

3.3.1 Promoting greater use

- Green spaces are an asset to any community. They need to be promoted to encourage greater use.
- Green space managers need to have a customer focus and respond to demand.
- Making it easy to find out what is going on in local parks and green spaces will encourage greater use.

Green spaces are a fantastic asset to any community. We need to celebrate and promote the value of green spaces more fully to encourage everyone to think how they might use their space for what they want. It is important that people know about what local parks and green space offers and are encouraged to use them more fully.

The key to attracting people to your park is to know your customers – to know why and when they use the park and what facilities they want. Understanding your customer will help you to make decisions about the facilities to provide, the opening times for your park, what promotional activities to hold and how to communicate with park visitors.

In addition you need to identify what makes your parks special or different from others. The majority of parks have historical, ecological, or other local significance that can be used in promotions. Your events programme or facilities, particularly those facilities for children, might provide you with a point of difference.

Promotional and communications activities can be as simple as providing quality information about availability and opening times. But they can also involve imaginative approaches, such as organising events and running healthy walks.

The process of developing green space strategies and site management plans will have already made links to the local community and provided an understanding of what people want. A communications plan will help you put your strategies and plans into practice to attract people into your park and formulate an integrated programme of activity.

Communications plan outline

1. Analysis of customers and facilities
2. Objectives and goals
3. Unique selling points
4. Communications activities
5. Resources (people and money)
6. Implementation (timelines and milestones)

Promotional events

Managers should try to develop an appropriate programme of community events. Targeted events can encourage new audiences into the park and consultation with local residents will help you choose the right type of events to run.

A growing number of authorities promote ambitious events programmes ranging from music and firework displays to balloon fiestas. If planning large-scale events, it may be appropriate to use a commercial event organiser, as this kind of event may also provide your park with a source of revenue for reinvestment. Remember that, although larger-scale events bring diversity to the park and promote their use, they can also bring new pressures and concerns for managers, such as litter and excessive wear.

Smaller-scale events, explaining the park's history, horticulture, and wildlife, will also draw people in. Green Gyms, park walks and exercise groups promote health and well-being. Other popular events for parks include tree-planting days and school excursions.

Engaging volunteers

Many local authorities run volunteer programmes, into which park managers can aim to incorporate a park element. Volunteers could be used to help park staff run events – or the parks could be used to hold thank-you walking tours or picnics for the volunteers. Volunteers will then become ambassadors for the park, increasing word-of-mouth promotion.

Engaging press

Local parks make good local stories, and a local newspaper could highlight your summer programme of events or engage the community in deciding how the park should be developed and maintained. For more details, see www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk

Engaging schools

Additional stories and interest can be generated by running competitions within local schools, on flora, fauna, wildlife or local

history. This could be incorporated as part of their education curricula. You could contact local schools directly, or go through the Education Unit within the Local Authority.

Engaging others

Other organisations create events and are often looking for venues. For example, most schools, sports and youth clubs hold fundraising events and local authorities can use the space for people's events. Every year on the first Wednesday of August, the Children's Play Council and the Children's Society co-ordinate National Playday. All over the UK local groups and play workers organise events that celebrate children's play. Many managers use Playday to promote green spaces to local children and young people. www.playday.org.uk

Communication tools

Once you have decided what type of activities and promotions you are going to carry out, you need to communicate with your audiences. General communications are also vital to help you increase the positive use of parks and ensure that green spaces are valued as part of a healthy, well-balanced lifestyle.



You can take advantage of the expertise of your local authority's marketing and PR unit. You can also use your networks and business partners to help communicate with as many people as possible.

Signage

Good signage in and around the green space are important tools for communication, helping your customers access and use the park appropriately. Signage should be attractively designed, well positioned and kept in a good state of repair.

Site notice boards can provide management information about flora, fauna and wildlife within your area to educate and inform your customers. They can also be useful for organisations to exchange information.

You need to ensure that there are suitable signs to direct people to your park. Directional signs from local public transport routes or car parking areas will help people find their way – if your park is easy to find people will be more likely to return.

