



# WE RETHOUGHT PARKS

BURNLEY 'GO TO THE PARK'

Nesta...



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### ABOUT THE RETHINKING PARKS PROGRAMME

Rethinking Parks was a joint Nesta, Heritage Lottery Fund and Big Lottery Fund England programme to find, support and test new approaches to raising income or reducing costs for public parks. Public parks face cuts of 60% and more from current local authority revenues over the next decade, and this programme trialled new methods and models to address this funding gap. Other resources from the Rethinking Parks programme, including descriptions of other models, the summary report and links to tools for the sector can be found at: <http://www.nesta.org.uk/project/rethinking-parks>

### ABOUT BURNLEY 'GO TO THE PARK'

Burnley is a small town in north west England. Go to the Park was developed by Burnley Borough Council and Offshoots, a project run by local social enterprise Newground. The partners developed and tested a new approach in seven of the town's parks, seeking to maintain them at a lower cost, increase biodiversity and reduce CO2 emissions, and to mobilise volunteers to help deliver the approach.



## BURNLEY 'GO TO THE PARK': AT A GLANCE



*Introducing more natural maintenance techniques and mobilising volunteers to reduce park's costs*



*The Council is facing huge cuts and so we are rethinking how we maintain our parks. We are trying to keep doing the things that are most important to the public such as removing litter, maintaining play areas and tackling dog fouling and we are saving money in other areas, such as introducing more wildflower meadows in our parks and replacing expensive bedding plants with herbaceous perennials.*



Councillor Bea Foster, Executive Member for Leisure, Burnley Borough Council

### WHAT IS IT?

Burnley 'Go to the Park' is an approach that combines new ways of lowering maintenance costs with a specialist volunteering programme to maximise volunteers' contribution to parks upkeep. The Burnley model combines six elements, each of which could be adapted elsewhere:

- Introduction of meadow management into heritage parks
- Woodland management and timber production
- Conversion of annual bedding to perennial planting
- Development of bee populations in parks
- Creation of 'Volunteer in Parks' programme
- Commercial crop production on parks' perimeters.

### WHAT'S THE POTENTIAL IMPACT?

Burnley 'Go to the Park' realised savings of £67,480 in the first year of operation (2014/15). These are projected to rise to £117,000 by 2020/21. The impact of similar schemes in other towns and cities will depend on the size of local parks, their characteristics, and the existing maintenance model.

### CORE CHARACTERISTICS



QUICK TO DELIVER



WIDER BENEFITS  
ACHIEVED



A MEANINGFUL  
IMPACT



VOLUNTEERING



## WHERE MIGHT FUNDING MIGHT COME FROM?

- Parks' managing authorities, who may buy specialist maintenance equipment to unlock future savings
- Health care commissioners, who may support volunteering coordination for wellbeing benefits

## WHAT ARE THE CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS FOR DELIVER?

- Expertise in methods used in parks (e.g. woodland & meadow management)
- Supportive parks managers, staff, Friends' groups and elected local officials
- A Good understanding of current management costs
- Staff capacity for, and expertise in, volunteering recruitment and coordination
- Local farmers who may purchase pollination services or assist with hay bailing or commercial cropping.

## HOW LONG MIGHT IT TAKE?

Six months to one year to develop, and two to three seasons to begin to reap greatest ecological and financial benefits from meadow planting.

# BURNLEY 'GO TO THE PARK'

## WHAT THE TEAM DID

## WHAT WAS THE TEAM'S ORIGINAL IDEA?

The Burnley Go to the Park team comprised:

- **Burnley Borough Council** (BBC), who oversaw implementation, working closely with Offshoots, and led communications and impact measurement
- **Offshoots**, a permaculture project that is part of social enterprise Newground
- Friends' groups were helpful supporters of the initiative



The team's idea was to move away from traditional, intensive horticultural techniques to lower cost permaculture approaches, working with nature rather than against it. They also wanted to test how specialist volunteer roles could complement this shift as well as delivering improved health and wellbeing benefits for volunteers.

