

# Berwick Parks

## HLF Restoration 2012 - 2018

### Final Evaluation



Northumberland  
County Council



LOTTERY FUNDED



people spaces places



# Executive summary

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Coronation and Castle Vale Parks are well loved green spaces located in the town of Berwick-upon-Tweed. The Parks have tremendous heritage value as they encapsulate part of the castle ruins and the River Tweed. The Parks are now host to many valuable community projects, activities and events.

The Berwick Parks saw an exciting £942,620 large scale restoration between 2011 and 2018. The project, funded by Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and the Big Lottery Fund under the Parks for People programme, has been a real success with the two Parks, which were created for the people of Berwick to relax and enjoy the open space, being restored and brought back into the heart of the community.

The restoration works included improvements to the pathways, steps and railings and the refurbishment of heritage features such as the shelters and lily pond. Large areas have also been landscaped and re-planted to reflect the original planting scheme. New interpretation and signage has helped inform visitors of the Park's natural and built heritage, and habitat improvements, including a wildflower meadow, have increased the sites biodiversity.

The views from the park have been opened up as a result of this special project and visitors now enjoy stunning views across the estuary of the Tweed, the Royal Border Bridge and castle walls. Rarely do public parks benefit from such spectacular views, drawing together the physical geography, industrial and historic qualities of a location and this is of exceptional significance.

Regular activities run by staff and volunteers have helped to draw people into the Parks to enjoy the spaces. Families and children have thoroughly enjoyed the events that have taken place in the Parks and the new sculpture trail and orienteering course are bringing more children into the Parks.

As well as the physical works, the project funded a Parks Development Officer who has led on public engagement, maintenance, volunteering and the delivery of an events and activities programme.

Throughout the project lifecycle Council Officers, the Friends of Castle Parks, volunteers, local groups and members of the local community have showed a real determination to improve the Parks and have been consistently positive about the restoration, getting involved where possible. The Berwick Parks restoration project has brought the local community together and has helped to secure their future.

The project has showed real strength in partnership working and has ultimately increased pride in

the community, enhanced friendships and has increased participation across the town.

The real success of the project is demonstrated in the partnership working of Northumberland County Council and Berwick Town Council in securing future funding to retain the Park Development Officer post which will cover both the Parks and the Town.

The maintenance across the Parks has significantly improved and the two Parks are England's most northerly Parks to achieve the Green Flag Award. Staff and volunteers have done extremely well retaining the Green Flag Award and achieving Gold Awards in the Northumbria in Bloom competitions in 2016 and 2017.





# The Parks

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Coronation Park and Castle Vale Park share similar histories. Both were created in the 1930s, opening within six years of each other, they share similar design styles and features redolent of the 1930s art deco movement. Located less than 500m apart, the Parks are situated either side of Berwick Train Station and contain remnants of Berwick Castle. Both Parks have spectacular views of the River Tweed and are in the town's Conservation Area. They are important wildlife areas on the river estuary and are located just above the SSSI of Northumberland Coast and Berwick Estuary.

Both Parks were created to provide recreational space for the people of Berwick and contain formal planting, period features, promenades, viewpoints and a wealth of cultural and natural heritage.

## Coronation Park

Located to the west of the town centre, Coronation Park is the most northerly Park in England. It is the smaller of the two Parks and has an unusual shape that covers 0.3ha. It was created following a tree planting on the site in 1937 to commemorate the coronation George VI.

The Park has much historic significance in Berwick, once being the site of Gallows Knowe, where public executions by hanging took place until 1823. It is also believed to be the site where Sir Alexander Seton's son, Thomas, was hanged when held hostage by Edward III during the siege of Berwick in 1333. With Berwick Castle to the south-east of the Park, there are also remnants of the Scheduled Monument and Grade I listed White Walls of Berwick Castle, built by Edward III. The medieval castle was crucial during the Anglo-Scottish war, when the two kingdoms were at conflict for three centuries and Berwick changed hands 13 times. The Park was originally a grazing field and adjacent to the Park is private grazing land, known as Tommy the Miller's Field, the land is believed to have been sold around 1830 when its last owner, Thomas Thompson, heard that the railway was being built.

## Castle Vale Park

Located to the east of Berwick Train Station and adjacent to the Town Centre, Castle Vale Park covers 1.75 hectares. The Park is generally linear and runs parallel with the River Tweed and forms the end of the Northumberland Coast Path, part of the 5000km international North Sea Walking Trail. It offers the visitor impressive views of the Royal Border Bridge. The land was originally given to Berwick Corporation by Mr John Cairns,

a local baker, in 1928. Following World War I and an economic depression, industry in the area was suffering, leading to mass unemployment. The construction of the Park helped provide jobs for some of these and workers, while grants from a local benefactor and the Government Unemployment Grants Committee helped fund the creation of the Park which was officially opened in 1931.

