

Park It!
celebrating people in parks

CASE STUDY

Park It! East Midlands



The Arboretum Smiles Again

Derby Arboretum, 18.09.05



The park

Derby Arboretum was the first public park in England when it was opened in 1840. The original Arboretum consists of a wooded area with mature specimen trees and formal walk ways. The more recent side of the park, or Rose Hill Recreation Ground as it is known, consists of a state of the art children's playground and an open field surrounded by large trees. The total area makes up 17.5 hectares. The whole Arboretum was extensively restored with funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) in 2003. It houses a popular café in the Heart of the Park building, as well as new toilets and offices for park staff.

The event

The event was attended by 6,000 people. The event re-created the original opening event of 1840 to mark the park's 165th birthday and to celebrate the recent HLF restoration. The Friends and the council realised that it would not be possible or appropriate to stage an exact reconstruction, so the event was a modern interpretation of the principle of the original opening, that of a park for the public's enjoyment.



As a result, much of the entertainment had a historical feel to it, including Victorian wash day demonstrations, historical guided tours of the park, an organ grinder and an antique fire engine. A wide variety of children's activities drew on the history of the park, allowing them to take part in a Victorian school class amongst other activities. The day finished with a procession through the park to re-create the original procession of 1840 by the town's civic societies. Children displayed banners and mobiles they had made throughout the afternoon in arts and crafts workshops, led by an Indian drumming display.

In order to reflect the diverse population surrounding the park, a strong multicultural theme was seen as necessary. This was reflected in the musical programme throughout the afternoon, which featured hip hop, rap and world music. A ladies fashion show also gave women a chance to see some of Derby's multicultural fashions.

The community group

The Friends of Derby Arboretum work closely with the council and have been keen to hold a re-opening event ever since the Arboretum was restored in 2003. They are keen to raise awareness of the park at any opportunity, especially its diverse heritage and have helped to organise several events before, although none as large as this.



This event proved that the Arboretum is a wonderful asset for all of Derby's inhabitants. It has reinstated Joseph Strutt's original intention of the grounds being used as a place for entertainment, recreation and education. I hope this will encourage similar events for the future as our Arboretum was designed with events such as this in mind.

Chris Harris,
Friends of Derby
Arboretum

Feedback

The event was extremely successful, especially given that it was an overcast day when several other major events were taking place across the city. People commented on the relaxed, family atmosphere and the fact that the whole park was used, many people re-discovering the park, this being the first time they had visited for several years..

The benefits

The event raised awareness of the whole park. The Arboretum Smiles Again was unique in that it was the first event held in the park to involve the old part of the Arboretum (the original part of the park) as well as the recreational area. The Friends group felt that this greatly benefited the park and raised awareness of a part of the park which is often forgotten. They hope that this has firmly introduced the idea that this area is also ideally suited to events, especially those with an historical focus.

This was the first time that many people had visited the park since its HLF restoration, many of whom couldn't believe how much it had changed. The organisation of the event, particularly on the day, developed relationships between the park staff and rangers and members of the Friends group. While they knew of each other's roles and responsibilities, they had not worked together on a major project before.

In the week leading up to the event the Friends' website received 9,000 hits, which was a record for the site. Linking together with the Park It! website, the internet attracted a number of people from well outside Derby, including several people from the south of England who were carrying out research into the history of the Arboretum.

Several local historical organisations have since linked up with the Friends as a result of reading about the event on the website and are keen to be involved with future events in the Arboretum. The Friends were also introduced to new contacts and organisations on the day of the event. This included a local faith group who made a vital contribution to litter picking after the event and have since expressed interest in working closely with the group in the future.

The future

The Friends and the council would like to hold a similar event next year. Now that they are not restricted to the anniversary of the park's opening, they would like to hold it earlier in the summer. They are very keen to involve the historical part of the park in any future events again, as they feel that this area is slowly getting established in people's minds as a core part of the park. They want to use this newfound momentum as an opportunity to conduct public consultation on the use of the historical side, in terms of events and future restoration.

The event taught the Friends of the necessity to involve local business and attract sponsorship to future events. This is an area they would like to focus on in the future. They are planning to exploit connections they have within the community to attract additional funding to help stage future events.



Lessons learnt

- Make sure that all partners involved have the capacity to organise the event. They must appreciate that workload will develop as the event builds momentum, requiring the greatest commitment throughout the month before the event.
- Make sure there are enough stalls for people to browse. It is often an idea to overbook, as some will not turn up on the day, ensuring that there are no empty areas.
- Be realistic with the budget available, size of space required and activities taking place within this space.
- Make sure all the partners understand their roles at the start of the process.
- Investigate opportunities of business sponsorship to bring in funding for the event. Exploit any links members of the Friends have within the local business community.
- When organising music, consider employing a stage manager to ensure smooth running. Make sure there is a contingency plan in case one of the acts does not turn up on the day, such as playing background music.
- Make sure the Friends stall is located in a prominent position and they are involved in the public-facing side of the event in order to raise their awareness.

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
Derby City Council – www.derby.gov.uk
Derby Arboretum - www.derbyarboretum.co.uk

