



WE RETHOUGHT PARKS

HEELEY PEOPLE'S 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 HEELEY PEOPLE'S PARK

Heeley People's Park is a community park situated in Heeley, Sheffield. The Heeley Development Trust was formed in 1996 and secured funding to redevelop an area of demolished housing as a community park. In 1997, the Trust took ownership of the 3.5 hectares of land through a 125 year lease from Sheffield City Council.

The park includes a rock climbing area, children's playground and large open area where music and community festivals are held during the year.



HEELEY PEOPLE'S PARK SUBSCRIPTION SOCIETY AT A GLANCE



Community giving for community parks

WHAT IS IT?

Heeley Subscription Society is a donations and subscription campaign run by an independent Development Trust.

CORE CHARACTERISTICS



LONGER TERM
IMPACT



PUBLIC DONATIONS



DIGITAL GIVING

WHAT'S THE POTENTIAL IMPACT?

Heeley Subscription Society made £7,000 in the first seven months of operation. By the second full year the subscription scheme is projected to make £8,000 per annum, accounting for 15% of the park's total operating costs.

WHERE MIGHT FUNDING TO DELIVER COME FROM?

- Local parks users
- Business sponsors
- Promotional products
- Local community groups

WHAT ARE THE CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS FOR DELIVERY?

- A good local park/s with high levels of community support
- Excellent marketing and campaigning skills
- A trusted, secure and clear website for digital giving
- Strong communications, including digital communications skills
- Benefits for subscribers and donors giving a sense of membership
- Independence from a local authority (ideally an existing independent parks organisation, as in the case of Heeley, to minimise establishment costs and maximise direct parks benefit)

HOW LONG MIGHT IT TAKE?

Seven months to one year to develop, and up to two years to start making a return.

HEELEY PEOPLE'S PARK WHAT THE TEAM DID

WHAT WAS THE TEAM'S ORIGINAL IDEA?

The project was led and run by the **Heeley Development Trust (HDT)**. HDT's original idea was to develop the Heeley Park Subscription Society and launch a new membership, community engagement and giving campaign. The subscription society would be backed up by an electronic platform to support annual subscription fees, individual donations, corporate giving and sponsorship. The eventual ambition was to get a £10 annual subscription from every household in the community. This would meet the ongoing maintenance costs of the park.

WHAT WAS THE TEAM'S ORIGINAL IDEA?

1. HDT engaged Masters students from Sheffield University to test community willingness to join a subscription society. The research showed 50% of respondents would join the subscription society, and a further 36% were considering it (suggesting a target for more dialogue and explanation to convert them). Others suggested smaller or less frequent amounts or alternative support (confirming the need for flexibility and different means to access the scheme).
2. HDT commissioned Peter and Paul, a branding and design company, to develop the subscription concept and campaign to secure £45,000 per annum for the park. HDT wanted to develop a clear message to explain to the public what was being asked for and why.
3. Market insight was the first step of the campaign development process. They explored opportunities and barriers around regular financial contributions to the park with residents and parks users. Peter and Paul discovered people didn't know Heeley Park was independent of the council (and didn't therefore get paid for by council tax), and were unclear of the park's boundaries (the park is subdivided by a road network).
4. Peter and Paul also surfaced people's feelings about the park. They found that some people would not necessarily give to the park "A tenner for that playground with the witches hat? I'm not paying that!", and many people recognised the park's community value "We took our sister-in-law recently - she's a climbing instructor - she thinks that boulder's great, it's so technical. We felt proud of having that on the doorstep."



5. A new branding and positioning of the park was recommended by Peter and Paul based on their market research. The branding company identified people would contribute when a gain was identified, rather than a threatened loss, and also found that the park wasn't considered a coherent space by residents.
6. HDT worked with Peter and Paul to create a website that reflected the branding and ideas implicit in the campaign, and also changed the park's name from Heeley Millennium Park to Heeley People's Park. The digital giving technologies beneath the visible 'skin' of the website included text giving and annual subscriptions through Pay Pal as well as Gift Aid contributions. The specifications for the system were security, efficiency, light in administration and the ability to be adapted and changed easily over time.
7. HDT used two opportunities to launch the subscription society: to 19,000 people at Sheffield United Football Club at the League 1 play off in May, and at the Heeley Festival. The Heeley Festival event was accompanied with press and social media and the site went fully live.
8. HDT used their summer events programme to promote the scheme to audiences directly. Subscription, cash and text donations were all tested at these events.
9. Feedback from conversations with parks users and across the wider community was sought out by HDT to gauge their impressions of the scheme, the ask and the website/giving experience.
10. A revised marketing and communications strategy was developed by HDT based on feedback and data on financial contributions.

WHAT HAPPENED AND WHAT NEXT FOR THE TEAM?

The events HDT run in the park throughout the summer were a key opportunity to enlist subscribers in the scheme. The events at Heeley People's Park had record attendance and positive approval ratings. However these did not convert to subscriptions in the numbers anticipated.



