

Park It!
celebrating people in parks

CASE STUDY

Park It! West Midlands



Culture and Music Fair

Haden Hill Park 14.08.05



The park

Haden Hill Park was originally a gentlemen's residence in the Victorian period. The original Tudor house dates back 500 years and has recently been restored and opened to the public once more. The council owned Haden Hill museum are the current occupiers of the house.

The surrounding 30 hectares of park have been a public park since 1922 and have recently been restored with a £2.1 million grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). The site has received a Green Flag award for the past two years, a national award recognising quality parks and green spaces across England and Wales.

The event

The event was attended by over 3,000 people throughout the afternoon. The Tudor part of Haden Hill House has recently been restored and has been opened to the public. The Friends and the museum thought that this presented an ideal opportunity to stage an event which focused on this new resource for the community as well as utilising the surrounding parkland.



The event was based around music which drew on the extensive history of the park and house. An Elizabethan band reflected the origins of the house while a Glenn Miller Swing band brought back memories of when the house was used as an operations centre in the Second World War. The event brought the park and house into the modern day with a contemporary dance display from a local dance troupe, something the Friends and the council were particularly keen to see represented.

Further activities included an historical guided tour of the park and the house by the Friends, wildlife tours, Victorian children's games, a children's painting and drawing competition and a variety of community and wildlife stalls.

The community group

The Friends of Haden Hill Estate were originally set up to provide a voice for the House which was then threatened with demolition 12 years ago. They have since raised over £20,000 for the House and successfully campaigned to have it restored and opened to the public. They are keen to encourage use of the House and the park at any opportunity, as the park remains an unknown resource to much of the local community. The Friends have a great deal of experience in conducting guided tours of the park and house, which they utilised on the day of the event. However, this event was the largest they have ever staged in the park.



The event was a huge success and it was fantastic to see so many people enjoying the park and what it has to offer – it made all the hard work worthwhile!

Jack Beard,
Chair of the Friends of Haden Hill
Estate

Feedback

The Friends and the council agreed that they had never seen so many people in the park at one time and the event was a great success. 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 over 80% of people said they would visit the park more often as a result (figures based on a representative survey conducted on the day).

The benefits

The Friends and the council felt that the event greatly increased awareness of the park and the House, attracting a number of visitors from outside the region. It also successfully raised awareness of the Friends group themselves, who received a great deal of attention on their stall, with one person taking out a lifetime membership of the group on the day. The event also helped the Friends and the council to establish new contacts with organisations and suppliers, which they will use for future events in the park.

The organisation of the event has provided the Friends with the confidence to organise a wider variety of events in the future, broadening their remit from their tradition of giving guided tours. As a result of organising this event the Friends now appreciate the value of organising activities which appeal to the younger audience as well. This was illustrated by their desire to have a modern dance troupe display to appeal to teenagers.

When the park was restored with HLF funding, a performance arena was created outside the house. A major purpose of the event was to highlight how this could be used, providing a purpose for it. The arena acted as the focal point of the event, and everyone involved felt that it increased awareness of this part of the park. The Friends feel that more people are using the area surrounding the house since the event. This represented a positive departure for the Friends, who traditionally have focused their events around the House rather than the park itself.



Due to the tight time schedules throughout the afternoon, particularly for the music and the guided tours, members of the Friends group felt that they became much more assertive and confident in dealing with suppliers and members of the public.

The future

The Friends and the council will continue to work closely together to promote the park and the House and raise money for further restoration works. They are planning to organise another event in 2006, and would like to have a multicultural focus to it, involving the local Asian community in particular. They feel that their confidence has increased sufficiently to stage another event in the future. The council see this as a positive move for the Friends. They feel that the organisation of the event successfully broadened the group's horizons and helped them appreciate the full range of activities and events which could be held in the park.

The Friends feel that they need to concentrate on attracting funding to enable them to stage a similar event in the future and have taken this on as a matter of urgency for the group. Supported by Sandwell MBC, the Friends have also been asked to lead and co-ordinate the development of a borough-wide network of Friends groups over the coming months.



Lessons learnt

- Maximise the lead-in period before the event.
- Maintain a flexible approach to event activities and have a back-up if things fall through or need to be changed.
- Make sure that all volunteers are highly visible and identifiable.
- Give some thought to fundraising, grant applications and sponsorship to make the event more sustainable in the long term.
- Make sure people know their roles and responsibilities in the week leading up to the event and on the day, making sure people are aware of timings and activities.

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

