Walking in Urban Parks and Green Spaces

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Walking in Urban Parks and Green Spaces
TCPA, for the Ramblers
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Introduction

Photo of Port Sunlight River Park courtesy of The Land Trust

There is now overwhelming evidence that regular physical activity, such as walking, is one of the best things anyone can do to keep healthy.[1] There is also increasing evidence that spending time in green spaces such as parks and gardens is good for our mental health, as well as our physical health.[2] Taken together, it is clear that we should be encouraging people of all ages and backgrounds to walk to, and through, their local urban parks and green spaces, and we should be making it easier for them to do so.

This report looks at people's attitudes to doing just that. Its findings are based on market research carried out in early 2018 among 1,000 people, forming a representative sample of ages and socio-economic groups across Britain. It demonstrates that people instinctively understand that spending time in parks and green spaces is good for them, with 98% of respondents saying that walking through green spaces helps to improve their mental health, and a similar percentage saying that walking through parks improves their physical health. It also suggests that different groups of people are put off walking through parks for different reasons, and that if we want to encourage everyone to use parks we need to focus investment carefully. How this can be done in practice is further explored in the case studies set out in this report.

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In addition to the population-wide health benefits provided by walking through green spaces, research also shows that parks and green spaces have an important part to play in reducing health inequalities.[3] Put simply, people with the poorest health tend to benefit most from access to good green spaces. It is clear, then, that we should be designing and managing parks and green spaces to ensure that they are accessible and welcoming for everyone. But what does this mean in practice?

There is a growing understanding that many people feel vulnerable in some public spaces – and that the most successful spaces are those that attract the widest range of people. Healthy middle-aged men walking dogs tend to feel safe in most spaces, whereas other members of society – women, young children, teenagers, the frail elderly – tend to avoid spaces in which they do not feel comfortable or safe. Some campaigners for equitable public spaces are now describing the presence of children in public spaces as being 'indicator species' – if there aren't any children in a public space then it's not a successful public space.[4]

Overall, the research showed that slightly more men than women are frequent users of green spaces in Britain's urban areas, with 29% of men and 21% of

women saying they walk through green spaces daily. The research was not able to include children, but notably the young people included in the survey, aged 16-24, were more dissatisfied with the maintenance of their local parks than older generations, and 33% of them said that they were discouraged from walking through parks because they felt unsafe. This, perhaps, is not surprising given that park ranger services have been one of the casualties of the reductions in funding for parks over the last few years. In contrast, only 12% of the over-65s felt that safety concerns put them off using parks. Perhaps not surprisingly, 35% of the over-75s said that having more benches or seats would encourage them to visit parks more often.

One of the striking findings of the research is that people tend to go *to*, rather than *through*, their local green spaces. Only 7% of respondents said that they walk through green spaces on their way to work, suggesting that more could be done to encourage the use of green spaces as part of active travel networks.

The resources question

Ironically, despite the fact that we now have more evidence than ever about the benefits that are provided to society by good parks, the money available to fund their maintenance is rapidly dwindling. According to research by the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE), 40% of park managers say that reductions in funding have resulted in a withdrawal of maintenance for some land.[5] The Heritage Lottery Fund's report, *State of UK Public Parks 2016*,[6] noted that 'It is clear that there is a growing deficit between the rising use of parks and the declining resources that are available to manage them.' It reported that 92% of park managers had seen their revenue budgets fall in the previous three years and that 95% expected them to fall during the following three years.

For many local authorities, faced with shrinking budgets and the rising cost of social care, finding money to fund discretionary services such as parks is

Photo of Port Sunlight River Park courtesy of The Land Trust

increasingly difficult, if not impossible. Aware of the benefits that public parks bring to their communities, and of the strong local support for parks, they are exploring radical new ways of running and funding their parks services. In Newcastle, for instance, the council is transferring the city's parks to a new independent charitable trust, a decision taken with a view to protecting the parks after the council had to cut its parks budget by 91% over seven years.[7]

Throughout the country, parks and green spaces are being run in new ways, with innovative partnerships between the public sector and others using funding drawn from a wide range of sources – such as generating income from events, or energy generation, or grazing, or even crowdfunding. In 2017 the government set up the Parks Action Group[8] to explore and disseminate innovative ways of funding and managing green spaces in England.

The research suggests that park and green space managers have been doing incredibly well in maintaining many green spaces to meet community needs, despite the cuts in funding, with 58% of respondents saying that their parks and green spaces are maintained to an acceptable standard. Another 38% said that some of their local green spaces are well maintained but others are not. This aligns with anecdotal evidence that in many areas scarce resources are being focused on a few green spaces, bringing them up to Green Flag Award standard,[9] while others are being left to decline.