To the south of the Park are the ramparts on Megs Mount, as well as Grade I listed fortified town walls and Conqueror's Well. The chalybeate well was constructed around 1882 in tribute to a local watch and clock maker, Peter Conqueror.

Historic postcards show that what the Parks would have looked like when they were first created. With six gardeners, they were maintained to a high standard, containing immaculate floral displays, a rockery, shrubberies and herbaceous borders. Both Parks also contain shelters, seating and promenades with sweeping views of the River Tweed. A favourite spot for locals is also the lily pond and arbour in Castle Vale Park.

Before the project, the Parks had become neglected and begun to deteriorate over the years due to a lack of funding and budget cuts. Areas had become overgrown and many of the Park's features were being lost through neglect and vandalism. The project evolved after CARA (Castlegate Area Residents Association) and the Berwick in Bloom Committee recognised the need for improvement and raised it with Northumberland County Council and Berwick upon Tweed Town Council. Following this a partnership developed to deliver the project, which was successfully awarded £890,700 by the Heritage Lottery and Big Lottery Fund under the Parks for People programme in 2012.



# The Project

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The two Parks were identified in the 2011 Berwick Public Realm Strategy ‘Tweed and Silk’ and were cited as having a ‘magical secret garden’ quality, however they are also overgrown and sadly neglected.’

Given that both Parks were in need of restoration and shared a similar audience it was felt that a combined submission to the Heritage Lottery Fund was appropriate.

Following a successful Round 1 pass from the Heritage Lottery Fund in June 2011, a series of linked plans were developed for the project during its development phase. This included a Conservation Management Plan, Activity Plan, 10 year Management and Maintenance Plan and an Interpretation Plan.

The Conservation Management Plan, developed in 2012, describes the restoration proposals in detail and sets out the heritage elements and significance of the Parks. With the aim of maintaining the design integrity of the Parks whilst responding to today’s needs, the Plan sets out the programme of works needed.

The Berwick Parks Activity Plan was based around the three key aims of learning, conservation and participation. The Plan used extensive consultation and research to develop an action plan of activities, interpretation, learning and promotion based around the current and target audiences.

The 10 year Management and Maintenance Plan was designed as a working document to aid efficiency and effectiveness of the management of the Parks. The Plan, developed following extensive consultation, brought together all the policies and issues impacting the maintenance of the Parks. It

was designed to help identify priorities for ongoing improvements, as well as encouraging a sense of ownership by staff and the community.

Based on two previous plans, the Interpretation Plan aimed to raise awareness of the Parks, as well as encouraging a greater and more varied use of the them. It was also intended to provide and promote a green route through Castle Vale Park into Berwick from the train station.

“

The project retained the history and heritage of the park but they now also have a modern twist and visitors are extremely pleased with the final result.

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“

The project has opened up a new world for us – we have increased our knowledge, made friends and it is now lovely to walk through the parks.

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*Quotes from volunteers who worked on the project.*





# Funding and project costs

The total cost to restore the two Parks was £942,620, including a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Big Lottery Fund of £890,700 under the Parks for People programme. This represents 95% of the total project cost, with contributions also made from Northumberland County Council and Berwick Town Council. The project involved a mix of capital works to heritage features and the landscape, as well as revenue elements such as training and project management. Despite some delays during the capital works schedule the revenue activity programme and overall project have been delivered in budget.

## Project Costs

Budget Heading	Allocation / Spend
Capital Costs	£664,782
Professional Fees	£47,088
Activity Costs	£157,300
Other Costs	£73,450
<b>Total Project Cost</b>	<b>£942,620</b>

# What the project set out to achieve

## Project Aims

The main aims of the project were to:

- Improve and restore the deteriorating infrastructure within the Parks, including features, planting, footpaths, steps, entrances and boundaries to ensure safe and easier access for all.
- Bring Berwick’s Parks back to life by employing a Parks Development Officer to engage local volunteers, groups and schools in practical conservation, maintenance and educational activities.
- Restore vistas of the Royal Border Bridge and Castle Walls by selective removal of self sown trees.
- Work with volunteers and local groups to set out and deliver an events programme, celebrating the cultural and natural heritage of Berwick and the Parks.
- Restore an excellent, yet sustainable standard of horticultural maintenance in the Parks and use the Parks to develop the horticultural skills of staff and volunteers.
- Continue to involve park users and support groups in all aspects of the project and future management decisions, by attendance at planning meetings, through consultation, events and practical work within the Parks.
- Improve the visitor attraction on offer in Berwick and contribute to the economic improvement of the town.
- Interpret the heritage of both Parks using a

range of media, such as leaflets, signage and the web.

