

The Royal Parks - Case Study

Background to the Royal Parks

The Royal Parks is an executive agency of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). The Royal Parks themselves, with a history stretching back for more than 1000 years, form a patchwork of manicured gardens, traditional parkland and countryside scattered across London. This ranges from Greenwich Park in the East through St. James's Park, The Green Park, Hyde Park, Kensington Gardens, Regent's Park and Primrose Hill in Central London to Richmond Park and Bushy Park in the West. Linked with these famous parks are lesser-known green havens such as Brompton Cemetery and the Longford River.

With the exception of Primrose Hill, all the parks are Category 1 Listed landscapes and are managed as free and open public spaces by the Royal Parks Agency. The Agency employs 250 staff directly and a further 650 or so during peak summer periods through letting and the arrangement of contracts and concessions. This large estate of Crown lands, comprising of well over 2000 hectares and maintained for the general public's "peaceful enjoyment, recreation, entertainment and delight" constitutes a significant area of London's wildlife habitat, including a considerable amount of wetland.

Sustainable development policy

The sustainable development vision of the Royal Parks is to "strive to provide continued leadership and expertise in the sustainable management of the urban park environment and promotion of sustainable development to the wider community".

The importance of this irreplaceable natural resource and historic landscape, within a capital city, is recognised by the agency which has, as its primary aim:

the need to conserve this unique heritage for present and future generations.

Sustainable development in practice

Community and Social Responsibility

Every day, tens of thousands of people jog, cycle, rollerblade, swim, rest and play in the eight Royal Parks. Other visitors prefer horse-riding, bird watching, picnicking, playing hockey, tennis, softball, Frisbee – or participating in organised 'living history' walks and nature treks. According to The Royal Parks' Chief Executive William Weston, the Parks are "London's personal space" for all these people¹, whether their visit is a snatched moment in a lunch-hour, an educational trip or a planned weekend family outing.

The Royal Parks' priorities echo those of the DCMS - young people, local communities, the economy, efficient delivery.

Focusing on these priorities allows of the Royal Parks – as a public resource – to reach the hearts and minds of a broad spectrum across this target audience. For example, each year, over 6000 children use the education facilities at Bushy, Hyde, Greenwich and Richmond Parks. Similar numbers visit the Diana playground in Kensington Gardens every day.

Reaching Out

There are also a large number of new and ongoing initiatives, designed to introduce new visitors to the Parks. Examples include:

Liberty Drives

Started in the summer of 1995 with a just a golf buggy, the Liberty Drives programme has grown to run four electric buggies, two of which are specially designed to carry wheelchair bound passengers, driven by 30 trained volunteers. In 2002, 12,000 elderly, disabled and infirm people took Liberty Drives in Hyde Park.

Wildlife for All

A partnership with RSPB and the Black Environment Network, Wildlife for All is aimed at bringing disadvantaged and excluded people from all over London closer to wildlife in the eight Royal Parks. Funded by Heritage Lottery.

Guided Walks

A series of guided walks have been carried out, with themes including 'Power and Glory', 'Winter Birds' and 'Peter Pan'. Guided walks are a tangible way of communicating the values of the Parks, as well as offering visitors the chance to delve into aspects of the Parks in detail.

Sport (community)

Continuing the theme of resource provision for a vibrant, thriving population, Regents Park hosts 99 acres of playing fields for companies, individuals and social clubs to play cricket, football and softball. In addition to the *ad-hoc* activities, the Parks have also played host – in varying degrees to larger, organised events, such as:

- London Marathon
- Richmond Park 10k run
- Stride for Life
- World Sprint Rowing Championships

Diversity

With over 5,000 acres, 60 million visitors – from over 100 countries, 140 species of tree, 280 monuments and 100,000 roses, diversity is an integral theme for many aspects of the Royal Parks. A range of activities held throughout the year are designed to encourage social inclusion and reflect cultural diversity, through welcoming and borrowing cultures from around the world. Examples have included:

- The Golden Jubilee – a celebration for everyone.
- 'Indian Summer' in Regent's Park – a combination of Test cricket, music and film, with a largely Asian theme.
- Funeral of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother.

Plus events connected with: Refugee Week, the European Year of the Disabled and Gay Pride.

The Royal Parks agency works closely with a broad range of organisations engaged in wildlife conservation and is represented on various steering groups and committees, such as the London Biodiversity Partnership. Currently, the Agency is leading a working party which is looking at a system for biological recording within the Royal Parks. It is also contributing to the formulation of several local Biodiversity Action Plans through the auspices of the Royal Parks Wildlife Groups.

Environment and Sustainability

The Royal Parks state that it is putting environmental sustainability at the heart of its operations, thus reflecting a desire to continue to take the lead internationally in the management of urban green space. There is a "Green Housekeeping Committee", which looks at how the impact of the Parks on the local and wider environment can be reduced. There is also an Ecology Officer, who advises on habitat management, sustainability, and biodiversity.

The Royal Parks provide a vital resource to assist in maintaining the people of London's emotional and physical well-being. The Royal Parks also has a number of policies and systems in place for managing its own operations to safeguard a unique natural and historic heritage whilst welcoming over 60 million visitors each year. This balance between present and future is a challenge to the management of the Parks, since it is vital to both conserve and enhance the Parks – and all they are home to – for the future.