The traditional model of funding parks and green spaces, in which all the money for maintenance came from council budgets, has disintegrated. New models of funding – often including a complex mixture of grants, revenue streams, income generation and other innovation – are emerging, but not without difficulties. Simultaneously, the huge benefits of parks and green spaces for people's health and wellbeing are starting to be rediscovered.

Despite the current difficulties of generating funding for green spaces, throughout Britain there are examples of projects that have successfully improved green spaces, encouraged much greater use of them by all sections of the community, and so contributed to local health and wellbeing. The case studies in this report describe what has been achieved in these places and how the work was done, in the hope that it will provide inspiration for others.

Notes

1. See *Everybody Active, Every Day – An Evidence-Based Approach to Physical Activity*. Public Health England, Oct. 2014. **https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/374914/Framework_13.pdf**
2. M P White, I Alcock, B W Wheeler and M H Depledge: 'Would you be happier living in a greener urban area? A fixed effects analysis of panel data'. *Psychological Science*, 2013, Vol. 24 (6), 920-8
3. R Mitchell and F Popham: 'Effect of exposure to natural environment on health inequalities: an observational population study'. *The Lancet*, 2008, Vol. 372 (9650), 1655-60
4. See L Laker: 'What would the ultimate child-friendly city look like?'. *The Guardian*, 28 Feb. 2018. **https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2018/feb/28/child-friendly-city-indoors-playing-healthy-sociable-outdoors**
5. *State of the Market Survey 2018: Local Authority Parks and Green Spaces Services*. Briefing 18-11. APSE, Mar. 2018. **http://apse.org.uk/apse/index.cfm/members-area/briefings/2018/18-11-state-of-the-market-2018-local-authority-parks-and-green-spaces-services/**
6. *State of UK Public Parks 2016*. Heritage Lottery Fund, Sept. 2016. **https://www.hlf.org.uk/state-uk-public-parks-2016**
7. See 'The future of Newcastle's parks decided'. News release. Newcastle City Council, Nov. 2107. **https://www.newcastle.gov.uk/news/future-newcastles-parks-decided**
8. See 'Government pledges £500,000 for new action group to grow future of public parks'. Press release. Department for Communities and Local Government, Sept. 2017. **https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-pledges-500000-for-new-action-group-to-grow-future-of-public-parks**
9. See the Green Flag Award website, at **http://www.greenflagaward.org.uk**

WALKING IN URBAN PARKS AND GREEN SPACES

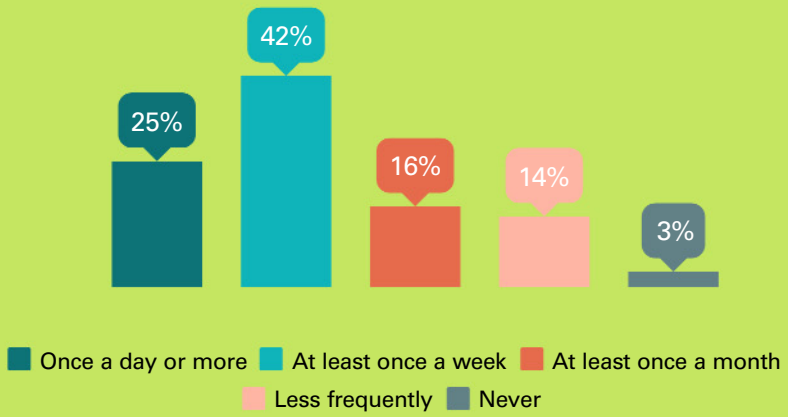
The Ramblers and the Town and Country Planning Association commissioned an online survey to understand public attitudes towards walking in urban parks and green spaces.

The UK-wide survey was completed by a representative sample of 1,000 people.

Here are some of the key findings of that survey.

67% of people walk in parks or other public green spaces near their home

AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK OR MORE



More **MEN** (29%) walk in parks and green spaces every day

compared with **WOMEN** (21%)

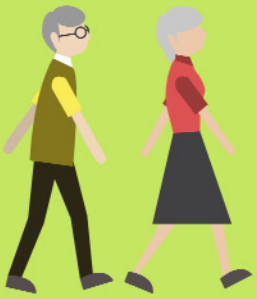
16-24 YEAR OLDS are more likely to be discouraged from walking in local parks or green spaces because of

SAFETY CONCERNS (33%)

Only **7%** of people walk through green spaces on their way to work

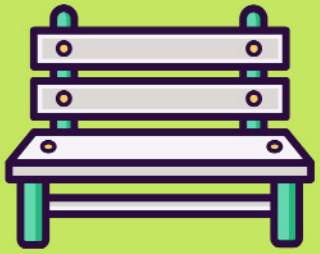
67% of people would walk more often if green spaces were