- Obtain and retain the Green Flag Award for both Parks.
- Provide free access to the space for people to enjoy, including the views and walks to Berwick Estuary which is part of the Northumberland Coast Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and is a designated Special Area of Conservation (SAC).
- Improve the wildlife value of the planting in the Parks to increase biodiversity, improving the ‘green lungs’ of the town and provide opportunities for learning.

## 5 HLF Parks for People Outcomes

The overall project was also expected to deliver against the five Parks for People outcomes under which the Heritage Lottery Fund would assess the success of the Berwick Parks Projects restoration project:

- Outcome 1 Increase the range of audiences
- Outcome 2 Conserve and enhance our diverse heritage
- Outcome 3 Increase the range of volunteers involved
- Outcome 4 Improve skills and knowledge through training
- Outcome 5 Improve management and maintenance



# How did we measure success?

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The project approach to evaluating the success of the restoration project involved the submission of quarterly progress reports and annual monitoring data. This final report has drawn on a combination of primary (new) research, with a focus on visitor surveys, and secondary research, which has mainly involved reviewing monitoring data and project records.

Throughout the life of the project a range of data has been gathered in order to satisfy HLF's requirements for annual reporting of outputs against the five programme outcomes. This data collection has also helped the project team keep on track and measure progress, identify gaps and learning opportunities and provide evidence for the final evaluation report.

In order to establish a baseline for the project face to face surveys were conducted in 2012 in Berwick to gather people's perceptions of the Parks, as well as identifying the Parks current audiences, reasons for use and visitor satisfaction levels. The survey found that three quarters of those interviewed had visited the Parks. Most were local, living within ten minutes of the Parks and they used the Parks to relax, enjoy the views and nature, walk the dog or exercise.

Further surveys were undertaken in 2015 and 2017 in order to track the impacts of the project and ensure that it was meeting targets. The study found that a third of respondents were actually visiting the Parks for the first time and 15% of visitors were travelling from a holiday home in Berwick, indicating that it had become popular with tourists and visitors to the Town. The Parks also remained popular with regular visitors, with two fifths (43%) visiting daily or weekly. Most visited the Parks to enjoy the views or see the wildlife, relax, exercise or to walk the dog.

In 2017, a visitor survey found that the Parks were still popular for regular visitors with over a third (38%) of respondents visiting it daily or weekly. However, two fifths of respondents (40%) were visiting the Parks for the first time and 28% had come from a holiday home in or around Berwick, indicating that the Parks are successfully attracting a new and broader range visitors to Berwick. The survey also found that walking (or passing through), walking the dog and seeing the views were popular reasons for visiting the Parks, along with enjoying the Parks and the plants.

Initially visitor numbers were recorded by visitor counts conducted over two days in early August 2012 at Coronation Park and Castle Vale Park. As

well as calculating baseline visitor estimates, they helped establish the times when the Parks are the busiest. All three are busier in the afternoons, while Coronation Park has additional peaks in the morning and evening. This was repeated in 2017 at the end of the project and found that annual visitor numbers had increased to 177,390 from 111,405 in 2012.

As well as monitoring visitor satisfaction and identifying areas for improvement, a video was created by the staff and young people of the Berwick Youth Project in 2014 which is available on YouTube. It describes how the Parks were pre-restoration and showcases the improvements following delivery of the capital works. The video features interviews with volunteers, staff and consultants and celebrates the success of the project.





# Visitor numbers and satisfaction

The Park Development Officer has throughout the life of the project, has improved the management and maintenance of the Parks whilst providing opportunities for schools, local groups, volunteers, and trainees, organising events and increasing the range of audiences that the Parks currently attract, including visitors to the town.

The physical improvements to the park have increased its attractiveness to visitors, both local and from further afield, and the project has enabled the Council to promote the Parks as part of the visitor offer for Berwick.

The numbers of visitors to the Berwick Parks have increased dramatically since the start of the project, with an estimated 177,390 in 2017. Visitor numbers have increased by 163% since 2012, when annual visits were estimated to be around 111,405. The Parks also now attract a wider range of audiences from BAME backgrounds.

An independent interim evaluation of the project was carried out in 2015. Visitor counts were carried out forecasting annual visitor numbers of 118,990 and 161 people responded to project surveys, 70% of the surveys took place in Castle Vale Park and 30% in Coronation Park. The results of the survey found that visitors considered appearance and cleanliness to be the most important aspects of the Parks. 99% of respondents stated they were satisfied with the appearance of the Parks on completion including its cleanliness, trees and shrubs, with floral displays exceeding expectations. Nine in every ten respondents also said they were likely to recommend the Parks to friends and family.

“

Top class job restoring it.

