

Park It! Northern Ireland



Picnic in the Park, Derry

Brooke Park, Saturday 5th August 2006

The park

Brooke Park is situated within the Northland ward of Derry City and has been a public park since 1901. Previous to this date a public library stood in the place of the park. In the heart of a residential area, the park consists of mature trees, grass terracing, picnic areas, a play park and a sports leisure centre. The park is surrounded by boundary walls and has 6 official entrances and exits.



When the park first opened, it was perceived as a beautiful piece of parkland within the city. During the 1970's it was used as a British Army base, which was attacked by the IRA in 1973. The army have moved out, and all that remains is an old watchtower overlooking the park. In recent years, the park has suffered from anti-social behaviour and consequently was used less by the public.

The event

Picnic in the Park drew a crowd of 2800 people. This was the largest number of people seen in the park for over 20 years. The beginning of the day required a bit of a clear up, because although the council had supplied staff to clear the park of litter, there was some broken glass found near one of the proposed activity sites. However, this was soon cleared, but serves to demonstrate the problems the park and its users have faced.

Wildly colourful flags of 40ft stretched for the sky. The flags were made by local youth groups coordinated by the Bluebell Arts Project. The football tournament organised by Derry City FC's Football in the Community Scheme proved to be extremely popular. For those of a less energetic disposition the bowls club held an open day and invited people to try their hand at bowling on the green, or to have a game of chess inside the clubhouse.

The music stage played host to a variety of acts including Portabello, Chadsko and Eamonn Friel. There was also an Irish Ceili by George Kelpie. Meanwhile in the children's area, youngsters were amused by the bouncy castles, parachute games, tug of war, sack racing and face painting.

The historic gate lodge invited visitors to view photographs of Brooke Park at the turn of the century, when the space was deemed as the city's jewel. Alongside this exhibition were drawings of proposed changes for the park should they attain the necessary funding to help this green space to sparkle again. The exhibition allowed residents to give their views as well.

The community group

A host of community groups pulled together to apply to Park It and form an event committee. The most prominent partners were Old Library Trust, and



the Gasyard Féile 06 and Blue Bell Arts Project. All of these groups have very strong connections to the local community. The Friends of Brooke Park were formed from residents living around the park, not long after application.

Feedback

- The event was highly successful, especially attracting such a large number of people.
- It was fantastic to see people enjoying themselves in the park.
- There has been an enormous amount of goodwill emanating towards the park and Friends group since.
- Colin Kennedy felt that the event was a courageous project to undertake because there were fears within the council and other organisations that things could go wrong.
- The link in with the council's Marketing Department could have been stronger, in terms of letting each other know what was happening in terms of press contact.
- The site plan divided the music stage from the rest of the activities, so the event felt as if it was in two parts. Next year, the group plan to change the direction of the stage.
- The flags really made a difference to the event and looked great, as they lent a carnival feel.
- The five facepainters were extremely busy and overwhelmed.

"Sir – On Saturday last, I spent one of the most enjoyable afternoons one could have. I was at 'Picnic in the Park' in Brooke Park with my two young children.

With courteous and helpful stewards at every gate, there were no lager louts or fights – just fun for children and a peaceful afternoon for the adults. I would suggest that the council move the children's events organised at Halloween to Brooke Park. This would, in my opinion, create a better atmosphere and a safer place for children,

Finally, I would like to thank everyone for organising a brilliant event."

Letter to Derry Journal, Friday 11th August 2006.



The benefits

- The new Friends group have got off to a flying start and have already established strong links with the media.
- The image of the park has improved immensely.
- Local residents have now glimpsed the potential of the park.
- There's strong support for the event to be held every year.
- The community swung its support behind a park suffering from anti-social behaviour.
- A great example of people reclaiming and rediscovering their park.
- The Friends group learnt a lot in a short space of time.
- Sometimes some people drop out during the organisation of an event, but this had the same core group of people working on the project throughout.

The future

- Planning a Halloween spooks parade in the park.
- A choral Christmas event and park walks will be introduced next year.
- Gasyard Féile looking to introduce volunteer training programmes.
- The group plan to hold a separate event for the bowling club next year.
- Aim to hold a similar event in Brooke Park next year.

Lessons learnt

- You may sometimes be able to turn a negative into a positive.
- Ensure that signage is good outside the park.
- You don't always need a whole day to run a successful event – Brooke Park ran from 2pm – 5pm.

Further information

Derry City Council

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Old Library Trust

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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