BETTER MAINTAINED



35% of people aged over 75 would walk more often if there were

MORE BENCHES



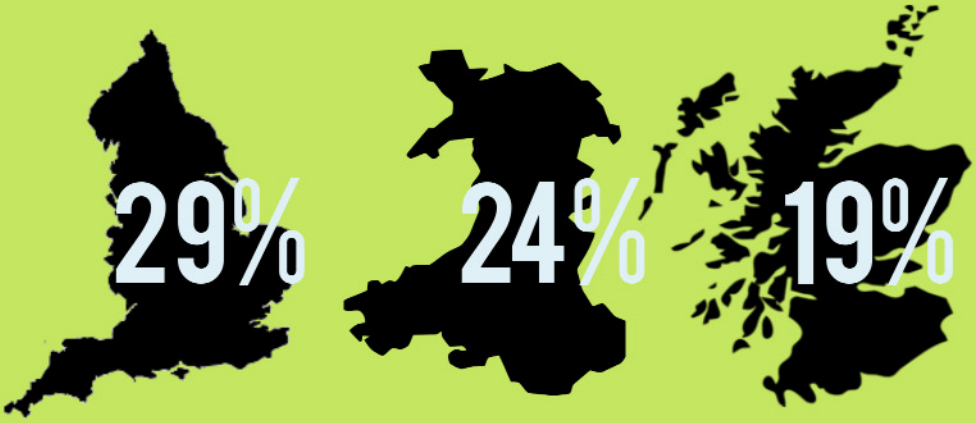
83% of people think that walking in urban parks and green spaces

IMPROVES YOUR CONNECTION WITH THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

People living in

ENGLAND

are more likely to think that parks and green spaces have improved in the last two years, despite cuts to maintenance budgets



enventure research

www.enventure.co.uk

Case Study 1

Almondvale Park

Location: Livingston, Scotland
Managed by: West Lothian Council

Almondvale Park in Livingston, Scotland is part of the main green corridor in the town and was transformed in 2015/16. In addition to the provision of a new adventure playground, platforms to view the River Almond, and wildflower meadows, pathways were upgraded to make them more accessible, with new benches and renovated underpasses. Under-bridge spaces were regenerated to make them safer and more appealing. The park was officially re-opened in September 2017.

How was the urban green space improved?

As part of the improvement works, a section of National Cycle Network route 75 was re-routed through the park. A new road crossing was installed and the path lighting was upgraded, aiming to make it easier and safer for more people to walk and cycle for more of the journeys they make all year round.

The signage in the park was replaced or updated, and a new trail of wooden posts was installed to mark out walking routes around the park. Interpretation signs on the walking routes include information on distances and times of walks. There are two main walking/running loops in the park: the first is wholly within the park on smooth tarmac paths, while the second is longer, loops partially outside the park and can be narrower and muddy in places. They have been designed so that combinations can be used to create three routes of varying length.

Furthermore, some areas of vegetation were thinned and cut back to give clear sightlines throughout the park, and, together with the installation of viewing platforms, this also increased the park's connections with the River Almond.

An underpass and three under-bridge areas were renovated via a public art project to make them more welcoming and feel safer.

How was the project funded?

West Lothian Council allocated funds to upgrade Almondvale Park from 2014 to 2017, including Section 75 contributions from nearby housing developments, a public art grant, and an additional 50% in funding from Sustrans Scotland's Community Links programme[1] (which is funded by Transport Scotland). These funds added up to a total investment of £1.2 million.

Photos: Becky Plunkett

New paths and seating areas have been installed in Almondvale Park, along with new signs

Clear signs show routes around the park

Impacts of the improvements

Data collected by Sustrans on the number of trips made through Almondvale Park by pedestrians, cyclists and others shows that in 2016 the total number of trips had doubled compared with 2014, before the improvement works were undertaken.[2] At the time of writing (early 2018) further data collected by Sustrans through house-to-house and park surveys is being analysed and will be available soon.

Its location in central Livingston makes the park a popular route to walk along to reach the shopping centre from local housing areas. The Civic Centre building is also located within the park, used by council staff, the police, the courts and the general public. The measured routes are well used by residents looking to increase their activity, and they are also used by local health walk groups. The 5 kilometre route is used by the Livingston Parkrun every Saturday, which an average of 300 attend.[3] This is very promising, as prior to the improvement works there was very little going on in the park but now all these local residents are aware of the facilities available. Around 600 people attended the official opening of the improved park in September 2017.

