

Parks for People Case Study: Barnes Park, Sunderland

This report summarises our findings from Barnes Park in Sunderland. 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

Barnes Park was created during the 1906/07 recession as a work creation initiative and provided employment for 2,000 people. Although the park was created without a formal design and without the involvement of renowned landscape gardeners of the day, its design and implementation were considered a success and the park has matured and flourished over the last 100 years.

Key features of the park include the collection of mature trees which dominate the site and also the valley itself in which it is situated, which is characterised by a stream which feeds into Bishopwearmouth Burn. Several bridges cross the burn and entrance to the lake, which is home to a variety of water fowl, giving the park its unique character. A Grade II listed bandstand lies at the heart of the tree edged valley and the coach house is the largest remnant of the park's Victorian history.

Other key features include;

- 4 bowling greens and 2 bowls pavilions
- 10 tennis courts and a basketball court
- Five a-side football pitch and play area
- Civil war cannon
- Stone pillars and railings

The park was awarded £2.46m of HLF funding and the capital works are underway. The park is due to fully re-open in Spring 2011.

Outcome 1: increasing the range of audiences

Baseline visitor numbers to the park were 129,000 although the intent is to increase this to the initial target of 255,000. A baseline survey showed 92% of users were white British and 4% were disabled. The age group with the highest representation was 65-74 years whilst the lowest was 75-84 years. Park satisfaction was found to be 59%.

To secure this increase in attendance, the park included a set of activities in its Audience Development Plan (ADP) which included;

- Events programme
- Specialist children and young people's play provision

- Work with local schools, colleges, university, community and voluntary groups
- Trim trails

Key to achieving greater usage has been efforts to make the park safer. They have built new play areas, cleared trees and installed CCTV, which has increased visibility and security within the park. Although not fully reopening until Spring 2011, they have organised events and used the project construction time to build links with local groups. Early results are promising, with attendances at times reaching over 500 and people having to queue to get in.

Delivery of the Audience Development Plan (ADP) is progressing well. There is a significant Bangladeshi community in the local area, and their previous use of the park was negligible, thought mainly to have been due to anti-social activity. However, through clearing trees and shrubs, the installation of CCTV and employment of a security warden, and community cohesion meetings, the park is felt to be much safer. There is also a community orchard and several new pathways that are fully accessible. By building links with local groups it is hoped that the population will feel more confident to use the park.

Although no results have yet been produced by gate counts, the early impression is that visitor numbers are up significantly and all parts of the park, including the sensory garden, are now being used by students, older people and children. Preparations are now being made for the full opening of the park.

Outcome 2: Conserving and improving the heritage value

The capital works will result in;

- 5 historic features restored/repared (2 completed so far)
- 1 lost feature reconstructed (already completed)

The project involves restoring the boundary railings, the bandstand, the ornate gates, the stone gateway and pillars, the stone archway next to the coach house, and the original benches. There will also be improvements to the lake and the cannon will be restored and will be put back with interpretation. The archway entrance to the Coach House cafe was restored along with replica gates being made for the Durham Road entrances.

To increase awareness and appreciation of the park's heritage, there will be a time capsule project, being developed alongside local schools. The Friends Group are producing a DVD that shows the history of the park, outlining the work that has been (and will be) done. The park's team and Friends Group are analysing the local history and have a 'living history project'. They have a website which is well used by local schools, and have had articles in the local press requesting old photographs or postcards of the park from throughout its 100 year history, which were then exhibited in the library.

Another example of heritage appreciation is the preservation of the golden key used at the park's original opening. The team tracked down the key and the current owner now brings it to events.

Although no formal surveys have yet been undertaken, feedback from the Friends Group has been positive, and the noticeboards at the entrance to the park are continually updated with news about events, etc, and are proving popular.

Outcome 3: Increasing the range of volunteers

Although no formal volunteer opportunities have yet been established (as the capital works are not yet finished) more and more groups now want to be involved. Walkabouts with the Friends is one way the park are attempting to attract more possible volunteers. So far they have 29 volunteers involved delivering 112 volunteer hours and have been involved in management, capital works and one-off events.

The project is attempting to increase the number of volunteers from a baseline of 20 to 200 and want to involve them in a variety of areas including management, maintenance, horticulture, access, marketing and one-off events.

Outcome 4: Improving skills and knowledge through training

The target is to have 9 staff trained, 5 work experience placements, 3 qualifications and 3 third parties using the park as a training venue. This is from a baseline of zero.

Some training has been incorporated into the park project. There are five apprentices (three or four will stay with the park depending on funding) working with the contractors which is helping them understand the various park features. Staff have also attended a “working with volunteers” course which was very useful and will aid in future development and training.

Looking ahead, the training/development plan is on course and there are plans to provide training in visitor counting and surveys with the Friends Group. There are also plans being considered to develop the park as a training base.

Outcome 5: Improving management and maintenance

Although the park does not have Green Flag status, the team has been working with the Parks Department since the bid stage to ascertain what work would need to be undertaken (i.e. bedding, etc) in order to apply for Green Flag status in the future.

Now that the park is partly opened and in use, efforts are being implemented to move towards meeting criteria. For example, bins have been relocated to make better use of them and are emptied on a more regular basis. Also, new toilets have meant additional cleaning of that area is required.

Conclusions

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

- Building links with particular groups (for example the Bangladeshi community) to understand barriers to use and local needs
- Involving local schools and volunteers in developing heritage projects to raise levels of understanding and ownership
- Staff trained in working with volunteers, to ensure they are able to effectively manage and support their volunteer workforce



Figure 1 - picture taken before work started