess activities group organises.
- First Aid – general

As far as possible the training has been designed specifically to relate to the historical interest of the village and park. Some of the training is designed to help volunteers continue the project once the funding has ended. As a result, some additional care and management of the park is now occasionally undertaken by the volunteers.

Outcome 5: Improving management and maintenance

With better equipment and more staff the park has had Green Flag status for 2 years. A rise in standards and people's expectations now means the park is held in higher regard, and local people are now proud of the park.

Using GreenStat measurements visitor satisfaction has increased from 42% to 70%. Overall the park has a very positive feedback score from the increased number of individuals visiting.

The health benefits of using the park are also being realised by the local community. With significant improvements having been made to the park the council now utilises the area as a starting place for the 5km run, bridge run and cycle events.

HLF support has provided a suitable drainage area along the main road, which runs through the park to the old estate.

Spot profile checks taken out by the friends of the park have provided them with key information relating to the change in visitor perceptions. More families have been seen at the park, as perceptions have improved to that of cleanliness and a family friendly atmosphere.

Being the predominant greenspace in Hale Village, the park has to take on a multi-functional usage. Evidence from those individuals who utilise the park demonstrates that the park redevelopment has achieved and exceeded initial expectations. For example, the local football team have a full drainage system incorporated into their pitches, the new children's playground has attracted families from all over the catchment area and older individuals are using the park as a means of improving their health.

Conclusions

This case study is able to demonstrate examples of good practice through:

- Incorporating the park into a wider heritage trail for the whole village
- Holding events to attract visitors from outside the area and embedding the park within the calendar of village events
- Employing a Heritage Champion (from the Friends group)



Figure 1 - picture after capital work completed