

Park it!  
celebrating people in parks

# CASE STUDY

## Park It! East



# Celebrating Colchester's Park Life

## Castle Park, 03.09.05



### The park

Castle Park is an award winning Victorian garden, set in 33 acres of glorious gently sloping parkland. There is a children's play area, boating lake, and great walks along the River Colne. Castle Park is also a superb venue for many open-air events and concerts.

Colchester Castle, situated within the park grounds, was built around the ruins of the colossal Temple of Claudius, after William the Conqueror ordered castles to be built throughout England. The Castle today holds a museum which takes you back over important events from 2,000 years of British history.

### The event

The event was attended by 6,000 people. A strong heritage theme was evident throughout the day, helping to emphasise the importance of the park's past to the town today.



The event included storytelling with Boudica, reliving her revolt against the Romans in AD60, which began with an attack on Colchester, the capital of Roman Britain. The park manager, along with his team of Blue Badge guides, re-enacted scenes from the park's past in full costume, from Roman times to the present day, whilst children dug for Roman treasure around the Castle Bailey. Guided health walks brought to life the park's historical significance to the town and highlighted the importance of the park in encouraging healthy and active lifestyles, whilst young visitors got plenty of exercise on the bouncy castle and playing three-a-side football.

The mini food and drink festival at the event celebrated the fact that in 1156, Richard I bestowed the Colne Fishing Rights on the Borough of Colchester, through selling Colchester's famous oysters along with locally brewed beer. Local artists worked with children on the day to make kites to fly in the park. They also had the chance to learn how to help the planet with Recyclobeat, who demonstrated how to make music out of discarded household items. A variety of nature stalls and workshops touched upon the importance of horticulture within the park and taught visitors how to plant bulbs.

Colne Harmony filled the park with ladies' barbershop harmonies and the Backroom Boys got visitors jiving in the sunshine. As the day drew to a close, the Castle Bailey filled with visitors dancing and clapping to the beat of Stefan's African Drum Troop.



The day was excellent, great fun and highly successful for all those who took part. Everybody seemed to enjoy themselves and many people asked if we could do it again next year. The event has really helped to establish the Friends group and has encouraged more members of the local community to get involved in their park.

Catherine Jaques, Friends of Castle Park.

### The community group

The Friends of Castle Park are a newly established group with little experience of organising events. 'Celebrating Colchester's Park Life' was the Friends' first event in the park. Ian Baalham from the Council felt this would be a great opportunity for the Friends to attract greater local involvement and interest, something the Friends jumped at this opportunity.

### Feedback

The event was extremely successful and many commented on the relaxed and fun atmosphere. All seemed to have a very enjoyable day, reflected in the high numbers of visitors throughout the day, and many said they would love to see more events like this held in Castle Park.

90% of visitors rated the overall event as 'excellent' or 'good'. 100% of people said they would attend a future event in the park based

on their experiences of this event and 72% of people said they would like further information about the Friends and other events they organise (figures based on a representative survey conducted on the day).

### The benefits

This event has helped to raise awareness of the Friends and has moved them onto the next stage of their development. Three very enthusiastic members have been identified through this process, which will help to carry the group forward into the future. Both the local authority and the Friends feel it has been a great bonding experience, forming a very close relationship between the two. The Friends feel that Ian and Kirsti from the council are effectively members of their group, which will benefit their work greatly in the future.

The Friends have seen a 100% increase in their contacts list as a result of the event, collecting 30 new contacts on the day, helping to expand their membership. They have also gathered together an exhaustive list of suppliers, which will be a useful resource when organising any future events.



The Friends have gained a great deal of experience as a result of organising this event and are very keen to host another next year. A great sense of achievement was felt by both the Friends and the local authority and has proved to be a catalyst for the Friends group.

Black Thunder from the local radio station SGR Colchester was present on the day and provided good coverage of the day's activities, raising awareness of the park as well as the Friends.

### The future

The Friends and the council would like to hold a similar event next year. Despite all the hard work and time that went into making this one such a success, they enjoyed every minute of it and can't wait to do it all over again. The Friends are keen to keep the momentum going for the group; they have since been researching other Friends groups across the country in order to put new ideas forward to the members.

The Friends plan to hold a social evening, inviting the 30 new contacts gathered on the day, in hope of expanding their membership and increasing their volunteer numbers. This will also help to increase the awareness of the Friends in the local area, attracting further members to the group.



## Lessons learnt

- Risk assessment training is crucial as every supplier must complete their own risk assessment and insurance.
- If posters and flyers are to be used to advertise the event, it needs to be made sure that the title of the event, location, date and time feature prominently. Any photos used should be locally important, featuring the park itself if possible.
- Be realistic with the budget available, size of space required and activities taking place within this space.
- Create critical paths with key deadlines and dates for all partners as early as possible.
- A timetable mapping out the entire process, from the initial planning stage, to the day of the event needs to be put together. This will help all involved know what needs to be done when and will help to prevent a mad rush in the last two weeks leading up to the event.
- Stewards need training and a briefing session on the morning of the event. During the event, radio contact is necessary with larger events.
- Rules for all suppliers on the day are essential. These need to state when to turn up, where to park, what to bring, and when to leave.
- If an event spreads across several areas of the park, you need to ensure all are linked sufficiently with signs and banners to make sure that certain areas do not feel isolated.
- After an event, the set-down and clearing-up time must not be underestimated.

### Further information

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### Links

Park It! – [www.park-it.org.uk](http://www.park-it.org.uk)

GreenSpace – [www.green-space.org.uk](http://www.green-space.org.uk)

Heritage Lottery Fund – [www.hlf.org.uk](http://www.hlf.org.uk)

Colchester Borough Council - [www.colchester.gov.uk](http://www.colchester.gov.uk)

