

Parks for People Case Study: Burslem Park, Stoke on Trent

This report summarises our findings from Burslem Park in Stoke on Trent. 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

At 22 acres, Burslem Park in Stoke-on-Trent is one of the largest registered Victorian Parks in the UK and is listed Grade II on English Heritage's Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest. In terms of physical restoration, the park is focusing on the repair of buildings and historic structures, particularly the formal terrace garden, containing an Elizabethan bandstand and pavilion.

The project has been approved at stage 2 and has been awarded £2.2m of HLF funding. The capital works started in spring 2011.

Outcome 1: increasing the range of audiences

Before the project started, the park had 198,524 person visits per year. From surveys carried out with users, 39% were male, 15% were disabled, 1% were under 16 and 6% aged 16-24. Both young people and disabled people were identified as target groups, as both are under-represented compared to the local population. The project wanted to see an increase in male visitors to 47%, disabled visitors to 18% and young people to 19%. Overall, the project wants to see an increase of visitors by 20% to 238,229 annual person visits.

The project wants to focus particularly on engaging with schools, residents groups and community groups and to do this the project recruited an Urban Park Ranger during the development phase. The ranger has been working closely with nearby schools and the local college to ensure that children have a say about future projects within the park. The project also plans to employ junior park rangers and develop more after school clubs within the park and a newsletter and website has been set up to engage with the local community.

Gate counters and surveys have also been implemented in order to collect quantitative and qualitative data on audience numbers.

As the capital works have not yet started, it is too soon to start collecting detailed data on impact against this outcome. The project manager feels that there is greater awareness of the park amongst the local community, as they have noticed an increase in attendance at regular health walks. A recent survey carried out in 2009 of 108 visitors also showed that the percentage of young people aged between 16 and 24 had increased to 21%, considerably higher than both the baseline (6%) and target (9%).

Overall satisfaction with the park has also increased; from a baseline of 61% in 2007 to 70% in 2009. The project hopes to increase this further to 73% once the capital works are completed.

The project has emphasised the importance of parks to the local community and actually how well used they are; they were astounded that the park has almost 200,000 annual visitors. The project now has real knowledge about their visitors and are keen to ensure that this is the case for all their other major parks. This is likely to be a consideration in their future staffing structure for parks.

Outcome 2: Conserving and improving the heritage value

The restoration works started in Spring 2011, which include;

- 2 buildings repaired/restored (the pavilion and lodge)
- 11 historic monuments repaired /restored (including gates, shelters, drinking fountains and display fountains)
- Enhancement of landscape features
- 3 lost features to be reconstructed (sculpture and fountains)
- 50% of the park's path and road system to be repaired
- Habitat protection/creation

Tree felling work has made a big difference to the park both in terms of aesthetics and as an education exercise to volunteers. They have been able to give an educational focus to this work, as tree felling experts have been able to explain the type of tree being felled and the reasons why to local volunteers. Wood carvers and artists have also been invited to make use of the stumps.

The park has a strong and active Friends group, which runs a weekly historical walk through the park. These are advertised in the local newsletter, on the park website and in the community room located in the pavilion. The community room also displays a history of the park and intends to publicise this to incorporate greater input from schools and local children.

The community room has seen an increase in use and the history walks increase by a few participants each time with the last walk consisting of 7 visitors. The park newsletter is currently distributed to over 1,000 people with the scope of increasing the distribution area further than the surrounding neighbourhood.

Outcome 3: Increasing the range of volunteers

The park has a strong Friends group, and the Local Authority have been working with these volunteers since before the HLF funded project started. Before the project started there were 19 volunteers involved, and they have a target to increase this to 23. The existing volunteers were also predominantly male (73%) and they wish to increase the proportion of female volunteers to around 50%. They are also hoping to increase the number of young volunteers, through the recruitment of junior park rangers. The current volunteers consist of members of the Friends group, other local residents and 3 regular volunteers from an educational centre for people with physical and learning disabilities. To achieve their target they are starting to hold open day taster sessions to attract more volunteers.

The park has built links with young people, with a view to establishing a Voluntary Young Park Partnership. So far volunteers have mainly been involved in the development of the restoration project, consultation activities, running park events, leading health and history walks, manning the community room and with the

restoration project display. They have also formed a relationship with Regent College, an educational establishment for people with disabilities.

So far the project has seen a slight increase in the number of volunteers overall from 18 last year to 19 this year. This is coupled with an increase in disabled volunteers (from none to 3).

The Urban Park Ranger has also developed procedures for engaging volunteers - safeguarding, health and safety induction, etc. He has also developed simple job descriptions for various volunteer opportunities and these are advertised through the local Voluntary Services office.

Developing volunteering opportunities has brought significant benefits to particular individuals. One example is a retired volunteer who is the leading light in the Friends group. He lives across the road from the park and has been heavily involved in its improvement and restoration for over 10 years (well before the HLF project started). He spends most days in the park and works in the Friends office in the pavilion and the volunteering has helped to give meaning to his life in retirement. He was individually honoured by the Lord Mayor in 2010 for his contribution to the park and to the successful HLF bid.

The HLF project has helped the Local Authority to focus on the benefits of volunteering - to the volunteer and to the organisation - and they believe that the post of Urban Park Ranger is vital to driving the engagement of volunteers

Outcome 4: Improving skills and knowledge through training

The project aims to train 20 staff and 7 volunteers by 2020. They also plan to encourage 3 work placements with the Urban Park Ranger responsible for delivering training. As part of this the ranger will be attending a foundation course looking at local curriculum and how best to integrate the park redevelopment and volunteer development into the training process. The Friends group has received guided walks training and some of the parks team have started restoration training.

Both staff and volunteers have benefited from the training on offer. Feedback from volunteers has been positive and the park expects the first round of volunteers to complete their training requirements in the spring of next year. The training has benefited the project as more people are now able to carry out a greater variety of tasks. Also, the volunteers are able to have a greater sense of ownership over the project and are able to increase their level of responsibility.

Those trained have been able to extend their range of skills. For example, the park staff have trained in rockery repairs and are now more confident in undertaking the task, as well as being more competent. They are also able to feel more involved in the park's restoration.

Those trained have also been able to undertake a wider range of tasks. In the case of the Green Flag training, this has prompted staff to be more aware of what contributes towards a successful park.

In the future the project will be looking to employ 2 young apprentices under the horticulture team. They will also carry out Green Flag training along with work experience training.

Outcome 5: Improving management and maintenance

The project plans to externally refurbish the pavilion and to incorporate a cafe within it. A lease arrangement with the cafe will provide a further revenue stream for the

park and there is the potential for the local college to increase their usage of the pavilion as a teaching facility.

The park does not yet hold Green Flag status, but is working towards it. A mock independent assessment against the Green Flag criteria in 2009 showed a score of 43, against a score of 39 taken before the project started.

Conclusions

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

- Recruiting an Urban Park Ranger during the development stage to start working with schools and community groups
- Using the Friends group to develop heritage appreciation activities
- Running open days and taster sessions to attract more volunteers