

---

# Parks for People Impact Evaluation

---

## Executive Summary

November 2013



**Shephard & Moyes Ltd**  
Plan, do and review





people spaces places

**Shephard & Moyes Ltd**  
Plan, do and review



# HLF Parks for People Impact Evaluation

## Executive Summary

Issue number: 5

Status: FINAL

Date: 28/11/13

Prepared by: Ian Baggott, Claire Moyes and Neil Eccles

Authorised by: Ian Baggott

# 1 Executive summary

The Parks for People programme started in 2006 and is funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, with the Big Lottery Fund contributing funding for projects in England only. The programme aims to regenerate public parks of national, regional or local heritage value for the enjoyment and recreation of local people and to date has awarded £254m to 135 projects across the UK.

This report considers the impact of this funding to date; on the parks, the people who use and work in them and the organisations responsible for their management. It considers progress towards the five programme outcomes, along with wider economic, social and environmental changes seen as a result of the investment. It draws on monitoring data collected from projects on an annual basis, alongside the results of a project survey and case study research of 8 exemplar projects.

## Headlines

The evaluation of the Parks for People programme demonstrates:

- Over 50% of the investment goes to the 20% most deprived areas in the UK
- Parks have seen a significant increase in visitors; an increase of 3.7m annual person visits
- 87 buildings and 215 historical features have been restored to date and 28 buildings will be removed from at risk registers
- Around half the projects have carried out habitat improvements or species diversification projects
- The number of volunteers has increased from 3,400 to 6,500 in 3 years
- The highest number of volunteers are being recorded in more deprived areas
- 369 staff and 2,117 volunteers have benefited from training so far.

- The majority of projects have already achieved their training targets, suggesting that initial targets were pessimistic and it is likely many more people will benefit from training than originally anticipated
- The biggest increase in satisfaction with parks is in the most deprived areas
- 83% of parks didn't have a management plan before the Parks for People investment
- There is evidence that the programme is attracting additional investment to parks through in-kind contributions, additional grant funding and new income generation initiatives

## **1.1 Programme overview**

Overall the Parks for People programme has received 265 Stage 1 or First Round applications between 2006 and 2013 of which 135 (51%) were successful. 71 applications were also made for project planning grants, and 41% of projects that received a planning grant went on to be approved. The majority of unsuccessful initial applications do not reapply, but of those that do around 76% are successful on resubmission.

The funding distribution shows that London has received the most awards (at 16% of the total), and the largest share of the overall allocation (at 19% of the total). Overall, almost 40% of projects and over 50% of funding goes to the top 20% most deprived parts of the UK at a local authority level.

Almost 60% of funding for Parks for People projects is provided by HLF or the Big Lottery Fund, with the remaining 40% being provided by partnership or match funding. And over 90% of applicants are from Local Authorities.

Of 135 projects, 15% (20) are in development stage, 80% (107) are in delivery and 5% (8) have completed.

A considerable proportion (58%) of projects are not allocating any budget for monitoring and evaluation work, and of those that do allocate a budget for this, around 60% have a budget of less than £10,000. This lack of resource for effective evaluation work is resulting in a significant number (23%) of projects submitting substandard or no annual monitoring data.

Collecting robust evaluation data is something that many parks departments have not been required to do in the past and the requirement to collect monitoring data is also not widely understood amongst HLF staff and monitors. Projects reporting poor quality or no data are not being challenged, and the data is not being used at an individual project level to assess progress or identify issues. There are also considerable challenges associated with collecting robust data on the profile of park users, which has resulted in some disparities between what the monitoring data shows and feedback from projects based on observation and anecdotal reporting.

Although we have sufficient data to draw conclusions about the progress of the programme, a review of what data is collected and how this is embedded within HLF's day to day monitoring processes would be beneficial.

## **1.2 Outcome 1: Increasing the range of audiences**

Nearly all (99%) of projects will be running a range of activities and events as part of their project, with 92% employing a dedicated members of staff to engage with communities. However, only a small proportion (28%) have carried out any work to specifically engage under-represented groups, although 60% of projects plan to in the future.