”

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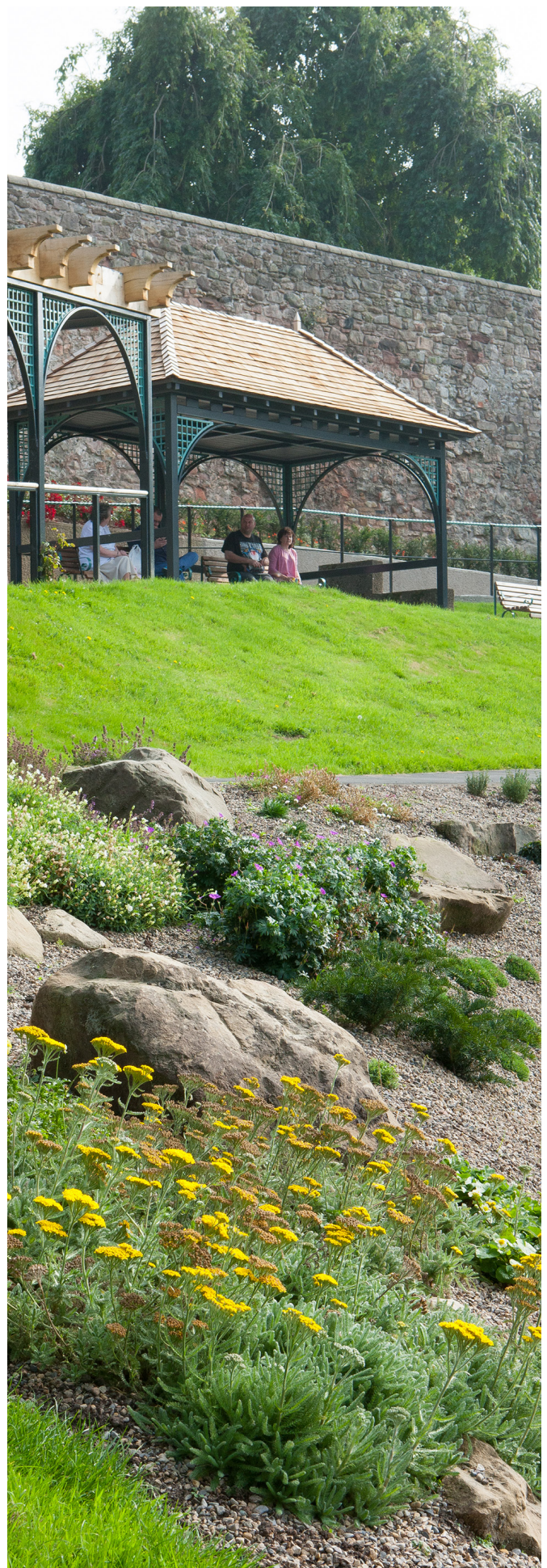
Lovely park, a hidden gem.

“

What a difference with the  
HLF money.

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*Quotes from visitor survey.*





# Conserving and enhancing the heritage value

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Capital works began in 2012 and were completed in 2017. They included the repair of two buildings, three historic features and restoration of the historic planting schemes. The project hit all of its targets to conserve and enhance the built and natural heritage across both Parks. Heritage works included:

- Repair of the 1930s shelter to the south of Coronation Park which included a new roof and seating and repainting.

In Castle Vale Park:

- The arbour and pergola have been restored and a ramp added to improve access.
- The 1939 art deco lily pond has been reinstated as a wildlife pond and the surrounding stone paving restored.
- Conqueror's Well, built in 1882, has also been carefully conserved and restored.

The Parks have undergone huge improvements to footpaths, park entrances and boundaries, handrails, seats, restoration of the lily pond in Castle Vale Park and the shelters. The new pergola in Coronation Park is a particularly good piece of design and carpentry work which showcases the detail of the restoration.

The conservation and enhancement of the Parks through the completion of the capital works mean they provide recreational space for residents and visitors to Berwick. The heritage features have been enhanced, protected and interpreted and now people appreciate these aspects of the Parks.

There have also been numerous horticultural improvements. Using old photos and postcards, staff and volunteers have been able to restore some of the original planting schemes. Plants have been carefully selected to echo the 1930s designs, including roses and rhododendrons. Tree works have also restored many of the views from the Parks and the Friends of Castle Parks employed their willow weaving skills to create bankside revetment for some of the Park's sloping borders.

Both Parks are managed in an environmentally friendly manner, as recognised by the Green Flag Award judges during their 2017 visit. They noted the use of compost bins and peat-free compost, as well as manual weeding as opposed to chemical herbicides. Much of the planting is wildlife friendly.

Part of Coronation Park has been converted to a wildflower meadow which, after initially failing, was resown successfully in 2016. Bat and bird boxes have been put up around the Parks and log piles

have also been created as an additional habitat for wildlife. The lily pond has been restored as a wildlife pond, with native lilies with marginal planting providing a habitat for invertebrates and negating the use of chemical cleaners. Regular wildlife watches are carried out by volunteers and the local community which help monitor the numbers of flora and fauna in the Parks. A 2018 survey identified 24 species of bird across both Castle Vale and Coronation Park and 9 scarcer species including moles, chiffchaffs and a variety of bees.

