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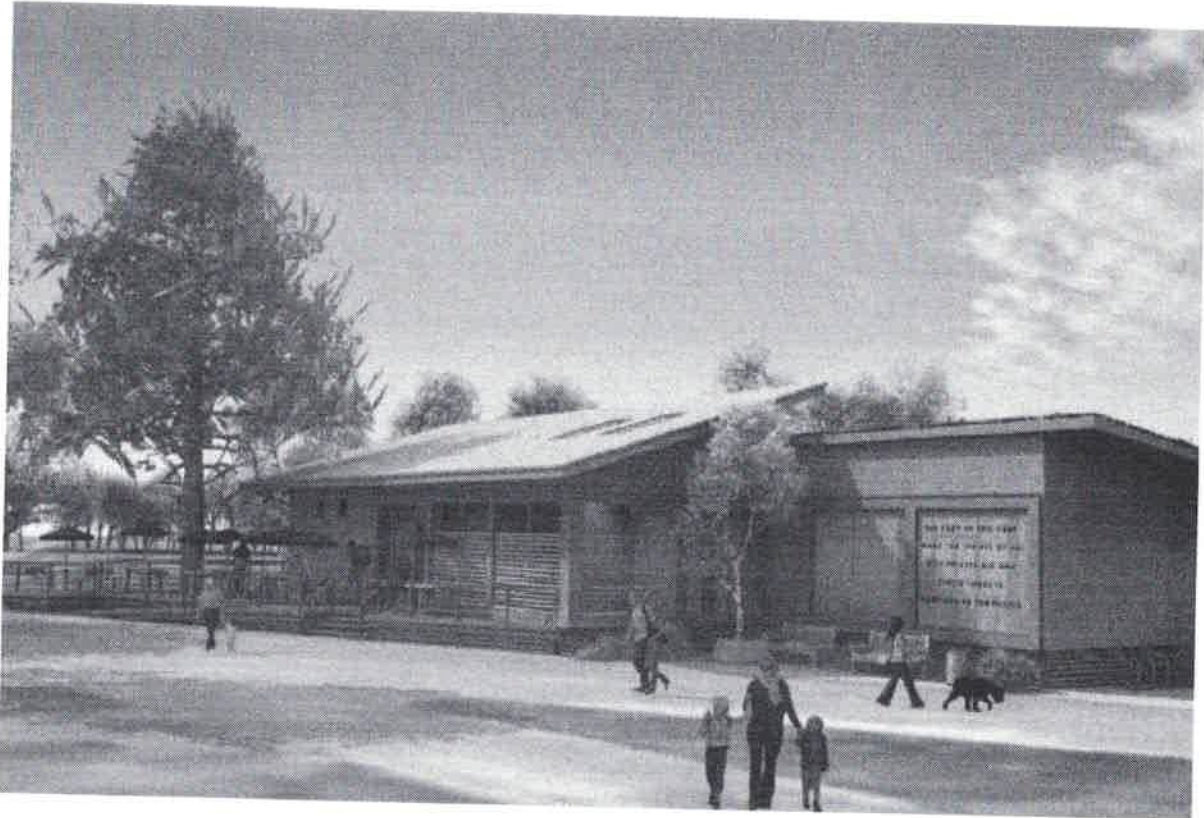
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BSBPMG417 Case Study Project

Devonport – The People’s Park, Plymouth City Council

Association for Project Management (APM) Community Project of the Year, 2010



Overview

The six-year, £5.5 million project aimed to transform Devonport Park, in Plymouth – nicknamed The People’s Park from a run-down, Grade II listed Victorian public park, into an area with a wide range of facilities, more diverse wildlife and community events and activities.

The project became part of the wider regeneration of Devonport following a 2005 survey by Plymouth City Council which found that 20 per cent of local people made no use of the park whatsoever.

Objectives

The project’s main goal was to improve the area’s footfall and create a focal point for one of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the South West.

To achieve this, there had to be total buy-in from local people for all aspects of the restoration. These included the design and delivery of the restoration scheme, improvements to the diversity of the park’s wildlife, an events and activity programme and new facilities including a café, toilet, changing rooms and a fit-for-purpose play area.

It was felt necessary to improve the management and maintenance of the park to strengthen

community safety and ensure long-term sustainability of the project, while maintaining the historic setting of the park.

Resources

The project had a full-time project manager, Chris Coldwell, Plymouth City Council, for six years and a full-time community officer Gillian Chinner, Peter Beynon and Ben Ozanne for nearly three years.

The total cost was £5.5 million – 69 per cent of which was financed by the Heritage and Big Lottery Funds, with the balance provided by Devonport Regeneration Community Partnership (DRCP), Barclays Bank, Plymouth City Council and the volunteer time and funds raised by the Friends group.

No resources were available at the beginning of the project so they had to be secured by lobbying and raising the project profile with the help of Plymouth City Council. The involvement of local politicians in the development of the project objectives helped to achieve this.

Challenges

The most significant challenge was securing and maintaining a community consensus over the course of the project. This involved a high level of community and agency stakeholder engagement.

Other challenges involved balancing the historic setting with brand new facilities and meeting the needs of existing park users alongside the needs of potential park users. The lack of any resources available other than the commitment of the City Council to fund the project manager post, meant the first three years were spent securing full-funding approval at a time of declining Lottery resources due to the 2012 Olympics and the static public funding budget at the City Council.

An added risk was the existence of a number of air raid shelters throughout the park. Knowledge of the size and extent of the shelters was limited, which could potentially impact on the build schedule.

Coordination

Among Chris Coldwell's duties as project manager was coordinating day-to-day relations with 25 community groups and other parties.

Chris worked in community development for three years on a secondment basis during an earlier part of his career and was able to put his facilitation and negotiation techniques into good practice.

Conflict was managed on a one to one basis using negotiation and bargaining with individual parties. By having a common agreement for the core project objectives and vision for the park at the outset, all decisions were bought to a quick and effective solution.

The process was supported by cognitive mapping techniques to record the views, opinions and priorities of the different stakeholders. This, in turn, helped create an open and transparent process, and engender a sense of trust in the City Council to act as chief mediator.

On a more formal basis, key community groups, the City Council Parks Service, City Council

Cabinet Member and the DRCP were updated at a monthly project board meeting. The group also acted as the project executive taking in to account the engagement and conflict management work with the other 22 parties concerned.

Successes

- The project has succeeded in helping to create one of the most successful 'Friends' groups in the city that went on to win the runner up cup as the Environmental Volunteer Group of Plymouth in 2010.
- Between 2007 and 2009 Devonport Park achieved a 30 per cent increase in footfall measured by a manual pedestrian count. There was also a near quadrupling of community satisfaction, up from 22 to 82 per cent of people being satisfied or very satisfied with the park as a recreational resource.
- The park looks set to continue as a focal point for local people. A community gardening group does half of all the planting, a new pavilion has just opened, contractors have made training placements available during restoration work, and full-time warden and apprentice posts will ensure the maintenance of the park for at least the next 12 years.





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