When aggregated, the projects aim to increase in visitor numbers by 19%, from a baseline of 47.5m to 54.5m. Projects in the delivery stage (and reporting data) have already seen an increase of 3.7m annual person visits. The majority of park managers (60%) have reported an increase in visitor numbers and 75% of visitors completing our survey say they now visit their park more often.

*“I work in the park so I can see the massive change in the numbers and types of people using the park. Just today 2 separate people (over 65s) stopped me and said how great the park is now, back to how it used to be and how people feel safe coming here again”*

Although the monitoring data collected by projects does not show a significant change to the profile of visitors, 28 parks have increased the proportion of BAME visitors and 25% of projects completing the survey state that they have increased the proportion of black, Asian and minority ethnic groups (BAME) visitors. Around a third of projects have managed to increase the proportion of disabled visitors using their parks, however the overall percentage of disabled visitors across the programme has not altered, with on average 6% or 7% of disabled visitors recorded between 2010 and 2013.



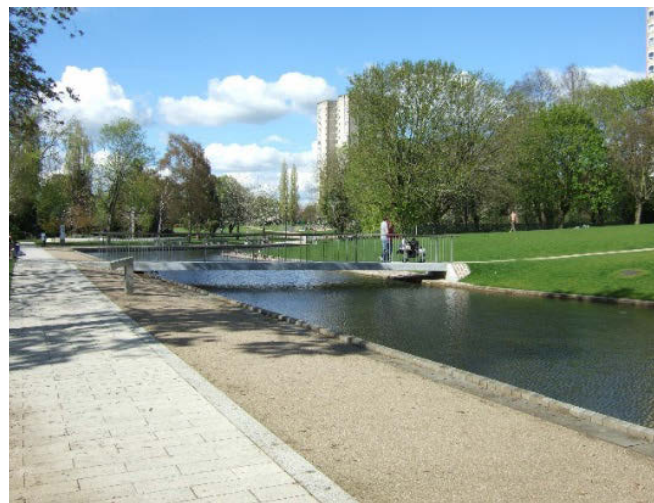
Although this is not backed up by the monitoring data collected, 59% of projects and 71% of visitors completing our surveys believe that the diversity of visitors in parks has improved as a result of the restoration project, with 49% of projects believe that the number of young people using the park has increased.

### **1.3 Outcome 2: Conserving and improving the heritage value**

As a result of the investment, 156 buildings and 425 historical features are to be restored as part of the programme, with 87 and 215 completed to date. 28 buildings are also to be removed from at risk registers, 13 of which are on English Heritage's at risk register.

A large proportion (59%) of projects have incorporated innovative methods as part of their capital programme. These have included new manufacturing techniques, replicating historical methods (e.g. tuck pointing and lime rendering), constructing contemporary buildings alongside historical features and incorporating environmentally friendly technologies.

A significant proportion of projects are also incorporating ways of improving parks' natural heritage. 48% of projects have carried out improvements to habitats and 53% have implemented species diversification methods. These include involving volunteers to build bird and bat boxes, incorporating wildlife tours and



surveys as part of the events and activity programme, and interventions in the capital works programme, such as the creation of wildflower meadows, de-silting ponds and waterways, and creating more suitable habitats for amphibians and other species.

Projects are also implementing a range of methods to increase visitor appreciation and understanding of heritage, with 97% including interpretation panels, 95% carrying out guided walks or talks and 88% producing leaflets or printed materials. As a result 64% of projects agree that visitor understanding and appreciation of heritage has improved, and 80% of visitors completing the survey agree.



Overall 60% of projects believe that the visitor experience has improved and 58% believe that the improvements have met the needs of the community. It is likely that this will increase as more projects complete the capital works programme.

*“Through interpretation and education people’s awareness of the heritage value has been raised. Increasing public knowledge of something that is valuable is the greatest way of conserving it. What was once seen as an old ruin can now be put in its historical context and acquires greater value”*

#### **1.4 Outcome 3: Increasing the range of volunteers**



The majority of projects (71%) started volunteering activities during the development stage of the project, with only 7% waiting until the capital works were complete. This demonstrates that the majority of projects understand the important role volunteering can play throughout the life of the project, with volunteers getting involved in design work, consultation and testing events and activities before the capital works start.



