

Park It!
celebrating people in parks

CASE STUDY

Park It! London



Town & Country Fair

Mile End Park, 12.06.05



The park

Mile End Park is a 32 hectare linear park without fencing or gates, constructed on the ethos of ecological and financial sustainability. Initially conceived by Lord Abercrombie in 1944 as a 'green finger', the park was extensively restored and developed in 1999 with funding from the Millennium Commission, although its development and promotion is ongoing.

This unique site offers a range of activities, with go-karts, a climbing wall, a children's play park, pond dipping, all-weather sports, a Connexions youth centre and a music-recording studio. Formal planting and wildflower meadows offer opportunities for rambling and relaxation. The park has held a Green Flag Award, a national scheme to recognise quality in parks and green spaces across England and Wales, for the past two years.

The event

Over 3,000 people attended the first Park It! event of the summer, and of the whole programme. The idea of the event was to explore how a modern urban environment was once connected centrally to the countryside and to discover a hidden history of the park and the surrounding area. The area and park was once known for hop growing, market gardens, farming and much more. The strong rural heritage theme was evident throughout all of the activities in the afternoon and helped to tie the event, and the different activities throughout the park, together.

The event included a dog show, farmer's market, exhibitions by local city farms, donkey and cart rides, plant sales, sheep shearing and wool spinning and a bucking sheep for children. There was also a very popular historical photo collection with a theme on town and country life in the area, with a local history organisation recording oral histories and stories from visitors. A youth theatre group re-enacted scenes from Mile End's diverse history while actors played out various fight scenes from Shakespeare's plays.

Arts and crafts were on show as well, such as wood turning and displays of rope splicing, while children had the opportunity to make boats and bird feeders in interactive workshops. A variety of music kept the crowds entertained throughout the afternoon, including a local Bangladeshi band, country music and a barn dance to end the day. Centre, as local music company, Newstar, belted out well known hits from popular musicals.

The community group

Established in 2000, the Friends of Mile End Park, the group have successfully established themselves as a voice for the ongoing development of the park and have a large local membership. They have worked closely with the council to develop a joint management advisory group and have put on several fun days and events in the past. The Town & Country Fair is the largest event the Friends have organised to date.



Mile End Park is a wonderful park and an amazing resource for the people of the area. It's their park and it's great to see people using it as it should be.

Michael Rowan,
Director of Mile End Park

Since visiting an event at a local city farm two years ago, the Friends had had an idea to stage an event which explored the rural and farming history of the Mile End area. While the local authority had limited funding to put towards it, the funding and help offered from Park It! made it possible to explore a little known side of the area's history and develop the Friends.

Feedback

The event was seen to be highly successful, particularly in terms of the audience, which reflected the demographics of the area well. The atmosphere of the event was very relaxed and peaceful throughout the day.

85% of visitors rated the overall event as 'excellent' or 'good'. Over 90% of people said they would attend a future event in the park based on

their experiences of this event and over 75% 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 fact that the park hosted such a family-focused event which was fully inclusive was a real success for a park that can sometimes feel threatening for events. It was felt that the staging of this event was another step in the right direction for the park, as new audiences are attracted and discover what newly available resources are available on their doorstep.

As a result of the organisation of the event, the Friends felt that they learnt a great deal about health and safety regulations and food regulations, and how important these are to consider. They have also made contact with many new organisations which they feel would make the task of putting on subsequent events easier in the future.



The main event area used on the day is currently at risk from becoming a site for the dumping of waste soil from the construction of the CrossRail development through East London. While nothing is confirmed, a campaign group has formed. It is hoped that this event demonstrated the value of Mile End Park to the local community and will help in the fight to save this area of green space if the development continues.

The Future

The Friends and the council are keen to stage another similar event next year subject to funding availability. While the Friends had good support from the majority of the members of the group, they feel that they would need to ensure closer involvement of other members of the group for future events. They are using this as an opportunity to improve and develop internal communication through email lists and other methods.



Lessons learnt

- Be fully aware of the demographics of the local area when you are promoting an event and adapt your methodology and marketing appropriately.
- Allocate tasks and responsibilities for all volunteers so the most is made of all people on site.
- When using generators and refrigerators make sure their requirements are confirmed prior to the event. Fully research requirements for food stalls and all health and safety issues well in advance of the event.
- If asking for contributions from the public for a photo display, consider having an enticement to encourage submissions.
- Ensure that all suppliers are properly briefed as to their arrival times and locations and that their requirements have been sufficiently researched prior to the event.

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

London Borough of Tower Hamlets – www.towerhamlets.gov.uk

Mile End Park - www.mileendpark.co.uk