The public art trail within the park involved many people from the local community in its creation. Leaflets about the finished trail are on display locally and can be found on the park webpage.

Challenges and lessons learnt

The clear links to council strategy and engagement with the community from the start helped to set a strong business case for the park improvements, and there has been a very positive response from local communities and local businesses.

The challenges came with managing such a large project with a diverse team within the council (including teams on grounds maintenance, roads, and arts services). However, regular communications and project management meetings helped to overcome any issues.

At the beginning of the project, it was anticipated that European funding would also be sought to further the improvements. However, it transpired that this funding was not available in time, and the project proceeded without it. This meant that some details had to be removed from the project.

Information on Almondvale Park can be found on West Lothian Council's Almondvale Park webpage, at https://www.westlothian.gov.uk/almondvalepark

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Notes:

1. See Sustrans Scotland's Community Links programme webpage, at **https://www.sustrans.org.uk/**
2. Data was obtained by Sustrans through user intercept surveys over one week in both 2014 and 2016. This was scaled up to obtain the estimated number of trips through the park per year. See **https://www.westlothian.gov.uk/media/16177/Almondvale-User-Intercept-Graph/pdf/Almondvale_User_Intercept_Graph.pdf**
3. See the Livingston Parkrun website, at **http://www.parkrun.org.uk/livingston/**

Case Study 2

Duke's River

Location: Lower Crane Valley, South West London, England
Managed by: London Borough of Richmond and London Borough of Hounslow

FORCE

Wider gravel paths were laid as part of the Duke's River improvement works

In 2015, improvement works to the Duke of Northumberland River (known as the 'Duke's River') corridor began; paths were upgraded, new signage was installed, maps were printed, and the vegetation and habitats were improved. The completion of this work in 2018 has created a 10 kilometre, circular riverside walk along the Thames, Crane and Duke's Rivers through Twickenham, Whitton, Isleworth and St Margarets.[1] There has been an increase in use of the key improved parts of the footpath by over 2,000% compared with the situation before the improvement works.

How was the urban green space improved?

The Duke's River – a canal built over 500 years ago to power mills – provides an important green corridor in South West London, between the River Crane and the River Thames. Since 2015, a restoration project has aimed to enhance this corridor. Parts of the pathway were previously very under-used owing to their poor condition (being narrow, muddy and/or victim to frequent fly-tipping), combined with a general lack of awareness of its existence. Through the project, wider and safer gravel footpaths have been created, and tree works have been undertaken to increase head height and visibility. In the London Borough of Hounslow section, where previously the river and path were separated, the links between the two have been strengthened by opening up the views and rerouting the path to follow the course of the river more closely where possible.

The project was led by a collaborative steering group, chaired by the Crane Valley Partnership[2] and including representatives from the London Boroughs of Richmond and Hounslow, Friends of the River Crane Environment (FORCE),[3] the Environment Agency, and Thames Water, with key inputs from the

Rugby Football Union (the corridor runs alongside Twickenham Stadium) and other community groups. Responsibility for the maintenance has now been handed over to Richmond and Hounslow Councils.

At the time of writing, in early 2018, some aspects of the project are still ongoing, including the installation of signage and maps along the path and over £100,000's worth of path improvements along a 750 metre stretch next to Twickenham Stadium. Long negotiations and issues with the planning process have caused this section of the project to be delayed, and the path here is still narrow and muddy and thus poorly used. It is hoped that an official opening event will be held once these works are complete.

How was the project funded?

The project started in 2015 when the local community successfully secured £157,000 through voting in the Greater London Authority's Big Green Fund. Further funds were provided by the London Borough of Richmond and the London Borough of Hounslow, predominantly from the Section 106 funds from local developments, as well as grants from the Big Lottery Fund and SITA Trust. Additional strips of land have been provided by the Rugby Football Union, Harlequins Rugby Club, and the London Borough of Richmond.

Impacts of the improvements

Before the improvement works the path along the Duke's River was very poorly used, with the main users being men with dogs. The Duke's River public use survey,[4] conducted by FORCE with TCV (The Conservation Volunteers) in April 2016, showed an increase in usage of over 2,000% (from 19 people a day to 409 people a day) along a 750 metre stretch following the improvement works when the path was upgraded, compared with eight months previously – while usage along a control section remained stable.

The Duke's River green corridor is now used both as a destination in itself and as a route to get elsewhere. It provides a link to a couple of pubs, a supermarket and two schools, and, following the improvement works which made the path feel safer, it is often used in preference to other routes (and to driving) to these places.