## WHAT DID THE TEAM DO?

The project brought together different aspects the team had been working on, or thinking about, for many years such as converting annual bedding to perennial planting and introducing meadow management. They also developed a 'Volunteer in Parks' programme offering more specialist volunteering opportunities to help with the implementation of the new techniques.

BBC and Offshoots had a good rapport after working together for many years and offered complementary skills and experience for delivering the approach.

BBC's parks team led engagement with councillors and Friends' groups to gain their support, given that the proposed changes would alter how the parks looked. The team consulted users and Friends' groups on major changes such as shifting to meadows or introducing perennial bedding plants.

Offshoots and BBC established a project steering group which developed management plans for each of the activities. The steering group met monthly throughout the programme to ensure the different strands were on track.

BBC benchmarked existing costs so an accurate assessment of financial impact could be made. They also conducted an ecological impact survey to measure changes in the biodiversity where different planting regimes were introduced.

## WOODLAND MANAGEMENT

The woodland management plan identified an area of woodland which required thinning and the resources needed for this. Some woodlands in the area are small and difficult to access, and timber extraction required a significant amount of manual labour. The team recognised that these areas lent themselves well to bringing in specialist expertise and a team of volunteers. The work was planned so that volunteers created woodland paths at the same time as extracting wood.

This meant that the public could more readily access areas previously too dense to walk through. BBC also purchased a forestry trailer (pulled by mini-tractor) so that the team could remove timber without damaging woodland paths, and a log splitter that volunteers could use. Extracted timber was turned into wood chip, which was then used for play areas, saving on the costs of purchasing wood chip; large diameter wood was split for fuel.

## MEADOW MANAGEMENT

BBC's meadow management plan identified the areas of parks that would be managed as meadows, in order to reduce fuel, labour and machinery costs, CO2 emissions and to increase biodiversity. The meadow areas were carefully chosen based on areas of lesser use and the aesthetic of each park, and the wildness of these spaces was balanced by continued careful mowing and maintenance of grass lawns and pathways. BBC purchased a special mower (the Amazone Profihopper) that could both achieve a high quality finish on formal lawns, and cut and collect hay from the meadow areas. Removing the hay crop was important to manage meadow growth and increase biodiversity. In larger park areas, an agricultural firm was contracted to cut and bale the meadows.



## VOLUNTEERS IN PARKS (VIPS)

The VIP programme identified four volunteer roles: Horticulture, Woodland, Ranger and Beekeeper. A specific brand for VIPs was created and volunteer descriptions were written for each role. The roles were marketed through word of mouth, posters in parks, press coverage and online (through Do-It, Burnley and Pendle CVS and Newground volunteering websites). Burnley College also marketed the volunteering opportunities.

A structured volunteer training and activity plan meant participants had a clear sense of what opportunities were available when and in which areas. Training, leading into specific activities, was seen as important for volunteers, not only so they understood the positive impact they would have but also to maximise that impact. New volunteers had one-to-one meetings with a coordinator and were introduced to the park gardener or group they would be working with. The VIP programme purchased Better Impact volunteer management software to efficiently manage the steadily increasing number of volunteers.

## PERENNIAL PLANTING

BBC replaced costly and time-consuming annual bedding plants with herbaceous perennials. BBC planned the change in consultation with park Friends' groups and funded it from savings in the bedding plant budget. Alongside the financial benefit, herbaceous perennials provide good forage for bees and a net reduction in CO2 emissions.

## COMMERCIAL CROPPING

A crop of borage was planted on a hectare of underused land in Towneley Park with a view to providing good bee forage and selling the crop for star oil production. While the crop did provide excellent forage for Towneley's bees and was a talking point with park users, the team could not find a buyer for the crop. Instead it has been cut and used for reseeding new areas for summer 2016.





## URBAN BEE FARM

The new meadows in parks provided an opportunity for Offshoots to expand its urban bee farm and the project looked for ways to safely place beehives in parks. As the only available enclosure which protected hives from people and vice versa was prohibitively expensive, the Offshoots/BBC team worked with a local engineering company to design and prototype their own model.