This internal management system is committed to sustainability through its own 'Green Housekeeping' as demonstrated by the successful achievement of ISO14001* standard in 2002. As part of this programme – and to ensure the future successful maintenance of the standard – The Royal Parks are working to 15 specific objectives, with targets including:

- Reducing fleet vehicles' emissions

- Waste management
- Energy efficiency
- Catering policies
- Drainage
- Event Management

[*The ISO 14001 standard was first published in 1996 and specifies minimum environmental requirements. It sets environmental performance criteria and through year-on-year monitoring, checks that an organisation is maintaining its management systems to achieving that standard]

Achievements

- 95% fleet vehicles run in LPG (liquid petroleum gas) – contractors gradually converting their fleets.
- Procurement of electricity from renewable sources (71% from wind power and hydro-electric).
- Introduction of ethical criteria into catering programmes (e.g. Using organic suppliers and reducing food miles).
- Carbon dioxide emissions reduced by 1,150 tonnes per annum.
- 100% Leaf-fall composting in Bushey, Green, Hyde and St. James's Parks (see below).

Recycling

In four of the Parks, tree waste is shredded and combined with other organic material to produce compost for the Parks:

- Bushey Park has converted an old dumping ground into a recycling area, allowing material and green waste conversion into mulch.
- Greenwich Park improved its ability to recycle organic materials with separate storage bays in its recycling yard.
- Kensington Gardens has moved its manure processing site to reduce the risk of nutrient-rich effluent contaminating the Long Water.

Other waste management initiatives:

Leaf Litter and Tree Waste

In 1990, Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens paid over £20,000 to dispose of fallen leaves. In 2002, four out of the eight parks were recycling 100% of their leaves (through composting), cutting costs by 90%.

Similarly, with tree waste; The Royal Parks are home to a vast array of trees and shrubs, all of which require periodic management, for example: thinning, pollarding and coppicing. Coppicing provides a sustainable supply of timber and encourages biodiversity. Regent's Park has a particularly creative outlet for its willow coppice; in a symbiotic relationship with London Zoo, the Zoo is now collecting coppiced willow poles throughout the year to feed its Okapis.

In Richmond Park, the age-old practice of charcoal burning has been revived. Branches of thinned or coppiced trees are cut and stacked inside a kiln and burned for 1½ days, with only limited oxygen supply.

In all of these cases, better environmental management practices have been accompanied by costs savings, either immediate or projected, helping build the business case for sustainable solutions.

Biodiversity

The Parks are home to many species of rare or vulnerable invertebrates and birds. These have become a clear and precise focus for special habitat initiatives. One example is the creation of new reedbeds on the margins of water bodies in several parks, particularly Kensington Gardens, Regent's Park and St. James's. These provide areas of natural waterside vegetation and wildlife habitat. They have also attracted foraging bats, such as the Soprano Pipistrelle. Other specific projects include bird monitoring and a moth survey in Richmond Park.

Beauty

The Royal Parks also place emphasis on maintaining the aesthetic integrity of the Parks' beauty, in both panorama and detail. Attention to 'soft landscaping' is one way in which the Parks are translated into beauty; the management of the relation between architecture and art with the land, species selection, and the design and maintenance of buildings and monuments, all contribute to the sense of relief, escape and well-being which the Parks bring to London and their visitors.

Tree avenues

Amongst the most memorable forms of natural architecture are the tree avenues found in every park: Chestnut Avenue, Rotten Row, Inverness Walk, Blackheath Avenue, The Broad Walk, Hornbeam Walk, and The Mall, are probably the best known. Each Park has its own tree strategy and replantings generally adopt a return to the original aesthetic. In many cases, this requires the planting of indigenous species such as sweet chestnuts and English oak but where appropriate, exotics, such as ginko, tulip tree or swamp cyprus are also planted. Greenwich Park in particular began the painstaking process of restoring some of its baroque avenues in 2002. First, a landscape architect established the exact position of trees, working from 17th century or original data. Tree holes were dug, and examined by archaeologists to ensure no disturbance of important remains. 60 trees known as 'heavy standards' – seven to eight years old, and 15 – 18' high, were planted.

Dial Walk

27 sweet chestnuts – chosen for their longevity – were planted in Kensington Gardens, forming a second outer avenue for Dial Walk, in front of the Palace.

Tree plantings

During 2002, 108 trees were planted in Bushy Park, 32 donated by 'Friends', the remainder supplied through the Prince of Wales' Royal Parks Tree Appeal. The Appeal, originally established to repair the damage done by the great storm of 1987, raised £750,000 over its 15 years.

Isabella plantation

The Isabella Plantation, one of the most popular destinations in Richmond Park, celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2002/03. The Plantation, a woodland garden, originally took four years of continuous labour to create. Providing a home to the National Collection of 50 Japanese azalea varieties, as well as rhododendrons, camellias, magnolias and other acid-loving plants, Isabella has been managed organically for the last 12 years.

The Future

The Royal Parks are committed to continuing to modernise the way the Parks are managed, raising its profile and generating new income. There are also plans to assess the benefits of the Parks through quantifying and promoting their contribution to the quality of life of Londoners and to the national economy.

To ensure continued certification to the ISO14001 standard, the Royal Parks must demonstrate continuous improvement in environmental performance. To ensure this, future projects include:

- Energy management: installation of renewable and sustainable energy resources in Bushy Park, sufficient to prove 40% of the annual electricity requirements of the Royal Parks.
- Events: working with organisers to reduce waste.
- Contractors and Concessionaires: Working with them to ensure sustainability with the Royal Parks takes a fully holistic approach. Initiatives will focus on waste management, sustainable procurement and continued conversion of contractors' vehicles to LPG.

Reference:

DCMS Sustainable Development Strategy – Royal Parks

1*The Royal Parks Annual Reports and Accounts 2002-2003, London's Personal Space*. The Stationery Office (TSO).