Since the improvement works, FORCE has organised regular free guided 'walks and talks'[5] along the Duke's River path, on topics such as birdwatching, ecology and the history of the area, including evening walks for sighting bats, as well as group walks for carers and independent-living charities.[6] This route is particularly popular as it is easy to access, crosses several bus routes and is safe, and there are always interesting things to look at. TCV has also run regular clean-ups and other volunteer events,[7] and there are other ongoing voluntary community conservation projects, such as counting the number of eels that enter the river from the upper Thames Estuary since the installation of eel passes. All these activities have helped to raise public awareness and engagement with the project and area.

Challenges and lessons learnt

This project has evolved slowly, and the number of people involved has built up gradually as local residents have seen the tangible benefits of the work being undertaken. There is some tension between the dedicated group of volunteers and users who respect the area and put considerable effort into maintaining it, and others who still use the area to dump unwanted items and for graffiti. This type of activity has significantly reduced since the improvement works but does still happen to some extent.

Notes:

1. Details are set out in *The Duke's River Walk: Kneller Gardens to River Thames Isleworth*. Information leaflet. Friends of the River Crane Environment (FORCE), 2016. **https://www.force.org.uk/assets/documents/d-dnr-walk-leaflet**
2. See the Crane Valley Partnership website, at **http://cranevalley.org.uk/**
3. See the Friends of the River Crane Environment (FORCE) website, at **https://www.force.org.uk/**
   Duke's River is one of a series of improvement projects and related use surveys undertaken by FORCE in association with the London Boroughs of Hounslow and Richmond over the last ten years. FORCE has been conducting use surveys at several sites every six months over the last six years and would welcome the use and interpretation of the data by researchers – contact FORCE on **info@force.org.uk** for further information
4. Duke's River public use survey, conducted on 12 July 2015 and 17 April 2016, before and after the path improvement works were undertaken. There were no overriding factors (weather, season, events or path closures) that could significantly impact the data
5. Details of FORCE's Community Learning – Guided Walks and Talks programme are available at **https://www.force.org.uk/learn/community-learning-walks-t/**
6. These walks are led by Frances Bennett, Trustee of FORCE, on behalf of FORCE and the local authority
7. Details are available through the TCV website, at **https://www.tcv.org.uk/london/richmond**

Case Study 3

Mab Lane Community Woodland

Location: West Derby, Liverpool, England
Managed by: Liverpool City Council

Tony Beyga

Mab Lane Community Woodland is now a much-loved and well-used green space

The 25 hectare site that is now Mab Lane Community Woodland was previously derelict land and playing fields, plagued with problems of flooding, neglect and vandalism, and many local people avoided it. Now it is a much-loved and well-used green space that has become a popular route to local shops and facilities and a desirable destination in its own right.

How was the urban green space improved?

The area used to be two large fields that were so derelict and unwelcoming that most people kept away from them. However, Liverpool City Council decided to offset the carbon footprint of the city's 2008 Capital of Culture festival by planting trees, and

The Mersey Forest Team

Ant Clousen Photography

Part of the site before the woodland creation (left) and the launch of Mab Lane Community Woodland in 2010 (right)

as a result 20,000 trees were planted on the site to create Mab Lane Community Woodland.

In addition to the tree planting, measures were taken to prevent flooding, improve drainage, and enhance the landscape. The woodland, officially opened in June 2010, now has a network of native trees, wildflower meadows, a community orchard, seasonal wetland areas, and footpaths.[1]

How was the project funded?

The transformation of the site was achieved through a partnership of local people and organisations including Liverpool City Council, the Mersey Forest, the Forestry Commission, and Riverside Housing. The creation of the woodland cost £688,000.

Impacts of the improvements

The woodland is now held in high esteem by local residents, and the number of people visiting it has increased considerably. The footpaths through the woodland have brought together the two sides of the estate by providing a direct link between them.[2] Residents walk through the woodland to access the facilities in Stockbridge Village (including a sports hall, a swimming pool, a café and studios), as a shortcut to the local supermarket, and to reach the popular Mab Lane Youth Centre. Previously this route was too unsafe for residents to use, but now it is used in preference to others.

As well as being a route to reach other places, this once-avoided site is now a destination in itself. Parents with prams, cyclists, fitness fanatics, picnickers and children playing can all be seen in the space. It is also used by the local schools for sports and outdoor lessons.

The woodland has also had wider implications for the nearby communities, as part of a co-ordinated effort to improve the local environment. Previously the area was widely regarded as undesirable and housing associations struggled to let nearby homes, whereas now there are waiting lists.[3]

Challenges and lessons learnt

The site was previously regarded in such a negative light by residents that it was initially hard to convince them that it could be transformed into a desirable place. While the improvements were being planned there was a concerted effort to involve local people, and events were organised to help engage people in the site's transformation.