“

*As the council's budget is reduced, we are developing ways of managing our parks at lower cost, such as introducing more wildflower meadows into parks. These encourage wildlife and provide excellent forage for honey bees, so it is a natural step to introduce bee hives.*

”

Councillor Bea Foster, Executive Member for Leisure, Burnley Borough Council

The design of the cage, made of perforated steel sheets, controls the flight of bees in and out of hives, providing good ventilation and protection while still allowing people to see the hives. The team are adapting the prototype after field testing, to reduce the cost of future designs and make them a feasible option for others.



## WHAT HAPPENED AND WHAT NEXT?

Most aspects of the project have been implemented as intended, with the desired financial impact. The program will continue with a small number of modifications, such as introducing a fifth volunteer role.

## INDICATIVE FINANCIAL FORECAST: BURNLEY 'GO TO THE PARK' - RETHINKING PARKS FINANCIAL PLAN

Financial Year	16-17	17-18	18-19	19-20	20-21
<b>VOLUNTEER IN PARKS PROGRAMME</b>					
<b>INDICATIVE INCOME</b>					
<b>VALUE OF VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>£ 18,000</b>	<b>£ 20,081</b>	<b>£ 22,326</b>	<b>£ 24,744</b>	<b>£ 27,349</b>
<b>INDICATIVE EXPENSES</b>					
Staff costs - direct, volunteer administrator	£ 2,834	£ 2,834	£ 2,834	£ 2,834	£ 2,834
Staff costs - in kind, induction & training	£ 1,729	£ 1,729	£ 1,729	£ 1,729	£ 1,729
Staff costs - in kind, gardener's time	£ 3,894	£ 3,894	£ 3,894	£ 3,894	£ 3,894
Other programme costs	£ 2,380	£ 2,469	£ 2,562	£ 2,661	£ 2,764
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>£ 10,837</b>	<b>£ 10,926</b>	<b>£ 11,020</b>	<b>£ 11,118</b>	<b>£ 11,221</b>
<b>Net contribution to Parks (IN KIND)</b>	<b>£ 7,163</b>	<b>£ 9,155</b>	<b>£ 11,306</b>	<b>£ 13,627</b>	<b>£ 16,128</b>
Return	40%	45%	51%	55%	59%
<b>MEADOW MANAGEMENT</b>					
Cost of traditional mowing	£ 50,275	£ 58,278	£ 64,692	£ 64,692	£ 64,692
Cost of meadow management	£ 8,997	£ 9,679	£ 8,863	£ 8,863	£ 6,565
<b>Net saving to Parks (CASH)</b>	<b>£ 41,278</b>	<b>£ 48,600</b>	<b>£ 55,829</b>	<b>£ 55,829</b>	<b>£ 58,127</b>
Return	82%	83%	86%	86%	90%
<b>PERENNIAL PLANTING</b>					
Baseline costs - Annuals planting	£ 36,905	£ 36,905	£ 36,905	£ 36,905	£ 36,905
Project costs, Perennial Planting	£ 25,488	£ 20,385	£ 8,592	£ 8,592	£ 8,592
<b>Net saving to Parks (CASH)</b>	<b>£ 11,416</b>	<b>£ 16,519</b>	<b>£ 28,313</b>	<b>£ 28,313</b>	<b>£ 28,313</b>
Return	31%	45%	77%	77%	77%
<b>WOODLAND MANAGEMENT</b>					
Use of woodchip for play surfacing, avoided costs	£9,885	£10,200	£10,500	£10,500	£10,500
Use of woodfuel			£1,750	£1,750	£1,750
RHI			£2,500	£2,500	£2,500
<b>Net saving to Parks (CASH)</b>	<b>£9,885</b>	<b>£10,200</b>	<b>£14,750</b>	<b>£14,750</b>	<b>£14,750</b>
<b>Total contribution to parks (INKIND)</b>	<b>£ 7,163</b>	<b>£ 9,155</b>	<b>£ 11,306</b>	<b>£ 13,627</b>	<b>£ 16,128</b>
<b>Total contribution to parks (CASH SAVINGS)</b>	<b>£ 62,580</b>	<b>£ 75,320</b>	<b>£ 98,892</b>	<b>£ 98,892</b>	<b>£ 101,190</b>
<b>Projected Combined savings</b>	<b>£ 69,743</b>	<b>£ 84,475</b>	<b>£ 110,198</b>	<b>£ 112,519</b>	<b>£ 117,319</b>

