

Park It!
celebrating people in parks

CASE STUDY

Park It! South East



Regency Birthday Bash

Bedford Square, 03.07.05



The park

Bedford Square is a small residential square next to the beach at Brighton. The gardens have recently been renovated by the council. The Square is currently celebrating its 200th anniversary.

Sitting next to the Brighton Hotel and opposite the Victorian Bandstand, the square was started in 1801 and finished by the late 1820's. The first tenant moved in during 1805. Originally Bedford Square consisted of the two houses at the base of the square now part of Kings Road and the Brighton Hotel. Having its own private garden similar to Montpelier Terrace, the garden was eventually acquired by Brighton Council in the mid 20th Century.

The event

The group decided to reflect the Square's Regency links at this event which attracted 300 people and celebrate its 200th birthday. An historical photograph and information display chronicling the life and characters of the square over the last 200 years, was created by one of the Friends members.

All of the Friends dressed in Regency costume, wandered around the square and chatted to visitors about the square and its history. Taste buds were tempted by the examples of Regency cooking on display for people to sample, as they listened to live music performed by a local band. The children spent the afternoon being entertained by a stiltwalker and magician.



The community group

The Friends of Bedford Square are very active and formed in September 2004. They act as a residents group as well as care for the Square. They have a very good website and send a regular e-newsletter to all members. Before the event there were no strong links with the council, but this was something they were keen to develop. In the past they had held small events for the Friends and residents only, but nothing that had focused on the heritage of the Square and nothing open to the wider public.

Feedback

The Friends and everyone attending thought the whole day went very well. Everybody enjoyed themselves including the Friends as well as the visitors. The attendance of 300 people was beyond their expectations for their small square, drawing a good local audience. Typical was one local woman and her granddaughter saw the event as they passed and promptly went home to fetch a picnic before returning to join the fun.



It's been a terrific day. I've never seen so many people in the park before. Everybody's having a great time and it was nice to see BBC Television filming the goings on

Liam Mandville
Friends of Bedford Square

The benefits

The group feel they have gained overall confidence about contacting people such as suppliers and the media. The organisation of the event also increased their confidence in making grant applications, having successfully applied for a festival grant from the council.

In the past there wasn't a relationship with the council. However, they have now established a strong relationship with the local authority. As a direct result of the event and the raised awareness of the Square, the council's parks department has since visited the site more frequently, cutting the grass increasingly regularly and carrying out plantings in the Square. This demonstrates the direct effect increased prominence can have for a small green space.

The event developed a closer community feel to the local area with many people, neighbours and passers-by coming into the park. The Friends group is better known now, within the council and in the area, thanks to the publicity about the event. One consequence is that two new people have turned up to Friends groups meetings since the event, which is a notable increase for small group.

The future

The Friends have now established a strong relationship with the council from which they hope to benefit from in the future. As a direct result of this improved relationship, they have been asked by other community groups and the council to form a network of associations working with parks and green spaces across Brighton.

A Christmas event is now being planned alongside another similar event for the summer next year, although this is dependent on funding as the Friends are keen to build on the momentum generated by this event.



Lessons learnt

- A list of suppliers at the start of the event organisation is useful and can provide a good idea of where to start.
- A list of grant providers and funds as well as advice on fundraising would also be beneficial at the start of the process.
- Make sure communication between volunteers and staff on the day of the event is sufficient because otherwise this can lead to confusion as to who is responsible for individual tasks, for example the collection of donation tins or the completion of evaluation forms.

Further information

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Links

Park It! – www.park-it.org.uk
GreenSpace – www.green-space.org.uk
Heritage Lottery Fund – www.hlf.org.uk
Friends of Bedford Square - www.fobsbrighton.info