To interpret some of the wildlife at the Parks a sculpture trail has been developed by the Friends of Castle Parks, Northumberland County Council and Berwick Town Council. Money for the sculpture trail came from a private donation, the SUEZ Trust and Berwick Town Council, who donated £10,064 for the design and creation of nine sculptures based on local animals and plants. Eight local schools helped design the sculptures which were created by artist, David Gross. The sculptures were installed with the help of the Berwick Army Cadets and Friends of Castle Parks. One sculpture design was selected from each school, with the ninth sculpture being Bari the Berwick Bear. The wooden sculptures were designed to be suitable for climbing providing an additional play opportunity for children, as well as being attractive and educational. The sculpture trail was officially opened on the 20 April 2018, by local MP Anne-Marie Trevelyan.

The Parks also feature information boards and panels with stories of the castle, railway, local history and natural heritage. A self-guided heritage quiz in Castle Vale Park features brass plaques in the ground with questions about the Parks and their history, with the answers hidden on separate plaques. New signage also guides visitors through the Parks, linking them with other parts of Berwick, such as the Royal Border Bridge and the Train Station. During their 2017 visit, the Green Flag judges also noted the nautical feel developed from the rope motif featured in the gates, handrails and benches around the Parks, sympathetically linking with their location and local history.

Activity delivery by the Parks Development Officer and the Friends Group have also helped to conserve and enhance the heritage value. The Friends Group have developed a detailed website which features regular news, events and park updates. A leaflet is also available, featuring the history and maps of the Parks and the circular Castle Parks Trail which takes visitors through the two Parks and along the River Tweed.





“  
People who visit the parks  
say “wow” and we now  
see many returning visitors  
who say “It just gets better  
every year”.  
”



“  
It’s a beautiful spot with  
amazing views and a  
wonderful facility for the  
town as well as a great  
place for individuals to  
keep fit or simply sit and  
watch the world go by.  
”





# Events and activities

As part of the HLF project, Coronation and Castle Vale Park have developed an exciting year-round programme of events and activities focused around ecology and heritage inspired by the Parks. The events programme is promoted locally and regionally.

Across the 5 year period, staff and volunteers have hosted 52 events including ecological surveys, Bioblitzs, guided and healthy walks, heritage open days, film screenings, outdoor theatre, family and educational events and Tai Chi in the Rose Garden and viewpoint in Castle Vale Park.

Annual events include an Easter Bunny Hunt, which has been attended by around 100 – 200 people over the years and the Halloween event featuring storytelling and themed crafts such as broom stick making and spider's web dream catchers, apple bobbing and a pumpkin competition. Other regular activities include willow weaving and photography workshops. Three Berwick Open Gardens events have also taken place since the start of the project, attracting around 500 visitors.

There are regular flora and fauna surveys in the Parks, including weekly wildlife watches linked with the British Trust for Ornithology birdwatch where volunteers also record numbers of bees, butterflies, dragonflies, mammals, reptiles and amphibians. On the 27 January 2018 volunteers and the local community also took part in the RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch event recording a total of 44 birds across 12 species and making pine cone feeders.

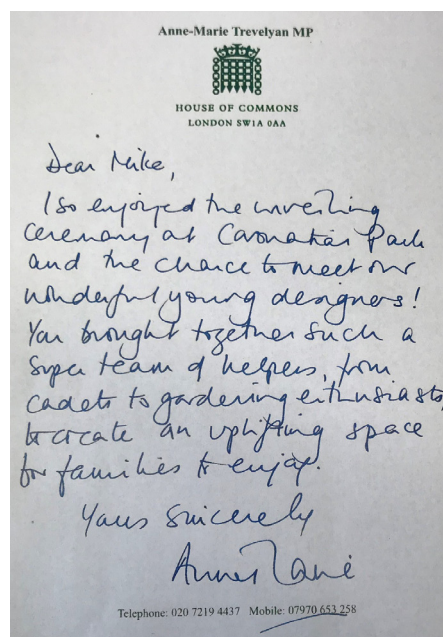
The Big Beastie Hunt invites up to 200 local children to get involved with pond dipping in the lily pond, as well as activities like making bug hotels and hunting for insects and other invertebrates in the

Parks with the Berwick Wildlife Trust. Other wildlife events have included butterfly hunting and dawn chorus walks through the Parks and along the River Tweed, as well as a river walk and pond dipping. The Berwick Wildlife Trust have also helped with Bioblitz events in the Parks, looking at bats and moths.