Seventy-eight volunteers have signed up to the VIP scheme and there are regularly over thirty volunteers active, who have contributed time worth £34,000 in total. Volunteers have also benefited directly from their involvement:





*"I now have an allotment and have learnt the skills to make it work. I have also learnt the skills for milling timber."*

(VIP Volunteer)



*"Since volunteering for [the] Go to the Park project my partner says I've become happier again and I feel more confident and useful as well."*

(VIP Volunteer)

The VIP scheme has also had benefits for staff. The park-based gardeners generally work alone and have enjoyed working with volunteers and sharing their knowledge. A fifth role of 'Park Volunteer' has been added as an additional VIP role to cover members of park Friends' groups who take part in fundraising, event organisation and so on.

There have been no complaints to date about the aesthetic changes in the parks moving from formal grass to wildflower meadows. The move from annual to perennial plants has been a greater topic of debate, particularly for parks staff who have been tending to annual beds for decades. The change is being managed by keeping formal annual beds in areas of the park best suited to this style and gradually introducing perennials.

The urban bee cages have become the visual reference of the project as a whole and now form part of an urban bee farm with more than 40 hives located across Burnley which are looked after by Offshoot's beekeepers and a team of volunteers. A second, more affordable, version of the cages is being designed - both for the project to use, and for sale to other beekeepers.

## WHAT DID THE TEAM LEARN AND WHAT ADVICE DO THEY GIVE TO OTHERS?

It's essential to engage with park staff at all levels - not just the supervisory level. VIP coordinators have spent time going out into different parks to talk with individual teams, held meetings with supervisors about the sort of activities VIPs can get involved with and introduced individual VIPs to staff before they actually started volunteering.

"The Parks Officers came through as champions for the project and have played a pivotal role in implementation and in promoting the VIP programme to the gardeners. They are very experienced and well-respected members of staff and so the gardening staff took a lead from them in engaging well with the VIP project and other aspects such as meadow management."

"There's a difference in the pace of different stakeholders; between the 'can do, get on with it' approach of some, and a slower more bureaucratic approach. There was particular frustration that data protection prevented the names of enrolled volunteers being shared with park Friends' groups."

"Focus on what's going to be sustainable in five years time - do stuff that fits in with your plans"

"The financial driver is not the only one - this is also the wise thing to do. The parks are important for local people, to avoid travel, to enable exercise, to improve wellbeing for children and adults, and we need to encourage personal and shared responsibility for our public spaces. We have to make the best use of the resources we have so the parks can be more self-sustaining but without losing their character."

Maureen Frankland, Chair of Towneley Park Friends Group.



## HORTICULTURE IS A FIGHT AGAINST NATURE

Towneley Park and other heritage parks in Burnley are perfect examples of the UK's Victorian parks: beautiful, traditionally presented, and loved by generations in their current form. For many, the formal landscaping and refined planting represent the archetypal park: this is what they expect to experience when they visit a heritage park. However this kind of resource-intensive management regime, and the large workforce it requires, is no longer sustainable for many local authorities.

This was a key driver for Burnley Borough Council to start questioning its traditional approach to horticultural maintenance. But the solution they found was not only about the money. It was equally important to find a solution that maintained parks at the highest quality, recognising their value to local people.

Burnley chose to think differently and to explore what a 'whole systems' permaculture approach could offer its parks – could it help reduce costs and maintain the quality of the parks as well as producing environmental benefits? In the words of Simon Goff, Burnley's Head of Green Spaces and Amenities, the shift was from "controlling nature" to "working with nature".

“We can apply this approach to other areas; we know now that we don't have to keep doing things in the same way as we've always done them.”