Notes:

1. See the Mersey Forest's Mab Lane Community Woodland webpage, at **http://www.merseyforest.org.uk/our-work/mab-lane-community-woodland/**
2. Se the *How the Mersey Forest Creates a Healthier Liverpool* video, at **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DJB85BVXFOw**
3. *How a Woodland Can Change a Neighbourhood: The Story of the Mab Lane Community Woodland.* Liverpool City Council, Mersey Forest, *et al.* **http://www.merseyforest.org.uk/files/documents/1228/Mab%20Lane%20case%20study.pdf**

Case Study 4

Port Sunlight River Park

Location: Birkenhead, Wirral, England
Managed by: The Land Trust

Giles Rocholl / The Land Trust

Port Sunlight River Park offers visitors a scenic waterfront and a variety of walks and views across the Mersey

Port Sunlight River Park has been transformed from a landfill site – a huge mound of rubbish – to a 30 hectare park, providing a popular community space with an array of walkways, wildlife, wildflowers, and a wetlands area.

How was the urban green space created?

The landfill rubbish site reached the end of its 15-year operating life in 2006. Not only was it an eyesore, visible from the historic Port Sunlight village, but its presence created a physical – and mental – barrier between neighbourhoods and restricted access to the waterfront.

The landfill site was carefully sealed over, covered with soil between 1 metre and 3 metres deep, and planted with a wide range of trees and plants. It opened as a park in August 2014. It now provides visitors with a scenic waterfront and a variety of walks, some of which provide spectacular views across the Mersey to Liverpool's famous waterfront. A section of the wetland to the north of the site, along with the River Mersey mudflats, is a RAMSAR site and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and attracts large numbers of migrating birds.

The park now has almost three miles of well-surfaced footpaths. Maps at the entrances encourage visitors to explore the park.

How was the project funded?

The landfill part of the site is still owned by UK Waste Management Ltd (UKWM)/Biffa, and other parts of the site are owned by Unilever. The two companies have granted the Land Trust a 99-year lease on the surface of the park. UKWM continues to

The Land Trust

The park has almost three miles of well-surfaced footpaths

manage the ongoing liabilities associated with the landfill and Unilever retains responsibility for the River Dibbin. The Land Trust has appointed Autism Together to manage the park on a day-to-day basis, and the organisation employs a ranger and has landscape teams that help to carry out the park maintenance.

The project was supported by Wirral Borough Council, local MP Alison McGovern, and the Forestry Commission, which identified a large proportion of the funding and invited the Land Trust in to carry out the restoration and take on the long-term management of the site.

The Land Trust secured further land from Unilever and long-term funding from Biffa Award, UK Waste Management Services and the English Woodland Grant Scheme to ensure that legacy funding was in place to maintain the site. The total cost of the project was £3.4 million, including funding for its long-term maintenance.

Impacts of the improvements

A major focus of the works was to improve access, including provision of a new site entrance from Dock Road North, a link to the Shorefields Nature Park, and access to the coastline to connect the communities of Port Sunlight, Bromborough and New Ferry with the River Mersey. The landfill site used to act as a barrier between the communities and the coast – so the park has now opened up access to the coast for the first time in a generation.

Port Sunlight River Park now has its own 'friends' group that encourages people to become involved in the park, including through organising events. Volunteers meet every Saturday and Wednesday for outdoor tasks, but additional opportunities exist to help with events, reception, walks and wildlife identification.

A regular programme of events has been established, including weekly health walks, monthly 5 kilometre runs, and activities for families in the school holidays. The park also takes part in the Wirral Walking Festival in May and Heritage Open Days in September, with guided walks planned around both Port Sunlight River Park and the historic Bromborough Pool industrial 'model village'.

Regular park users include dog-walkers, running groups and individual runners, cyclists and cycle groups, and bird-watchers.

Challenges and lessons learnt

Working to transform a former landfill site will always have its challenges, but these have been outweighed by the huge social, environmental and economic benefits that have resulted from the creation of public open space at the park. Overall, the project highlighted the importance of long-term planning when transforming a piece of land into a valuable community asset, particularly in terms of ensuring that there is funding available for the ongoing maintenance of the site. It also demonstrated the effectiveness of public-private partnerships in bringing together different funding streams that can be used to deliver benefits to the environment, community and local economy.

Case Study 5

Walker Park

Location: Walker, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England
Managed by: Newcastle City Council

Originally opened in 1891 as a green space for local people living in a largely industrial area, Walker Park underwent a £2.5 million restoration project in 2015/16. As a result, 30% more people now use the park.

How was the urban green space improved?

