

Parks for People Case Study: Stewart Park, Middlesbrough

This report summarises our findings from Stewart Park, Middlesbrough. 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

This project has two main aims: It will celebrate and interpret the great heritage of Captain Cook, Henry Bolckow and Thomas Dormand Stewart who gave the estate to the people of Middlesbrough. It will also restore and develop Stewart Park as a centre of horticultural excellence, with a variety of training opportunities and a full and varied events programme.

The Friends of Stewart Park, Young and Volunteer Rangers, school/college placements and community payback (probation services) will help restore, to public enjoyment, the many hidden and neglected features such as the lake and ponds, the overgrown flower and walled gardens and the Doric temple.

Outcome 1: increasing the range of audiences

The project currently enjoys visitor numbers of 242,850 with a roughly equal split between male and female visitors. Although no target is set for BME visits, there is a target of 10% usage by disabled people and 60% for overall satisfaction.

To date progress has been monitored at events, which are key to the project's ambitions to increase the range of audiences. Thus, to realise this ambition they are attempting to offer a variety of events targeting various age groups. Moreover, an education and events officer has recently been appointed who will be working on the Audience Development Plan (ADP) full time. The officer believes the range of events have been very good and has instructed the ranger to carry out five feedback sessions each month to get visitors' views as they go in and out of the park.

The park also seems a lot busier compared to how it was prior to the project and people are coming from further away to visit the park or museum. However, although the park already has more facilities than before they are looking to further add to these in the future.

Outcome 2: Conserving and improving the heritage value

The fine Victorian estate buildings will be renovated to provide publicly accessible community buildings situated around two sheltered public events spaces not currently available in the park. The buildings will be used for informal and formal historical interpretation, arts display space, craft and horticultural workshops and clubs. The estate buildings will include a visitor centre that will feature exhibitions, a volunteer base, animal centre, a shop, a tea garden and a horticultural and traditional skills vocational training base with restored walled gardens.

Current physical restoration work has resulted in;

- 70% of landscape features being brought back into use
- 20% of all pathways being restored

This has allowed the park team to develop heritage trails, which look at the park's entire history. Although at an early stage of development, early feedback has been very positive.

Outcome 3: Increasing the range of volunteers

The project sets out ambitious plans to increase the number of volunteers from 25 to 125, to be achieved by building on the very strong Friends Group and by providing opportunities for links with the probation service and the unemployed.

The community buildings will allow the development of a strong community volunteers' activity base and meeting area.

Outcome 4: Improving skills and knowledge through training

The park team is planning to train 295 staff, 30 volunteers and obtain 1 qualification, with trainees being drawn from local modern apprentices and adults with severe learning difficulties and mental health problems.

A number of training initiatives have already begun, and both staff and volunteers have benefitted from these. For example, social care and forensics trainees have been working in the walled garden, increasing not only the number of trainees working in the park but also use of the park itself.

Furthermore, good links have been established with local schools and feedback here has been very positive. This has also helped to increase the range of audiences within the park and thus work towards Outcome 1 objectives.

Outcome 5: Improving management and maintenance

The park will be re-applying for Green Flag status in 2012 when the work is completed. A parks manager was appointed in April 2010 while the volunteer groups and Future Jobs Fund groups have increased the quantity and quality of maintenance. Similarly, there are also plans to appoint a horticultural advisor to work alongside the parks manager to work with the school work experience groups, as well as the park ranger to increase maintenance.

Conclusions

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

- Employing an activities and events officer to lead on delivery of ADP
- Developing links with schools for training opportunities
- Use of Future Jobs Fund to improve maintenance