Simon Goff

This approach has resulted in two key visual changes for those visiting the parks. Firstly, some areas have been turned over to meadows. Secondly, a proportion of the traditional beds has been planted with perennials rather than annuals, aiming to provide year-round cover and colour. Yet despite people's affection for the existing, traditional look of the parks, there has been little resistance to these changes. Burnley Borough Council worked hard to ensure a smooth transition. It focused on making the biggest changes in parks where Friends' Groups have shown most enthusiasm for the potential of permaculture and where they would be advocates for this new approach to other park users. The workforce has received training to better understand permaculture principles and has been able to learn from the experience of an established local organisation called Offshoots. Energy has been devoted to ensuring that the meadows are well managed and don't have an air of neglect.

For the council, this has meant a significant shift of thinking: from a defensive, preservation mindset to one that is open to change. This shift takes courage, and seeing it through takes energy, resources and the ability to take others along with you. To have achieved this within a local authority setting is no mean feat.



## QUICK GUIDE TO DELIVERY: BURNLEY 'GO TO THE PARK'

### Feasibility Assessment

1. Identify suitable sites to introduce: woodland management; wildflower meadows; perennial planting; commercial cropping; beekeeping. Consider: existing maintenance contracts; skills of parks' and partners' staff; species selected for planting; and opportunities to increase biodiversity; maturity of woodlands; and site accessibility. Assess opportunities for volunteering initiatives to accompany all or some activities.
2. Benchmark costs and assess financial benefits of each new approach on a site-by-site basis. Include the costs of any specialist equipment and volunteer coordination and support as well as direct maintenance.
3. Develop an outline business case for the new maintenance approach(es).
4. Identify suitable delivery partners who may complement existing skills, resources or networks to ensure project's success.
5. Communicate business case to stakeholders (including but not limited to Friends' groups, staff, elected members) and enlist their support for the concept.

### Development

6. Set up a steering group involving partners and key stakeholders to monitor and guide implementation.
7. Develop delivery plans, accountabilities and timetables for each project strand.
8. Identify the impacts you (and any other funders) are seeking - this may include financial, biodiversity, volunteer wellbeing and/or staff engagement benefits.
9. Develop systems to measure and monitor impact - e.g. financial tracking, ecological surveys, volunteer feedback.
10. Engage and train staff, including park rangers, where required. In Burnley, early engagement with park staff was key to gain their support for introducing volunteering initiatives. Conduct ecological surveys across relevant sites.
11. Design specialist volunteering roles, incorporating the input obtained from engagement with staff.
12. Design and implement communications and marketing plan to inform park users and the public about the new approach, rationale and expected results.
13. As part of this, develop a volunteer recruitment plan - consider how you will use local networks, and think about the lead-in times needed for larger volunteering initiatives. Design in opportunities to thank and retain volunteers.
14. Source relevant equipment for new management techniques, including tools / equipment for volunteers.
15. Source volunteering coordination software, if using, and insurance cover for volunteers. (In Burnley, insurance cover was provided through Friends groups).

### Implementation

16. Communicate the changes to parks and recruit volunteers in line with plans.
17. Introduce new techniques according to seasonal cycles.
18. Introduce interpretation boards or other signposting in parks so the public can read about changes while on site. For example, a biodiversity rating of meadows will help people understand and measure increases in species over time.
19. Measure and monitor financial, wellbeing and biodiversity impacts. Adapt initiatives as needed in the light of progress and feedback.
20. Keep communicating - for example, a regular newsletter or social media dedicated to your project or venture, in order to better communicate with and between volunteers, park friends, partners, elected members, etc.

## WHERE CAN I GO TO FOR MORE INFORMATION?

<http://www.newground.co.uk/services/individual/offshoots-permaculture-project/volunteer-in-parks-vip-programme/>

<http://www.nesta.org.uk/go-park-burnley>

1 Plough Place  
London EC4A 1DE

[rethinking.parks@nesta.org.uk](mailto:rethinking.parks@nesta.org.uk)  
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