HLF Restoration Project
Final evaluation report
March 2017
Priory Park’s History

Priory Park is Dudley’s premier historic park. It covers 7.7 hectares, and sits just 600m (a five-minute walk) from the centre of the town. The park was opened in 1932 to serve the needs of a large newly built housing estate, and featured tennis courts and a bowling green, a formal rose garden and a pond. Shelters and a park pavilion were added in the 1950s, and these features have survived until the present day.

The park’s site has a rich history, stretching back almost a thousand years, when a small monastery, Dudley Priory, was set up. The Priory’s ruins are located within the park and are a Scheduled Ancient Monument, Grade I listed. In addition is Priory Hall, a Grade II listed building now used for public functions, including weddings.

By the early 2000s the long-term effects of funding reductions were clear to see. Much of the park and its structures were dilapidated, and in stark need of refurbishment. Its rich history and heritage had become neglected, anti-social behaviour was a problem and visitor numbers were low.

To remedy these chronic problems, Dudley Council and The Friends of Priory Park put together a comprehensive restoration plan, with projected costs of £2.64m. In July 2010 Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) agreed to fund £1.79m (69%) of the project’s cost as part of its Parks for People programme.
Project vision and aims

Extensive research, observation and consultation started in 2009, and continued throughout the project, which began in 2011 and ran for five years.

Stakeholders determined that the key aims should be a balance between the physical restoration of the park’s infrastructure and the encouragement of greater and more diverse use of the park. Key to this would be providing the local community with opportunities to volunteer, learn and train.

Objectives agreed

The project partners agreed that the project should focus on these aspects:
- A new community building with classroom, toilets and educational staff
- Improve the park’s infrastructure and planting
- Repair and enhance the park’s historic structures
- Enhance active recreational provision
- Provide ways to understand the park’s history.

Key social aims of the project

It was hoped that the planned improvements would bring about a number of social benefits:
- Positive changes in management and maintenance
- Enhance security by improving park supervision
- Actively engage the local community at all levels
- Improve participation in horticultural activities
- Raise participation levels in active leisure pursuits, including sports training, community gardening and health and wellbeing activities.

Data collection and evaluation

From the outset, primary data was collected by surveying council staff, park apprentices, the local community and volunteers. Surveys were repeated annually and evaluated. Visitor observation surveys were also conducted at regular intervals. In addition, focus groups and one-to-one questionnaires were conducted, and repeated.

Park rangers and volunteers collected data and fed it into the HLF’s annual reporting of outputs against project outcomes. Data was further analysed and compared to targets set in the initial application.

Qualitative information was also collected from various sources, including comments made during surveys, plus Facebook and TripAdvisor.

HLF requirements

As part of its Parks for People programme the project’s key funder, HLF, required that the scheme should work towards five key outcomes.

1. Increase the range of audiences using and enjoying the park
2. Conserve and improve the heritage value of the park
3. Increasing the range of volunteers involved in the park
4. Improve skills and knowledge through learning and training opportunities
5. Improving management and maintenance of the park.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>VALUE</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capital costs and fees</td>
<td>£1,641,025</td>
<td>62.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased maintenance</td>
<td>£459,500</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New staff costs</td>
<td>£263,606</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunk costs and overheads</td>
<td>£129,147</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>£54,190</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity costs</td>
<td>£41,000</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretation</td>
<td>£38,250</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>£10,000</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer match</td>
<td>£5,000</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>£2,641,718</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Project costs. HLF contributed £1.79m (69%) of the total.

Concept sketches for public art to go in the park.
Physical outcomes

The Priory Ruins
Work to the ruins included pointing end-stone masonry, removing unsightly fencing, new signs and interpretation, lighting and the creation of a medieval herb garden with high-quality paving in the cloisters area.

The Pavilion
The small, underused pavilion was extended to create a new bright, airy education and meeting space. Two new wings were added to create much needed public toilets. An office base for a park heritage ranger was also created along with bespoke interpretation for visitors to learn about the history of the Priory and the park.

Art works and features
A number of art pieces were commissioned to depict the park’s rich ancient and more recent heritage. These included:
- A gateway at the park’s south end, designed by Steve Field, depicting the monastic past of the site.
- A gateway, designed by local student Carol-ann Richards, at the north end, to represent medieval times, when the area was a deer park.
- A life-sized bronze statue, by John McKenna, of Dudley-born tennis champion Dorothy Round. Round won the Wimbledon singles championship in 1934 and 1937, and was Australian Open champion in 1935.
- A major project to design, create and install medieval tiles within the Priory ruins. Artist Karen Slade worked with local schoolchildren to create designs that were then made into clay tiles. The tiles were installed to explain the different rooms within the Priory.

Other works
A whole raft of other works were devised and installed to improve the park’s general physical condition and usability. These included:
- improvements to entrances, footpaths, paving, seating and historical planting.
- the addition of various ramps, handrails and steps to improve accessibility, while taking care to execute these in a manner that was in keeping with the park’s heritage.