Celebrating the heritage of the town, residents also got to meet a knight, Scottish spy, a healer and a sorceress during a Meet the Ancestors Day with Wild Dog Outdoors. Activities included weapons demonstrations, making flour using a quern, storytelling and learning about magic potions, Celtic spells, myths and legends.

As well as regular events and activities in the Parks, there are also special one-off events to celebrate important occasions. A Parks Opening event was held on the 31 July 2014 to celebrate the completion of the capital works and the official re-opening of the Parks. The event was very well attended by the local community and the Parks were opened by Her Grace, The Duchess of Northumberland. Following the installation of the sculpture trail, funded by a private donation, Berwick Town Council and the SUEZ Trust, there was a further celebration event, with an official opening by Anne-Marie Trevelyan MP for Northumberland.

Many of the events will continue to run beyond the life of the project and will be managed by the Parks Development Officer in conjunction with the Friends of Castle Parks. Forthcoming events include a Big Picnic event in Coronation Park which will comprise live music, a community dance and games and a film screening as part of Berwick's film and music festival.



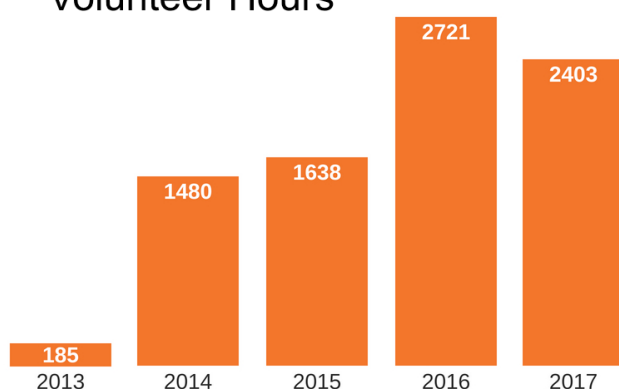


# Volunteers

At the start of the project there were just 6 volunteers helping to look after the Parks and no regular volunteer programme. Now the Parks see 17 volunteers involved with horticultural and maintenance tasks, assisting with the management, marketing and running events. Match funding of £8,000 was included within the Round 2 HLF/BIG Parks for People application comprised of 100 days of gardening and maintenance tasks and 20 specialist volunteer task days. This target was exceeded in 2015.

Volunteers records captured throughout the project demonstrate the volunteers contributed a huge amount of their time to the project. A total of 8,247 volunteer hours were spent across the two Parks since 2013, this equates to 1,204 volunteer days.

Volunteer Hours



A major component of the project was employing Kate Dixon, the Parks Development Officer to maintain the Parks, engage local schools, the community and volunteers and deliver a programme of events and activities. Kate has worked hard to restore and maintain the Parks, as well as engaging local people. This was recognised when she was voted runner up in the Northumberland County Council's Excellence Awards.

Initially there had been no plans to create a Friends Group but after 9 volunteers showed an interest, Kate set up the Friends of Castle Parks in 2014. The group help to ensure the horticultural displays are kept to an excellent standard and so far, they have helped with planting the rose beds, daffodils and sowing the wildflower meadow, as well as regular weeding, pruning and the construction of the willow bankside revetment. The Friends have also assisted with clean ups, historical research, events and marketing.

The volunteers also play a key role in the ongoing management of the Parks. Meetings take place regularly during which the group arrange fundraising and promotion or plan events and maintenance works. Volunteers have assisted with the design and installation of park interpretation and have worked

with Berwick Academy, young people attaining their Duke of Edinburgh Award, the Army Cadets and with the Berwick Youth Project during their filming of the restoration.

The Friends Group have also helped run several events in the Parks, including weekly wildlife watches, dawn chorus walks, Easter and Halloween events and tai chi.

The volunteers work hard to promote the Parks, attending events such as the Alnwick and Kelso Tourism Fairs and Borders Tourist Fair. They have assisted with consultation and have worked closely with other local organisations, holding teacher drop-in sessions and hosting several Heritage Open Days. In 2015 and 2017, they also conducted the visitor surveys in and around the Parks.

The Friends of Castle Parks host a website that provides up to date information about the Parks, along with photos and events pages and a Parks quiz. The Friends also produced a leaflet for the Parks, featuring information about the Parks heritage and a trail that links the two Parks. The leaflet has proved to be so popular that a second print run of 10,000 copies had to be ordered.

The Friends Group were runners up in the Love Northumberland awards in June 2017. These awards celebrate county wide volunteer groups and are run by Northumberland County Council.





# Training

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The project successfully delivered activities and training for staff and volunteers, enhancing skills and aiding the sustainability of the Parks in the future, including:

- conducting wildlife surveys
- delivering a programme of events
- production of a film on the restoration
- delivering the interpretation plan
- creating a learning space in Coronation Park, and
- developing learning resources for schools

The Friends of Castle Parks have learnt about willow weaving and put their new skills to use, creating willow bankside revetments for some of the sloping flowerbeds.