Overall the programme aims to increase the total number of people volunteering in park projects by 5,800, to a total of 9,700 volunteers; a 146% increase. Overall volunteering will increase from an average of 42 volunteers per park to 105, with volunteer time increasing from 75,600 to 155,600 hours over the programme as a whole. This equates to over £1m of additional investment through volunteering time.

Since 2010 the number of volunteers involved in projects has increased markedly, from 3,400 volunteers involved in 2010/11 to 6,500 in 2012/13. Using the 2012/13 data, there has been a net increase of volunteers of 2,600. The actual number of volunteer hours has also increased, from 58,600 in 2010/11 to 95,000 in 2012/13. This is a net increase of 19,400 hours, which equates to £129,000 of additional volunteer time.



The highest average number of volunteers per year is being recorded in the more deprived areas, which may indicate the demand for voluntary activities as a means to improving skills and confidence, particularly amongst unemployed people.

82% of projects have reported an increase in their volunteers as a result of the project. Most parks (72%) have Friends groups volunteering; however a significant proportion also attract volunteers from the wider community (62% of projects), schools (54%) and voluntary organisations (45%).



Although the monitoring data collected from projects doesn't show a change to the profile of volunteers, 69% of projects completing the survey believe that they have attracted a greater diversity of volunteers. Approximately a third of projects report that they have attracted a greater proportion of young and disabled volunteers.

Overall there is a good spread of volunteering activities. The most popular activities are maintenance, horticulture and one off events and least popular are retail and involvement in the capital works programme.

### **1.5 Outcome 4: Improving skills and knowledge through training**



The Parks for People programme is resulting in a significant investment in training and development for volunteers and staff. The most popular training activities are practical horticultural skills, leading guided walks and tours and events management.

Overall the programme aims to train nearly 700 members of staff and 2,600 volunteers and so far 369 staff and 2,117 volunteers have benefited from training. This demonstrates significant investment in skills development across the sector, which is particularly important in light of Local Authority cuts in revenue budgets.

Half of projects have already achieved their targets for staff training and 71% have achieved their targets for training volunteers; this indicates that the initial targets set were pessimistic, and it is likely that in reality many more people will benefit from training as a result of the programme.

As a result of the investment, the programme also aims to provide 530 work placements and 780 qualifications. So far 442 work experience placements and 530 qualifications have been achieved, again showing good progress. The target for increasing the number of third party organisations (such as schools, businesses and voluntary sector groups) using parks as training venues has been exceeded, with 4,500 organisations benefiting, against a target of 4,000.

As a result of the training 79% of projects believe that their staff are more skilled and 71% agree that volunteers are more skilled. In particular staff and volunteers now have a greater knowledge of heritage and conservation work and better skills around running events and activities.

*“On a personal level the project has taught me an incredible amount in terms of skilling me in fundraising, project management, marketing, volunteer management. By my role as a lead on the project I have had to learn and expand my own skills set”*

## **1.6 Outcome 5: Improved management and maintenance**

A key element of the programme is ensuring that the investment in parks is sustained. As a result of the programme 67% of projects will employ more staff, 97% will increase the skills and knowledge of staff and volunteers and 75% will be seeking to secure additional funding to improve management and maintenance.

A key feature of the Parks for People programme is the requirement for each project to produce a 10-year management and maintenance plan. A significant proportion (83%) did not have a management plan in place before the investment, and many projects are reporting that the process of developing this plan will help ensure the park is better managed in future.

Each project is also required to obtain the Green Flag Award, the national quality standard for green space. However, only 32 projects (23%) have submitted a baseline score for Green Flag, indicating that most have not carried out an assessment against the criteria.

*“With the introduction of an additional staff member, we are able to continue to undertake work to a higher level than was previously done. The frequencies and management input has also increased with regular management meetings with the community now taking place”*

The pass mark for the award is 66 (out of 100). So far, 32 projects have submitted an actual score of 66 or above, with 7 projects achieving a pass mark that originally had a baseline of less than 66.