Think carefully about bucket shakes for coins: this can be seen by people as a substitute to becoming an ongoing member and part of something bigger.



Andy Jackson

HDT sought detailed feedback, analysed the reasons for the difference between performance and expectations and formulated a revised plan for the coming year to address this. The team learned that the options for giving need to be simpler and the website user journey clearer, so people understand what they are signing up for and have confidence in the site's security. HDT also found awareness needs to be higher, and the communications campaign needs to operate throughout the year and across many channels.

The People's Park subscription scheme will continue with revisions to the site and marketing strategy.



INDICATIVE FINANCIAL FORECAST: HEELEY PEOPLE'S PARK - RETHINKING PARKS FINANCIAL PLAN

Financial Year	15-16	16-17	17-18	18-19	19-20	20-21
INDICATIVE INCOME						
Subscriptions and online donations	£2.126	£4.917	£6.505	£8.375	£10.424	£12.700
Cash donations, events	£1.760	£4.750	£4.750	£4.750	£4.750	£4.750
Event-related income	£14.358	£20.743	£23.098	£25.264	£26.882	£27.974
Corporate donations / sponsorship	£2.150	£4.000	£4.000	£4.000	£4.000	£4.000
Grant Income	£103.652	£57.948	£54.005	£49.967	£46.301	£42.933
TOTAL INCOME	£124.046	£92.357	£92.357	£92.357	£92.357	£92.357
INDICATIVE EXPENSES						
Park Maintenance Costs						
Staff Costs	£30.068	£29.317	£29.317	£29.317	£29.317	£29.317
Vehicle costs	£1.990	£1.990	£1.990	£1.990	£1.990	£1.990
Maintenance costs	£4.538	£4.538	£4.538	£4.538	£4.538	£4.538
SUBTOTAL, PARK MAINT. COSTS	£36.596	£35.845	£35.845	£35.845	£35.845	£35.845
Event Costs						
Staff costs	£9.990	£9.051	£9.051	£9.051	£9.051	£9.051
Other event costs	£15.511	£15.511	£15.511	£15.511	£15.511	£15.511
SUBTOTAL, EVENT COSTS	£25.501	£24.562	£24.562	£24.562	£24.562	£24.562
Subscription Society						
Staff Costs	£11.117	£9.802	£9.802	£9.802	£9.802	£9.802
Operational costs	£1.125	£4.500	£4.500	£4.500	£4.500	£4.500
Programme development costs	£31.308	£-	£-	£-	£-	£-
SUBTOTAL, SUBSCRIPTION SOCIETY	£43.550	£14.302	£14.302	£14.302	£14.302	£14.302
Business Development	£10.741	£9.990	£9.990	£9.990	£9.990	£9.990
Premises & other overheads	£7.657	£7.657	£7.657	£7.657	£7.657	£7.657
TOTAL EXPEDITURES	£124.045	£92.357	£92.357	£92.357	£92.357	£92.357
Net result	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0



FRAMING THE ASK FOR A PEOPLE'S PARK

People value their local green space and these spaces make a valuable contribution to health and wellbeing. So, shouldn't people be interested to help pay for their local park?

It certainly sounds logical, and this was the premise behind the Heeley Subscription Society. But how do you sell this idea to local people? How do you overcome their perceptions: that they already pay for the park through taxation; that they don't use it so therefore don't need to contribute; or that parks are somehow a free resource.

For Heeley Development Trust (HDT), it has become clear that this is much more than an awareness raising or marketing task. This is about challenging the prevailing culture. Heather Ditch, one of the trustees (and a designer involved in developing the park branding and marketing), articulately describes the problem HDT faced "there was so much thinking to be undone [among residents] before we could do anything".

Andy Jackson, HDT Manager, explains "this needs a collective shift in mass consciousness about an issue". Local people need to be helped to understand that their park is a community asset, and helped to make a connection with it that builds their sense of ownership of and commitment to it. As Andy says "selling the gain rather than the loss is interesting". HDT is not focusing on the threat to the park, but trying to show that there is real value in community stewardship of the park.

Local people see a well managed and maintained park in their midst, so what is the driver that will enable them to see the benefits of investing in it, both financially and emotionally? Renaming the space as 'Heeley People's Park' has been a key step in emphasising that this is a community asset, managed by and for the local community. This connection needs to be developed further; the story needs to be continually told and re-framed - that is, your contribution helps to pay for the park to be looked after for your benefit.

To do this HDT needs to draw on its networks and relationships across the community, engaging face to face with local people. The key is to hold the kinds of conversations that build this understanding and will ultimately lead to more subscriptions, until there is a critical mass of local people in the Subscription Society.

There is a genuine local affection for the park that can be tapped into more effectively, but people need to know that their contribution can and will make a difference. They need to be able to 'buy into' a vision for the park and they need to know that their contribution will make a difference compared to supporting 'more of the same'. They also need to know that any contribution has an impact. Being asked for £1 a month towards a £45,000 goal is dispiriting, but £1 a month towards a new £45 light sounds just much more achievable.