During the nine-month renovation project, the footpaths in the park were improved and resurfaced so they are now all suitable for wheelchair users, push chairs and mobility scooters. More park furniture has been added, and in some areas the vegetation has been cleared or thinned to create a safer and more open atmosphere.

Additionally, more play and sports facilities were installed, including a multi-use games area, an under-12s football pitch, a skate park, and an updated play area. A community garden was also created.

Photos: Katherine Knox

Restoration work at Walker Park has included wide-ranging renovation and the addition of more play and sports areas

How was the project funded?

In August 2012, Newcastle City Council submitted a Parks for People application to the Heritage Lottery Fund. This successfully secured a £1.8 million grant. Further contributions were made by Newcastle City Council, Walker Ward Committee and Your Homes Newcastle, bringing the total budget for the project to £2.5 million.

Impacts of the improvements

According to a usage survey conducted in summer 2017 by Eljay Research and Newcastle City Council,[1] the number of users of Walker Park has increased by over 30% since 2008. Around 43% more adults visit the park and 14% more children, with an annual total of almost 450,000 visitors. This amounts to around 8,600 visitors per week. Many residents who stopped using the park have started using it again since the improvement works. Using the park is becoming a well-established part of the lives of many residents, with 90% of visitors using the park at least once a week and over a quarter of users saying that they use the park more now than they did before the restoration project.

All the paths were improved and resurfaced

Furthermore, where usage numbers used to drop sharply after 4 pm owing to safety concerns, now the numbers of visitors is maintained more evenly across the day and early evening. In 2011, on average each park visitor spent 35 minutes in the park; this figure has now increased to over an hour.

As well as being a destination in itself, the central location of Walker Park, between housing, Church Walk Shopping Centre and the Walker Centre, means that is frequently travelled through. In the summer 2017 survey 27% of the park users surveyed were walking through the park to somewhere else. This is comparable to the 25% who were using the park for walking for pleasure.

The level of community engagement with the park is strong. The Friends of Walker Park[2] was re-established following the improvement works, with the aim of getting local people involved in the park. Community events held within the park are always well attended. The improvement works have encouraged residents of all ages to use the park. For example, residents of nearby sheltered accommodation now use the park regularly as the footpaths are clearer, with fewer tripping hazards, shallower gradients and more benches.

Challenges and lessons learnt

There are further improvements that could be made to Walker Park. For example, more lighting along the secondary footpaths in the park would help to further increase how safe the park feels in the evenings.

Local residents and community organisations who are invested in improving the park are keen to ensure that it maintains its growing reputation, rather than slipping back into decline.

Notes:

1 *Transforming Walker Park: Evaluating the Impact of Heritage Lottery Funding*. Eljay Research, for Newcastle City Council, Aug. 2017

2 See the Friends of Walker Park Facebook page, at **https://en-gb.facebook.com/Friends-of-Walker-Park-106661606354183/**

Case Study 6

Wrexham Industrial Estate

Location: Wrexham, Wales
Managed by: Wrexham County Borough Council

The public footpath running through Wrexham Industrial Estate, part of Wrexham public footpath 18, had not been used for years. It had become overgrown and gated off. Now it has been cleared, resurfaced and re-opened to the public, linking this employment centre with the wider countryside.

How was the urban green space improved?

The footpath had been temporarily closed in the 1980s while a factory was built. It was meant to be re-opened to the public but this never happened. The only people to use the track were those who wanted to access the nearby lake for fishing; they had to request access by ringing the number that was displayed on the padlocked gate which blocked the path. The footpath had been neglected for decades and had become completely overgrown.

Despite this, the route was still recorded as a public right of way. Therefore, North Wales Wildlife Trust, as part of its Wrexham Industrial Estate Living Landscape scheme, which aims to improve attitudes towards the estate, initiated a request to restore access to the path and improve it.

The path was cleared and new signage and a 75 metre-long boardwalk were installed, as well as a new gate that can be closed to traffic while remaining open for pedestrians. The path was re-opened in 2017.

How was the project funded?

Wrexham County Borough Council applied for a Rights of Way Improvement Grant from the Welsh Government and used it to pay for the purchasing

Jonathan Hulson

Sion Roberts

The new 75 metre-long boardwalk (shown under construction on the right)

Sion Roberts

Jonathan Hulson

Before the restoration the path was closed (left), but a new gate was installed (right) to allow pedestrian access

and installation of the boardwalk, which cost £9,800. Other costs were met from the council's own budgets. The project was led by North Wales Wildlife Trust.

Impacts of the improvements

The improvement project has created a circular walking route which links Wrexham Industrial Estate (one of the largest industrial estates in Europe) with the surrounding countryside. Wrexham Industrial Estate hosts 300 businesses, which provide employment for 8,000 people.

