

Parks for People Case Study: Castle Park, Frodsham

This report summarises our findings from Castle Park, Frodsham. 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

Castle Park is situated on the western fringe of Frodsham, Cheshire. It lies both within Overton Conservation area and a site designated as one with archaeological potential, with most of the parkland lying within the boundary of the Medieval Borough and accommodating the site of the Medieval Castle. In 1851 Edward Kemp was commissioned to lay out the woods and gardens and these improved grounds featured heavily in Kemp's book 'How to lay out a garden'.

Today the park is open all year round to the public, offering facilities such as a children's play area, a fitness trail through the woodland, a bowling green, two tennis courts, formal and ornamental gardens and a garden designed specifically for the disabled. In addition there is a significant woodland area with associated water features, the former being over-mature and the latter no longer functioning properly.

The project aims to restore and protect this important Edward Kemp landscape, whilst also developing new landscape habitats and facilities that will improve public access and involvement in the park.

The Castle Park Project builds upon a large consultation exercise with the local community and other stakeholders. Generic proposals for the park will allow for the improvement to infrastructure, particularly in respect of existing footpaths and driveways, disabled access, park furniture, CCTV, lighting, enhanced management and maintenance, species diversity and ecology and water features. The overall aims of the project include developing a broader audience, ensuring access for all and the implementation of training key elements.

Outcome 1: increasing the range of audiences

The park identified visitor numbers of 440,628, which it aims to increase to 528,754. No targets are set to address usage by women or BME residents but the project does target an increase in disabled users. The project also aims to gain a satisfaction rating of 85%.

To support delivery of these aims, the project has boosted its efforts to monitor usage and put in place a programme of events. Automated people counters were installed in August 2007 and these showed that there were approximately 380,000 person visits annually. However, the construction works on site which commenced in April 2009 meant that some of the people counters were removed and accurate counts have not been maintained during this period. However, it is felt that visitor numbers have remained at previous levels.

Audience development activities have focused on the use of events and activities to attract people to the park. These events include 'the Enchanted Park' held in late November 2010, a week long event to coincide with National Tree Week and attracted local schools and other visitors to the park to learn about and understand the woodland ecology of the site.

The park is proving to be a popular venue for events and other local organisations are now approaching the Council to use the park as a venue for events. A local church has run a family event in the park and a 70s themed "micro-music" festival also proved successful.

The development of new sports facilities within the park, the provision of a flood lit multi-use games area and sports pavilion means that there are now more facilities for teenagers and older children within the park. This will provide enhanced opportunities for youth engagement and positive activities for young people. Furthermore, the new facilities will be used as a basis for sports coaching.

Outcome 2: Conserving and improving the heritage value

The physical restoration work has resulted in;

- Restoration of the landscape setting of Castle Park House (removal of inappropriate play area)
- Restoration of the Conservatory
- Restoration of Kemp's Formal Garden including fountains
- Restoration of the American Garden
- Restoration of the Synagogue Well
- Access improvements including new pedestrian access
- Signage and interpretation
- Woodland management
- Access to geological heritage has been improved & interpreted.

To support the capital works, the Frodsham Local History Group has assisted with historical research and the development of the interpretive materials. Additional information is available on the Council's website and the Northwich and Rural North Community website. Events and activities have been used to interpret the park and bring the heritage "to life" and these events will continue in the future.

The onsite interpretation and events aim to provide "subtle exposure" to the heritage value of Castle Park and aim to increase visitors' understanding and appreciation of the heritage value of the park.

Outcome 3: Increasing the range of volunteers

The project aims to more than double the number of volunteers at the park from a baseline of 21 volunteers to 50. The focus on delivery of the capital works means that little progress has been made to date. However, more recently work has been undertaken to develop the membership and scope of the Friends of Castle Park and this will become the future focus for volunteer activity. There are now approximately 30 people on the mailing list for the groups and the authority aims to develop the range of volunteer opportunities available in the park. In addition, there are plans to

develop a volunteer gardening group to assist with horticultural tasks, woodland management and other activities.

Outcome 4: Improving skills and knowledge through training

The project will train 9 members of staff and 15 volunteers and help obtain 23 qualifications, largely in operation and maintenance of equipment. Training during the delivery stage has tended to concentrate on operational and induction training as facilities / features have been installed and handed over to the park's staff. This includes an induction and familiarisation training for the buildings (opening up procedures, alarms, lighting, heating systems etc), fountains, play area inspection, and other features. Generally, this has been effective and staff have adapted effectively to taking on the operation and maintenance of these facilities.

Outcome 5: Improving management and maintenance

An application for Green Flag was submitted in January 2010. The management plan is currently being updated to reflect the implementation of the capital works and to provide a more streamlined document. The challenge will be to demonstrate the track record in sustaining the quality of the improvements and the wider park so soon after the implementation of the capital works.

A new set of Service Standards are currently being developed for Castle Park (and 4 other 'urban' parks) within the authority area. Overall, the restoration of the park has meant that park staff have responsibility for maintaining additional features such as the play area and that these receive higher levels of use than previously.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the improvements are valued by local residents and park users. However, there is an acceptance by the authority that a more structured framework needs to be implemented to ensure that the success of the project can be demonstrated.

The management and maintenance plan is currently being updated and a woodland management plan will be developed in due course. The training plan will be reviewed and a broader approach to training adopted to address the risk of the potential loss of more skilled and experienced staff.

Conclusions

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

- Attracting a range of external organisations to run events and activities in the park
- Engaging a local history group to assist with research and interpretive materials
- Development of Service Standards for the park



Figure 1 - Picture taken before work