



**the BIG
Biodiversity
Challenge**
do one thing

**Revealing, Reviving and Restoring Great Linford Manor Park
Great Linford, Milton Keynes
The Parks Trust**

BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award Category: Community Engagement

Project overview

Our Activity Plan attracted over 29,000 participants from 2017 to 2023, showcasing our park's natural and historical heritage. Through diverse events, we engaged new audiences, raised awareness, and supported the wider restoration project, celebrating this cultural asset of Milton Keynes.

What were the biodiversity conditions on site, prior to the enhancement?

Prior to our project, public awareness of the park's biodiversity was minimal. While locals enjoyed spotting common species such as ducks and moorhens, opportunities to experience a wider diversity were scarce. Conservation volunteering was non-existent, and environmental monitoring was limited and sporadic. Public engagement events were infrequent, lacking compelling attractions to promote the park's appeal. The variety of habitats was limited, reducing the variety of activities we were able to offer. Our schools programme was also limited and focussed elsewhere in our estate. The park's visitor base was not representative of the diverse population of Milton Keynes.

What were the reasons behind this project ?

Before our project, local people were unaware of the historic and natural heritage of the park and so our project sought to increase understanding and promote ambassadorship for the unique designed landscape. We wanted to encourage engagement with the park from a range of visitors that is more representative of our diverse city so that everyone could benefit from the wellbeing benefits of the great outdoors and feel a sense of local pride over this special park. We wanted to deliver a varied programme with something for everyone to promote the site locally and regionally.

Opportunities to engage with nature were limited pre-project. © The Parks Trust.



We consulted with local residents to create a park that worked for them. © The Parks Trust.



What were the biodiversity measures taken?

Since 2017, our Activity Plan has delivered over 500 events and activities, reaching an impressive audience of more than 29,000 individuals. We established a dedicated volunteering Friends group who now independently contribute to conservation efforts such as creating hibernacula, hedge-laying, clearing vegetation, and maintaining pond water supply. Community engagement days have enabled locals to learn about nature and participate in parkland tasks, including constructing woodchip paths and drystone wall to enhance amphibian and invertebrate habitats. We've engaged nearly 200 younger volunteers, including Youth Rangers, Youth Explorers, and Junior Park Rangers, who have assisted in creating hibernacula, woodchip paths, and a stumpery. In 2022, we partnered with a local church youth club, offering 12 children conservation and education activities as part of the John Muir Award program.

Our schools programme has expanded, with tailored sessions on the park's geology, including visits to the quarry. Over 300 children have benefitted from school sessions since 2019. During construction, we engaged local residents through informative Pond Works Information Talks and organised Biodiversity Walks to share project updates and knowledge with the wider public.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, we adapted our engagement strategies by incorporating remote activities. For instance, we conducted interviews with Parks Trust Forestry Officers, discussing their favourite arboretum trees, and shared these videos online, amassing over 8,000 views. Collaborating with local care homes, we distributed "Spring From Home" activity packs, allowing residents to engage with the park during lockdown. These packs were further distributed alongside food bank parcels administered by the Parish Council.

We have developed site-based interpretation that celebrates biodiversity, highlighting the new wildflower meadow and the majestic Linford Lime veteran tree as prominent features within the park. These efforts have collectively fostered a greater understanding and appreciation of the park's natural and historical significance among the local community and beyond.



Youth Explorers creating a stumpery in the park, 2022. © The Parks Trust.



Wildflower ID Workshop, 2022. © The Parks Trust.



Further information

Our Activity Plan was delivered by a dedicated team from The Parks Trust including the Community Engagement Officer, Events team, Outdoor Learning team and Biodiversity Officers. We enlisted support from project consultants, for example Landscape Architects and Hydrologists, to help us deliver activities to local people.

We monitored engagement continually, reporting to funders on a quarterly basis, and have collected large volumes of data on pre- and post-project community engagement. We have observed a change in the visitor demographic through transect surveys and event photographs, with it now being much more representative of Milton Keynes. The ages of visitors engaging with the park has been reduced and we are welcoming more families and young people, as well as visitors from minority ethnic backgrounds. We have exceeded our engagement targets in many areas, particularly in engagement with older people whom we have supported through a park-based café and guided nature walks.

We have learnt the importance of audience development work to help project managers understand who the project is for and who will be using the finished landscape. By getting to grips with our audience we were able to deliver a wide-ranging programme which has successfully engaged a diversity of people. We have learnt that biodiversity can be celebrated in different ways, and this varies between age groups and backgrounds and getting to know park visitors helps the project team to work effectively. The construction project has created the structure for greater biodiversity and our project's community engagement has celebrated it.

Project Team

Funders – National Lottery Heritage Fund & Community Fund, Client – The Parks Trust, Parks Trust Volunteers and the Friends of Great Linford Manor Park, Interpretation – Outside Studios.

What was the motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

The Trust is a charity intent on advancing public education in plants and wildlife and we took this project as an opportunity to do this intensively at Great Linford Manor Park. Our team is driven to make our parks inclusive spaces that represent our community.



Drystone walling with volunteers, 2021. © The Parks Trust.



Hedge-laying with the Friends group, 2022. © The Parks Trust.