

Parks for People Case Study: Devonport Park, Plymouth

This report summarises our findings from Devonport Park, Plymouth. The case study has been produced following a telephone interview with the project manager, surveys with stakeholders 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

The Devonport People's Park Project will aim to restore and re-position Devonport Park as 'The People's Park' for the areas of Devonport, Stoke and Morice Town. It will be delivered through a partnership led by Plymouth City Council and including Devonport Regeneration Community Partnership and the newly constituted Friends of Devonport Park.

The projects will attempt to address community concerns over security, safety and a decline in the park. A resident park warden will be established and restoration work on the park will restore key assets including fountains, memorials and historical features. A cafe, toilets, community pavilion and changing facilities will form the central focus and heart of the new project.

The provision of quality sports and play facilities, including regenerating the existing inadequate play area, tennis courts and grass football pitches and providing sports activities, will enable the park to meet its catchment potential and complement the Brickfields Recreation Ground adjacent. Community engagement is high on the agenda through the work of a Community Education Officer to work on a dedicated basis with the Friends, young people, local schools and the Training Centre

Outcome 1: increasing the range of audiences

Baseline visitor counts identified 1,077 day visitors, which it is hoped will increase to close to 2,000. The project sought to increase BME visits from 2% to 6% and increase satisfaction rates from 19% to 75%. Work on much of the project is now complete and the project is clear that it will now far exceed original targets for visitor numbers. The target of a 15% increase has in fact realised an increase of 36%. The project has also achieved its aims to increase usage of the park by older people, young people and people from beyond the Devonport and Stoke wards, as these user groups were under-represented.

In addition to the capital works, the partners have delivered a strong and proactive programme of events designed to attract a wide range of audiences. Park Fun Days have been developed with the Friends Group, as well as organised walks and sports events. A media campaign has included regular press releases, Facebook page, website and leaflets.

Outcome 2: Conserving and improving the heritage value

The physical restoration work has resulted in;

- 3 Listed buildings restored and removed from the At Risk Register
- Work begun on restoration of 2 Fountains
- 1 historic garden restored

Awareness and understanding of the park's heritage has been improved through website promotion, creation of a heritage trail, leaflet, guided walks and an education pack. A 'living memories' project has also been undertaken, capturing stories and pictures from local people to articulate how the park has inspired them. This is mainly delivered through the Friends Group who have organised several events celebrating the park's history and heritage. The park is now included as part of a 5km heritage trail.

As a result, there is a greater range of audiences now coming into the park, particularly young and old people. Also, visitor surveys have highlighted that they are coming specifically for the heritage and history, whereas before they would just pass through. This has then meant the park is busier and feels safer. More people are now coming to the park rather than going to Central Park about 2-3 miles away which used to be the case.

Outcome 3: Increasing the range of volunteers

The baseline was 28 volunteers and although no target was set to increase the number or range of volunteers, actual volunteers have now reached 77. This has been achieved by starting up the Friends Group, a care home gardening volunteer group and a youth friends group for young people to get together and have input on various things in the park.

The project is proud of its success in securing more volunteers. The Friends Group have set up their own newsletter and Facebook page and although most members are 'passive', the group now has 238 members. Volunteers are impacting on other areas too. In 2005 there were only two tree wardens and now there are around 50 people involved on a daily basis. There are also 30 volunteer gardeners.

Outcome 4: Improving skills and knowledge through training

The project aimed to train 3 staff, which has been delivered. However, although no targets have been set, the importance placed upon the role of volunteers means that the project has trained 11 volunteers and obtained 14 qualifications, trained to level one in horticulture and another 10 doing level two RHS certificate. Four are volunteer work leaders.

The restoration works opened up opportunities for training. There were a number of training placements such as the construction of the lodge and landscaping and the project had a training day for trainee electricians when the pavilion was being restored. With the management and maintenance team there will be an apprenticeship every two years.

Both the staff and the volunteers have benefitted as the City Council parks manager and Chris Coldwell, project manager are now Green Flag Award judges. Parks for People funding has meant that skills development was in the plan from the outset and was given proper attention.

Outcome 5: Improving management and maintenance

The project does not currently have Green Flag status but want to apply in early 2011 subject to completion of all capital works. The team are confident of success and point to having an on-site park warden as being of vital importance, meaning someone is in the park all day and staying in the lodge. A lot of people said they would not use the park if there was not a warden and therefore this will hopefully quell any such concerns. Extra gardeners have also been appointed alongside several additional volunteers, particularly within the Friends Group.

This has resulted in greater satisfaction levels and figures from GreenStat reveal an 83% increase in usage since 2006, with people staying longer and enjoying additional activities within the park rather than just using it as a walking route.

Conclusions

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

- The use of a strong media campaign and events programme to increase visitor numbers and experience
- Inclusion of the park in a heritage trail that extends beyond its boundaries, thereby attracting visitors who are particularly interested in heritage and history
- Establishing a 'young Friends' group to attract younger volunteers
- Apprenticeships and work placements as part of the capital work programme
- Employing an on-site warden to improve supervision and management



Figure 1 - picture taken before work started