But the second dimension here is not only what people are being asked to pay towards, but also how they are expected to pay. While local people have been happy to throw cash into buckets, they have been reluctant to use the online platform and, in the words of Simone Abram, the Chair of Heeley Development Trust, "this is a significant issue for signing people up". This reflects two key factors: that people are sceptical about giving their bank details to less familiar websites; and not everyone is happy to pay for things online.

In moving forward it is clear to HDT that the Subscription Society will be one of several sources of funding for the park. Income generation, rent revenues, public sector funding and grants should all play their part in the future. History is repeating itself in the city: even in the Victorian heyday of public subscriptions to parks, Sheffield Botanical Gardens struggled to maintain sufficient levels of investment through this means alone.

What is particularly interesting is the extent to which this project is impacting on HDT as a whole. It has emphasised the limitations of a single source of income; that HDT has been right in its strategy to move away from relying on grant revenue alone. “This has contributed massively to our thinking as an organisation” says Andy.

WHAT HAPPENED AND WHAT NEXT FOR THE TEAM?

“We directly observed a lot of people at our Big Boulder Event [one of the festivals in the park] respond to our ask with coppers and small change, this means a very high volume of very low value transactions with no dialogue or ongoing contact and only small revenue generation and people feeling they’ve done their bit. As we plan our events and activities programme for next year we will focus this entirely around building subscriptions and sign ups. We will improve and simplify our message along with the website and include a paper based sign up function.”

“Start developing your brand, identity, idea and market well before you NEED the income. Give yourself time and capacity to grow awareness, trust and profile within your community”

“Don’t look for clever, bespoke or expensive solutions to create web and giving resources. These are available, secure, well tried and tested. Just Giving is seen as a trusted platform; make use of that and make sure it’s visible on your site.”

“Don’t enter into this approach lightly or underestimate the work to engage and hold on to your subscribers – it is an investment for the long term, probably the income generated is not and shouldn’t be the primary reason for doing it.”

“I think this approach needs to be small scale and at a very close level of communication – not distant or too large, I think people respond to their local spaces, the ones they know and use.”

“With hindsight such a radical departure from what folks are used to was bound to take time to sink in and the message to embed.”



QUICK GUIDE TO DELIVERY: HEELEY PEOPLE'S PARK

Feasibility Assessment

1. Gauge the size of target audiences, their willingness to contribute, how much people might give and identify subscription categories (e.g. individual, family, corporate or other). For example, conduct a survey or focus groups to understand people's experiences of the park and what they might pay for, or compare demographics and giving potential with an existing parks or greenspace donations organisation.
2. Identify what subscribers will expect in return for regular contributions. This could be as straightforward as a membership card and updates about what contributions have been spent on. Consider whether different types of membership provide incentives to give more.
3. Estimate costs to set up and deliver the scheme, including time and resources for marketing and communications, website development and maintaining and building the subscription base. Identify the number and nature of subscriptions and timeframe required to achieve viability. If feasible, progress to development stage.

Development

4. Appoint a project manager with campaigning or fundraising skills.
5. Develop a brand and key messages for your campaign. This stage is likely to involve further market research and insight with representatives of your target audience to identify the specific messages and ideas that resonate with them and draw people to your scheme.
6. Use the brand and key message insights to develop the communications and engagement / campaigning strategy for the subscription scheme. Find specialist support to help you - paid, voluntary or pro bono. Consider the relevant mix of face-to-face, digital, press, physical ads, events and other communications targeted at increasing subscribers and maintaining membership. Consider enlisting ambassadors or champions for the subscription scheme.
7. Create the functionality for memberships to be paid and administered. Contract / recruit a web developer, as this is likely to require a website with digital payment functionality. Ease of use and security of the site will be important considerations for subscribers, so ensure there is a process to test and understand the user journey. Also ensure approaches for feedback are built in, and plan tactics to understand what works and what doesn't, along with resources to make adjustments once launched.
8. Develop a system for managing your database of members, aligned with the website. Information on your members is a key resource and it's important that you collect and retain this. Ensure you have included the appropriate permission statements so that members give you the right to keep in contact with them after sign-up.
9. Design and develop membership packs and joining information to confirm subscription.
10. Consider soft launching the scheme so any modifications to messages, process etc can be made ahead of engaging a wide audience to participate.

Implementation

11. Implement the strategy for enlisting new members. Launch events are more effective if there is media interest, so consider timing and sending press releases to local community media outlets in advance.
12. Review and refine the strategy for engaging and enlisting subscribers based on trend data and feedback from members and wider target audiences who have not yet subscribed.
13. Include communications back to members (e.g. by electronic newsletter) at specific points in the year to identify what difference their contributions make to the park.

WHERE CAN I GO TO FOR MORE INFORMATION?

<http://www.nesta.org.uk/heeley-subscription-society>
<http://www.heeleypeoplespark.org/>

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