Official presence

People working in green spaces are an asset and their presence makes visitors feel more comfortable. They should be easily identifiable to the public, well informed and willing to assist visitors. Staff, whether they are contractors, rangers or others, need to be given adequate training on the green space, its history and facilities and dealing with the public.

Thinking more widely the range of uses of green spaces also means that others, such as public health and community safety professionals could have a role in using green spaces to support their objectives.

Tools for success

- **Green Flag Awards scheme** – The Green Flag Awards manual has a marketing and promotions component. The events calendar on the Green Flag Awards website also provides information on events taking place at winning sites and can be a good source of ideas. www.greenflagaward.org.uk
- **Park It!** is a series of 12 events taking place regionally in parks throughout the UK. These events will inspire communities to discover the history of their parks and celebrate their significance to the people who use them. www.green-space.org.uk/parkit

In practice

Bringing heritage to life

Weaste Cemetery is a tranquil green oasis in a densely populated urban landscape. Within its 39 acres, a wide variety of trees and wild flowers create a haven for wildlife. The Grade II listed Victorian cemetery contains a wealth of historical information about Salford and its people that, until recently, was underused by the local community.

The primary aim of the project was to release the heritage value of this hidden gem in a way that fully engaged with people of all ages. The project was designed to involve people from Salford, including schoolchildren, in the study of locally built, natural and cultural heritage.

It also aimed to reduce vandalism, increase civic pride, increase visitor numbers,

enhance the natural environment, and create opportunities for lifelong learning.

The design and installation of a heritage and ecology trail at Weaste Cemetery was the foundation of the revival of the cemetery. The trail comprises a series of seven illustrated outdoor interpretation panels situated at points of historical and natural interest. The trail is accompanied by a laminated guide, education packs, public events, schools visits and local and regional media coverage.

School visits and organised public events led to an increase in the number of people using the cemetery for education, appropriate recreation and social interaction. Since the launch of the trail in September 2004 at least 90 children and 150 adults have enjoyed learning about the value of the historic and natural environment.

Weaste Cemetery has suffered from anti-social behaviour in the past. Encouragingly, the trail interpretation panels at the site have suffered no deliberate damage since the launch of the facility almost a year ago.

The project was funded with a grant award of £32,000 from Greening Greater Manchester (contributed to by Landfill Tax Credit, BIFFA Waste Management Limited, Groundwork North West, Greater Manchester Waste Disposal Authority, and the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities).

Marketing plan brings new lease of life

Wellington Park lies on the fringe of Wellington in Taunton and serves the local community. Heritage Lottery Funding in 2000 helped restore this beautifully designed Edwardian ornamental park to its former glory and to secure its national heritage interest. The council's goal to encourage and maximise the use of the park by everyone led to the development of a marketing plan.

A coalition of park's staff and community groups, including Friends of Wellington Park, set about identifying the current and potential users and how people wanted to use the park. This audit of users formed the foundations for a comprehensive marketing plan setting out targets, actions, responsibilities and a timeframe for delivery and review.

Actions included: meeting the Green Flag criteria, especially creating a welcoming place and applying high maintenance standards; obtaining and retaining a Green Flag Award; hosting more and diverse events by the Friend's group; producing leaflets on the park about its heritage and tree trails for distribution through council offices, the local



tourist information office, sports centre, etc; improving access to the park by sign-posting and developing a new heritage trail from the town centre; promoting the park locally through tourist information; running training and educational days on horticulture and wildlife; partnership working with community groups, local care providers, doctors and leisure providers.

The Friends of Wellington Group have also produced a website (www.fowp.ik.com) devoted to the park and to publicise itself and its annual events using Community Website Builder Toolkit – see www.communitykit.ik.com

As a result of the marketing plan, more people from all walks of life are visiting the park, and using the space in a variety of ways, from attending the wide range of events hosted there (from 100-2,000 people), to keeping fit and learning new skills, or just soaking up the quiet and relaxing atmosphere. On the back of this success Taunton Deane Borough Council have rolled out marketing plans for other key parks and are now considering a strategic marketing plan for the whole of the green space network with site-specific action plans. Wellington Park has won a Green Flag Award for the past two years.