The volunteers also participated trips out to learn from other gardens. The group learnt about the management and maintenance of rhododendrons at Glendiok Gardens and went to the Royal Botanical Garden Edinburgh to gain inspiration from the collections, leading to a training event with the staff.

The Friends Group stated that the volunteer training and site visits were very beneficial to the group and that visiting other projects and talking to other Friends groups was particularly helpful.

The Camera Club supported training sessions in the Parks in 2015 which saw them hosting three photography workshops with volunteers, leading to a Berwick Parks photography competition.

Additionally, over the course of the

project, seven staff and volunteers achieved qualifications in:

- BASP Outdoor Emergency First Aid
- LANTRA certifications in chainsaw maintenance and cross cutting and using a hedge-cutter, strimmer and bush-cutter

The Parks Development Officer also developed a local studies, history and habitat educational programme with local schools which now enables students of all ages to learn in the Parks. The inclusion of an outdoor classroom and events space in front of the southern shelter, the restoration of the lily pond at Castle Vale Park and the installation of a sculpture trail and orienteering course has helped increase use for this purpose.

# Management and maintenance

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The Parks are managed by Northumberland County Council, in partnership with Berwick Town Council and the Friends of Castle Parks. Berwick Wildlife Group and Berwick in Bloom also provide bird and bat boxes and the Northumbria In Bloom judging routes for the Berwick Town entry.

The Parks were entered in the 'Specials' category of Berwick's Northumbria in Bloom entry, helping the town achieve its highest ever award of Silver Gilt in 2015. Castle Vale Park also won a Gold Award in the Northumbria in Bloom competition (2016 & 2017) and Coronation Park achieved Outstanding for its 'Your Neighbourhood' category.

Unfortunately, the Berwick Parks were unsuccessful in their first Green Flag Award application. However, the judges visited when a significant amount of work was

still outstanding. Completion of the main contract works, an improved management plan and evidence of community participation meant that the Parks achieved the award in 2015 and have retained it ever since. Their score has also increased from 70 – 74 in 2015 to an impressive 80+ in 2017.

The Green Flag judges noted the hard work of those involved in their 2017 feedback, adding that the sites were "an absolute treasure of green space development" and that "those involved in [their] development both present and past can be very proud of what they have achieved".

When the Parks were first created, there would have been six dedicated gardeners. Now, with only one gardener, regular maintenance by the Friends of Castle Parks is invaluable to keeping the Parks at a high

standard. The volunteers help with planting, patrols and litter picks.

During the Green Flag Award assessment the judges also recognised the management and maintenance plan detailed a wealth of information, dealing with all the aspects of the Parks. They praised the levels of community involvement and promotion through social media.

The accreditation of such awards is a great recognition of the work that has been done by staff and volunteers over the past 5 years.

The importance of the Park Development Officers role was recognised and Northumberland County Council in partnership with Berwick Town Council have now secured funding to retain the post beyond the project lifecycle. The intention is for role to cover a wider remit covering the town of Berwick as well as the two Parks.



# Project review

Findings from the Final Evaluation show that the project has been a success playing a vital role in the continued use and sustainability of Berwick Parks and this is a testament to all involved. In conjunction with the capital works, the dedication of the volunteers and staff, have helped ensure that both Parks have been returned to their former glory.

Heritage features, including the lily pond and shelters, have been restored and the history of the Parks can now be fully appreciated by visitors thanks to the new signage and interpretation. Additional media, such as the website and Friends Group's leaflets, have also helped to draw people to the Parks and encourage engagement in regular events and volunteer activities in order to increase heritage understanding of the two sites. The Parks have seen an overall increase in visitor numbers as a result of the restoration project, and now the Parks see more first time visitors coming

from holiday homes in and around Berwick.

The Friends of Castle Parks have worked hard to increase the biodiversity of the Parks and weekly observations have ensured comprehensive monitoring of the wildlife within the Parks. Much of their hard work has also been recognised as both Parks have won awards for their horticultural displays, and through the Parks being awarded and maintaining Green Flag Award status since 2015.

However, despite the many successes of the project, the results of the 2017 visitor survey show there is still work to be done with regard to provision for teenagers and better access.

Recent good practice and lessons learnt should be embedded into any future strategy and practice in order to maintain excellent standards of work and enjoyment of Berwick Parks.

## Achievements

The project has met all of its approved purposes as has improved and restored the deteriorating infrastructure and vistas across both Parks and has enhanced horticultural maintenance in the Parks through the development of skills across staff and volunteers.

Berwick's Parks have been brought back to life through the engagement of local volunteers and schools, and increased visitors to the site who now enjoy the improved accessibility, views, floral displays and learn more about the heritage of the Parks through new interpretation.

