

Green Infrastructure Case Story

St Lawrence Park, Byker, Newcastle Upon Tyne

NATURAL
ENGLAND

Transforming a park with a voluntary community 'green exercise' group

Background

St Lawrence Park is situated in the East End of Newcastle within sight of the famous Byker Wall and the rejuvenated quaysides of Newcastle and Gateshead. Prior to the start of this project the use of the park for community-based activities was low, with the poor state of the park providing little benefit for the natural environment. It was neglected leading to a variety of problems including anti-social behaviour.

The Project

Through The Green Gym*, a health and personal development programme, local residents and others from outside the area were engaged in weekly activities focusing on improving St Lawrence Park. The aims of this programme were to:

- Provide opportunities for residents to meet new people, learn new skills and increase their self confidence.
- Engage residents in regular exercise, provide healthy lifestyle advice and monitoring improvements in health and wellbeing.
- Improve quality of park within a socially deprived area.
- Involve local community in planning and implementation.

"The Green Gym has certainly enabled myself and this community to take possession of the park, and to demonstrate to all what can be achieved by working together. Myself, my fellow volunteers and the Byker community are immeasurably better for it."

Richard Hammond - Chair of the Friends of St Lawrence Park



Key Facts:

- Local Authority: Newcastle upon Tyne
- Size: 2.2 ha

The catchment of the park according to the Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard is 300m (see map). The area is highly deprived including poor health, high unemployment and a high crime rate. There is poor provision of green spaces / access routes.

Benefits and impacts

The environmental benefits include the restoration of 2.2 ha of an urban park. 3000m² of wildflower meadow were sown, with benefits for associated wildlife. The social and economic benefits started by giving the community increased and improved access to a more natural environment. 700m of footpath and all existing access points were improved to facilitate this. Increased recreational activities then led to health improvements of participants.

The Green Gym has engaged 92 participants. Those involved included people with mental health problems, learning difficulties, unemployed people looking for experience and skills, members of the Friends of St Lawrence Park group. Referrals from a number of smaller charities meant a positive impact for people from the Tyne and Wear conurbation and beyond. As a result of the project 2 jobs have been safeguarded and participants have used the Green Gym as a springboard into employment, further education or volunteering opportunities.



Key Outcomes and Benefits:

- 2.2 ha park restored
- 20% of participants into employment and 55% into further education / volunteering
- 75 % of participants improved their mental and/or physical health
- anti-social behaviour in area dropped from 830 to 650 incidents p.a. over 3 years
- Self-sufficient Friends of Group and Green Gym group by March 2011



Lessons learned and good practice

- Combining the health benefits of the Green Gym concept with generating free volunteer time proved a valuable delivery mechanism for enhancement and maintenance of the park, which should become increasingly important for “localism” and in current economic climate.
- The project attracted enough participants as Groundwork liaised with a number of other charities, such as Real Life Options bringing together “provision” and “demand”. Taster sessions in liaison with e.g. the DePaul Trust helped recruiting new members and finding appropriate occupation for their clients.
- A staff day for Natural England in July 2010 helped a team to grasp issues around Green Infrastructure and sustainable communities while working alongside the community group.
- The Green Gym is excellent for engaging people in environmental improvement with people being motivated to join for a broad range of reasons.
- Funding package from a number of sources and being used flexibly and led by community.



The way forward

The funding from Natural England and Newcastle City Council allowed Groundwork South Tyneside and Newcastle to secure additional funds from the Big Lottery to continue delivery of weekly Green gym sessions for a further 12 month period. Two of the Green Gym participants have undertaken formal Green gym leadership training and hope to continue practical improvement sessions with the community. Friends of St Lawrence Park have continued to shape the project, sourcing additional support from Newcastle City Council, Bat Conservation Society and Newcastle’s Community Voluntary Service. They have independently organised public events including a bat walk and summer fayre. The aim is that the Green Gym and Friends of Group are going to be self-sufficient by April 2011.

External links:

[Summary of neighbourhood statistics for Newcastle 26C LSOA \(ONS\)](#)
[Newcastle Green Gym \(Newcastle City Council\)](#)
[Nature Nearby: Accessible Natural Greenspace Guidance \(Natural England\)](#)
[Paying for Parks \(CABE\)](#)

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Contacts:

Ingo Schüder- Green Infrastructure
Delivery Leader, Natural England
Phone 0300 060 0940 or Email:
Ingo.Schuder@naturalengland.org.uk

Alene Lee- Groundwork South Tyneside
Phone: 0191 428 1144 or Email:
alene.lee@groundwork.org.uk