57% of projects completing the survey agree that the quality of the maintenance work has improved, and 54% agree that the frequency of maintenance work has increased.

The improvements to management and maintenance are also being reflected in visitor satisfaction levels. The baseline visitor satisfaction across all projects was an average of 66% and the aim is to increase this to 81%. To date, average satisfaction levels have increased; in 2010/11 the average satisfaction was 79%, in 2011/12 it was 78% and in 2012/13 it was 82%. The data also shows that pre-restoration visitor satisfaction was lowest in the more deprived areas. The annual returns show an overall picture that satisfaction is increasing in all areas with the highest gains in the most deprived areas.

## 1.7 Wider impact

As well as progress against the five programme outcomes, this report considers the wider impact of the Parks for People programme. There is a considerable amount of secondary evidence that indicates that investment in parks and green space can have a considerable wider impact; including economic, social and environmental. Although many projects haven't yet considered the wider impact, the research indicates that the investment is making a difference to local communities and the organisations that manage green space:

<p><b>Economic impact</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is anecdotal evidence of increases in house prices to properties adjacent to high quality parks, and developers are using proximity to parks as a marketing device</li> <li>• Some local businesses are reporting an increase in trade as a result of the restored park, and visitors are noticing that more people are now using town centre facilities (where the park is centrally located)</li> <li>• Parks are important tourist attractions; with visitor numbers in large parks competing with tourist attractions such as Alton Towers, Westminster Abbey and the Millennium Centre in Wales</li> <li>• Projects in more deprived areas are contributing to wider economic development initiatives</li> <li>• There is also a local economic benefit as volunteers gain employment as a result of engaging in parks projects</li> <li>• Many projects are also leveraging in additional funding; for other projects or activities, or to support maintenance in the future. And some projects are supporting the generation of social enterprise and other revenue generation activities within the parks.</li> </ul>
-------------------------------	--

<p><b>Social impact</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Projects are reporting an increase in community pride, greater community involvement, an increase in people’s awareness of leisure facilities, an increase in people socialising and greater community cohesion. Parks are becoming important community hubs for a range of people to interact, learn and play.</li> <li>• Projects are also having a significant impact on skills and confidence, with more than half seeing at least 50% of volunteers improving their practical skills and confidence levels.</li> <li>• Many projects are also engaging disabled people through the volunteering programmes, demonstrating a much more inclusive approach</li> <li>• Projects are also implementing activities aimed at improving health and wellbeing, and for some Local Authorities the link between green space and health has improved.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Environmental impact</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Projects are seeing an increase in biodiversity, with a greater appreciation for developing appropriate habitats for bird, plant, amphibian and other wildlife.</li> <li>• Projects are also implementing methods to reduce their carbon footprint, through using energy saving technologies and more efficient buildings</li> <li>• The programme has also had a significant impact on the way Local Authorities manage their heritage assets. There is better appreciation of the value of heritage and greater knowledge of conservation and management methods.</li> </ul>

## 1.8 Conclusions and recommendations

Overall this report shows that the Parks for People investment is making a positive contribution across all outcomes. It is changing not only the country's heritage assets and ensuring they are in better condition, better managed and interpreted for current and future generations but it is also fundamentally changing people's lives through events, activities, volunteering and employment opportunities.



The challenge ahead lies on two levels, firstly getting more projects to supply more information both about outputs and also wider impacts so that future evaluations can be more robust, colourful and influential. Secondly how to ensure that projects do not start to lose match funding previously committed not only during the life of the project but also following completion. Historic parks are vital to the well-being and vibrancy of urban communities. They simply cannot be allowed to go backwards.

*“It has exceeded expectations, surpassing all targets set and, more importantly creating a lasting connection between people and place. It’s not just more people coming to the park, its more people having a better time, meeting new friends and giving their support. More volunteers have been engaged than predicted, learnt new skills and made a lasting difference to people’s lives. The park is the catalyst for that and a safe common ground”*