The Parks Development Officer has provided excellent opportunities for community engagement in the Parks through the provision of a wide range of events and volunteering activities throughout the project that have attracted large audiences.

The Parks now provide living examples of wildlife friendly and sustainable gardening and maintenance practices and are used to promote the value of biodiversity to volunteers, schools and community groups through activities, walks, talks and events.

The maintenance has significantly improved and the two Parks hold the Green Flag Award. Staff and volunteers have done extremely well retaining the Green Flag Award and achieving Gold Awards in the Northumbria in Bloom competitions in 2016 and 2017.

## Lessons Learnt

Although volunteer data was collected by the Parks Development Officer throughout the project the data was not translated and inputted onto the annual monitoring return. While it's clear that the volunteers have dedicated a lot of time to the ongoing maintenance of the Parks and in involving the local community, the inconsistent recording of volunteer hours means that their contributions are difficult to quantify. Keeping records of volunteer hours and tasks is also important for evaluating the effort required to sustain current standards.

The incomplete annual return has somewhat hampered the ability to assess the true success of the project as we are unable to compare current data with baseline figures. A key lesson learnt here therefore is to set up a monitoring and evaluation framework and data collection toolkit at the onset of projects.

The 2017 visitor survey was unfortunately carried out before the installation of the sculpture trail and the orienteering course and as a consequence satisfaction levels appear lower than expected given the success of the project. The results highlight the importance of ongoing consultation and a desire for further improvements. Future surveys should be carried out regularly across the two Parks and all annual surveys should ensure 70% respondents in Castle Vale Park and 30% in Coronation Park in order to benchmark against the 2015 survey results.



# Legacy and the future

The HLF restoration project has been a major journey to re-establish and revitalise both Coronation and Castle Vale Parks. The successful completion of the project represents a real milestone for those involved and marks a new chapter for the Parks. The site's fabric, built and natural heritage and community spirit have been restored and protected. It is a wonderful achievement and has had a dramatic, positive impact on the local community and the town.

The project has met its aims and now provides and promotes an alternative, 'green' route through Castle Vale Park into town from the station, and vice versa up from the river.

There is now a greater awareness of the Parks and this is demonstrated by the increased visitor numbers. The rise in visitor numbers, including first time visitors, is a clear testament to the hard work by staff and volunteers who continue to improve the physical environment of the Parks and provide a fantastic programme of activities.

The Parks have become central to the hosting of events in Berwick that celebrate the town's heritage. The events programme has proved highly successful with a noted increase in participants. An events sub-committee formed as part of the Friends Group to allow the provision of Parks events to continue beyond the project in conjunction with the Park Development Officer whose important role will be sustained.

During the project many of the volunteers also got involved with Berwick in Bloom, this has since encouraged volunteering in Spittal. The project has snowballed volunteer involvement across the town shown through the establishment of a town wide litter picking group.

Much of what the project achieved would not have been possible without the commitment and dedication of the volunteers. They have made a huge difference to increasing awareness of and protecting the historical and ecological aspects of the Parks and their fundraising efforts and event planning have increased enjoyment of the sites and increased opportunities for the wider community. The Parks Development Officer with the Friends of Castle Parks will continue to build relationships with the cadets and increase engagement with children and young people.

As the green lungs of the town, the Parks play an important role in conserving local wildlife and as a site for local people to enjoy nature and the Parks' stunning surrounding. Features such as the wildlife pond, wild flower meadow and bird boxes, along with sensitive management and the delivery of a



comprehensive programme of wildlife activities have all contributed to this. Meanwhile the physical restoration and interpretation of the historical features mean that the Parks' role in Berwick's history can now be appreciated and enjoyed by all.

There is a desire amongst the local community to ensure continued maintenance of the Parks and future investment. Future hopes include continuing to meet the needs of visitors with disabilities, teenagers and children, recruiting more volunteers and continuing with a comprehensive volunteering and training programme and further enhancing the sites heritage through the restoration of the fountain in the lily pond and linking the Parks with the River Tweed and the Town Centre by creating an extended nature trail which includes a walk through the plantation and crossing the bridge.

Northumberland County Council are wholly committed to the two Parks and their continued preservation and maintenance is fully backed by the County Council leader. With the ongoing commitment the County Council and the partnerships formed with Berwick Town Council and the Friends of Castle Parks, it is hoped that the Parks will be kept to award-winning standards for years to come.



# Acknowledgements

All involved are very grateful for this HLF/BIG Lottery Parks for People grant which has enabled much needed restoration works to both Coronation Park and Castle Vale Park in Berwick Upon Tweed.

The project has in essence, protected and preserved the heritage and wildlife value of the sites and the park now sees more visitors enjoying the green spaces than ever before.

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