The Wrexham Industrial Estate Living Landscape scheme is continuing to improve the footpaths in the area and is currently working with Sustrans and the Ramblers on an active travel map which will feature this footpath. The aim is to encourage workers on the industrial estate to go on walks in their breaks. The travel map will be circulated to all businesses on the estate and displayed in public areas at the end of May 2018.

Sion Roberts

A new gate installed as part of the restoration work

At the time of writing, in early 2018, the footpath had been re-opened for only a year, but its popularity is growing as a method of reaching the estate and as a dog-walking route for local residents.

It is hoped that local schools will use the footpath to reach the estate for educational tours and school trips.

Challenges and lessons learnt

There are some potential safety issues with the forklift trucks that have to cross the path. The drivers are aware that there may be pedestrians around.

The walk runs through the industrial estate close to some factories, and the factory owners were nervous about allowing people access so close to their buildings. The council discussed this with them and as a result bought a new gate that could be left open to pedestrians but would prevent vehicles accessing the path.

The council recognises that because the path had been closed for so many years people will need to be encouraged to use it, and so is organising a guided walk that incorporates the improved footpath as part of a circular route. There are also several other volunteer-led community walks being organised along the footpath.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

When planning improvements to green paths or spaces, think about the needs of a wide range of potential users. Enough benches, level paths, good signposting, clear sightlines and good maintenance will all help to encourage more use by a wide range of different people.

Recommendation 2

It is often not enough just to create good paths to and through green spaces: you also need to encourage people to use them. Holding an opening ceremony or party, or organising guided walks, can be good ways of helping people to discover a transformed green space or new route.

Recommendation 3

Successful projects to improve walking through green spaces usually require a wide range of people and organisations to collaborate and many different sources of funding. Making this happen can take many years – but the results can transform an area for the better.

Recommendation 4

Communication is a vital part of successful projects. The many people and partners involved in a project need to be kept up to date with progress; local communities need opportunities to contribute their ideas and to be made aware of plans and progress.

Recommendation 5

People are far more likely to walk in green spaces if they are well maintained; but funding this is difficult. When planning improvements to green spaces, think about how much it will cost to maintain them in the future and, if at all possible, secure a long-term income stream to pay for future upkeep.

Further information

The Ramblers

www.ramblers.org.uk

The Ramblers helps everyone, everywhere, to enjoy walking, and protects the places we all love to walk. The Ramblers is the only charity dedicated to looking after paths and green spaces, leading walks, opening up new places to explore, and encouraging everyone to get outside and discover how walking boosts your health and your happiness. Find out more about the Ramblers' Manifesto for a Walking Britain and Charter for Walkable Towns and Cities here: **http://www.ramblers.org.uk/get-involved/campaign-with-us/paving-the-way.aspx**

The TCPA

www.tcpa.org.uk

The Town and Country Planning Association campaigns for the reform of the UK's planning system to make it more responsive to people's needs and aspirations and to promote sustainable development. It has published a number of guides to people help plan, fund and manage green spaces and other community assets including, *Planning for Green and Prosperous Places*, and *Long-Term Stewardship*, which can be downloaded here: **https://www.tcpa.org.uk/guidance-for-delivering-new-garden-cities**

Green Infrastructure Partnership

www.gip-uk.org

The Green Infrastructure Partnership is a national network of more than 2,000 people and organisations that work to promote and enhance green infrastructure – the networks of parks, green spaces, green routes, etc. that provide so many benefits to society. Members receive a newsletter ten times a year. Membership is free – to join, email **gip-@tcpa.org.uk**

Green Infrastructure Resource Library

www.tcpa.org.uk/green-infrastructure-research-database

The Green Infrastructure Resource Library is a free-to-use, searchable database of documents and case studies on green infrastructure, hosted by the Green Infrastructure Partnership.

Green Flag Awards

www.greenflagaward.org.uk

The Green Flag Awards scheme sets a benchmark for well-managed green spaces, and awards parks and green spaces that meet that standard.

Ordnance Survey Open Greenspace

www.osmaps/greenspace

To help people find their local green spaces, Ordnance Survey publishes the OS Open Green Space searchable maps.

Parks Alliance

www.theparksalliance.org

The Parks Alliance represents the people who create, maintain and use parks and green spaces across the UK.

GreenSpace Scotland

www.greenspacescotland.org.uk

Greenspace Scotland supports the planning, development and management of green spaces and networks in Scotland.

ramblers
at the heart of walking

tcpa

Walking in Urban Parks and Green Spaces
TCPA, for the Ramblers
May 2018