

Parks for People Case Study: Chances Park, Carlisle

This report summarises our findings from Chances Park in Carlisle. 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

Chances Park is a very popular, 29 acre park located about 2 miles from Carlisle city centre. It is a mix of open grassland, established woodland and historical parkland trees and flowers. Chances Park was originally the grounds of Morton Manor, which is a Grade II listed building built in 1807. The Manor was home to the Chances family, important industrialists in Carlisle who bequeathed both the manor and park to Carlisle City Council in 1944.

The Manor is now the home of the Morton Community Centre, which boasts 12,000 visitors a month. The Community Centre houses the Friends of Chances Park group who have been active for over 10 years. It was the popularity of the park and Morton Community Centre which provided the impetus for the P4P bid and the demand for improved facilities in the park to support a wider audience. The park and centre provide a base for many voluntary and community groups, but it was felt that more could be achieved by making physical improvements to the park to create a range of new activities.

The park was awarded £892,000 of HLF funding and the capital works are now complete. The project has since employed staff to deliver a range of activities.

Outcome 1: increasing the range of audiences

The park had a baseline visitor count of 10,000 annual person visits with the largest age group prior to the project being 65-74 year olds, with the smallest being 17-19 years. The project set out to increase visitor numbers by 50% by delivering a variety of events, including;

- Summer events, music and performance arts for families and young people
- Civil ceremonies
- Family BBQs
- Urban horticultural and agricultural shows and nature walks
- Schools summer activities programme
- Bulb planting and bird boxes for young people

Overall the project has seen a significant increase in visitor numbers, with 74,032 visitors recorded from May to September alone. Numbers of visitors are now consistently 100 more per week than at the start of the project. The proportion of disabled and young visitors has increased significantly and there has been a slight increase in the range of reasons why people visit the park. As a result of the data

from the visitor counters installed at some entrances, the city council is now interested in installing counters at other parks in the city.

These figures were achieved through a varied series of events and activities as part of the official re-opening of the park. These included falconry sessions, organised lunches, adventure days and workshops. The adventure days were very successful and charity Barnardos, who ran them, are now using the park independently for their own programme of Forest Schools Activities. Tai Chi has been offered and proven very popular, with a block of 6 Autumn Sessions attracting 15 to 20 people at each session.

As well as Barnardos, the park is acting as a hub for community activity involving other organisations. There has been a summer programme of activities in the park ranging from Forest Schools Workshops, adventure days and Summer Splash which was run by the local Police to target 11 to 19 yrs olds in order to prevent anti social behaviour in and around the park. The park's team now run regular 'Picnics in the Park' events for children on the autistic spectrum and their families. These offer a chance for the families to meet and gain support from each other in a very informal setting. Barnardos provide fun activities for the children and Carlisle Mencap use the events to establish links with the parents and carers and sign post help for them.

Outcome 2: Conserving and improving the heritage value

The capital works were designed to support greater use of the park, such as improved pathways and lighting, and also to improve the appearance of the natural environment. There were 2 main areas of capital work – repair and conservation and building work.

The physical works included;

- Restoration of the Ha Ha Wall
- Major path improvements
- Improved entrances for access and mobility and repairs to boundary walls
- Creation of a secure play area for young children
- Creation of an outdoor performance area and events area

The work to improve the natural environment included;

- New tree planting and bulb planting
- Restoration of natural meadow and the Georgian garden
- Preservation of the ridge and furrows
- Removal of trees and shrubs to create better access and new vistas

The restoration of the Ha Ha Wall was a major task to conserve the heritage of the park. The wall allowed livestock to graze on the pasture land without allowing it to get onto the lawns of the family home. Some of the Ha Ha was still visible but a lot was buried under solid leaves that had accumulated over the years. The project has brought the wall back to its former glory and is once again a feature of the park.

The park has used leaflets and developed a heritage trail to raise awareness of the park, the wall and the park's heritage. It is a National Heritage site as it has the remains of a medieval farm but most local people had not been aware of this previously. The team is now working on a nature trail leaflet for the park and a park and manor history leaflet for use in the community centre and to give to schools as a

learning resource. Volunteers from the Friends group are planning to get the history of the park and the house recorded on paper.

Outcome 3: Increasing the range of volunteers

The park set ambitious targets to increase volunteer numbers from a low baseline of 6 to 42. The aim was to involve volunteers in maintenance, horticulture, marketing and one off events and the first step towards this was to establish a Friends of Chances Park group. This has been achieved and the members (and friends of Friends) regularly deliver mailshots, and there was over 1,000 volunteer hours recorded from April to May 2010.

Volunteers helped during the grand opening of the park, mostly on the day making sure that people were looked after. Other activities supported by the Friends include bulb planting, preparing a history of the park and Christmas carols. The volunteers also helped out in the initial stages of the project by compiling a tree study, recording species of trees in the park and also collecting visitor data prior to the counters being fitted on the gates.

Elsewhere, the project has formed links with voluntary sector organisations, including Carlisle Mencap, RSPB, Barnados and the World Owl Trust. The result of this has been to give local people a new sense of ownership of the park. However the team recognise that more needs to be done to get people actively involved. There has only been a slight increase in volunteer numbers and while these volunteers are very enthusiastic, the park recognises the danger of over reliance on a small number of people.

Outcome 4: Improving skills and knowledge through training

Prior to the project, no training was delivered at the park or to people linked to the park. The park set targets which included;

- Training for 2 staff and 25 volunteers
- 1 work experience placement
- 25 qualifications and
- 2 third parties using the park.

To date, the park has only delivered part of these targets, delivering a small amount of training for local volunteers, the main part of which was bulb planting and some bird box work in partnership with the Green Spaces team and a local ringing group. The feedback from the volunteers was that the training was good and they had enjoyed planting the bulbs and being able to get involved. The training has also allowed children to mix with the residents and enable the volunteers to see the park from a child's perspective.

Two handymen for the park have been trained as event stewards. They now help out at all the events, and the training is seen as vital to the running of the events. They are now much more involved, and enjoying their new roles.

Looking ahead, the park expects to deliver more training next year, with more wildlife training and getting people qualified as walk leaders. This will allow the park to deliver Healthy Walking events for local people. The team is currently discussing new training opportunities in the correct use of the bird boxes with the RSPB.

Outcome 5: Improving management and maintenance

Although Green Flag status is not yet secured the park will be trying next year, after efforts this year were impeded by the weather. The City Council have, in partnership with the Friends Group, secured a gardener who is specifically assigned to Chances Park. This allows him to become well known to members of the public and build a relationship with users. As he is in the park working every day and not allotted to different parks on a rota he can see when things need done and if any issues arise.

The park's management enjoy a very good working relationship with the City Council's Green Spaces Team and meet regularly to discuss any improvements and solve any problems that arise. They now have a maintenance agreement in place with the Parks Department and this will be in place for 10 years.

Anecdotal evidence from park users points to much greater levels of satisfaction since the project started.

Conclusions

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

- Delivering a range of activities and events that attract a diverse audience
- Forming links with existing voluntary sector organisations in order to attract more volunteers
- Recruiting a dedicated gardener for the park



Entrance before work



Entrance after work