



Kick The Dust: Future Proof Parks

Introduction to Future Proof Parks

Significant funding cuts over the last 8 years means that historic parks and heritage landscapes are at risk of decline and/ or being lost to the public forever. Some 45% of local authorities are now considering selling greenspaces they can no longer afford to maintain, while others are exploring the option of charging for entry.

New approaches are urgently needed to arrest this decline. The most effective and sustainable solutions include building the capacity of local people to increase their involvement in the management of these sites.

There is already a long history of 'Friends of Parks Groups' in England, who continue to play an important role in protecting and enhancing local parks and open spaces. But while their numbers are growing, research suggests that most of the volunteers are older people, that groups struggle to attract new, younger members and resources are stretched.

To address this issue, Groundwork UK in partnership with Fields in Trust and the National Youth Agency (NYA), will deliver 'Future Proof Parks' – a new national programme supported through the Heritage Lottery Fund's flagship Kick the Dust portfolio programme.

Future Proof Parks will harness the energies and talents of young people aged 11-25 years and, through training and mentoring, encourage them to support 60 'Friends of Park groups' across five areas of England to care for their local historic parks and landscapes.

Youth and community workers from five 'heritage hubs' will be deployed to support up to four friends groups each year (over three years) to become more 'young people friendly', and to have the appropriate governance structures in place to ensure their safe and effective engagement. Groups will benefit from NYA training and support focusing on safeguarding, youth participation, effective communication and youth governance. They will also be helped by Groundwork to recruit and work with young people to create a shared vision and plan to increase young people's participation at each site.

Young people will be encouraged to identify, develop and lead activities themselves, focusing on exploring, protecting and enhancing the sites' natural and historical heritage value. Potential activities will include organising practical conservation days, historical re-enactments and storytelling, capturing social history through photography and video-making projects or running family fun days. Young people will gain confidence and learn new skills from existing Friends of Parks Group members, but also bring their own existing talents - for example, in the use of social media - to run awareness campaigns or fundraising events, including crowdfunding.

By the end of the programme, Future Proof Parks will have: trained 180 young people as committed friends group members; involved a further 700 young people in wider activities and volunteering opportunities;

delivered 3,000 days of voluntary activity; trained 180 friends group members in youth engagement; and disseminated the learning from the project to 5,000 other Friends of Parks Groups around the country.

As a result of the project, the following outcomes will be achieved:

- *For heritage:* more adults and young people will have a better understanding of the value of heritage parks and landscapes; more young people will volunteer in heritage parks and landscapes; and Friends of Parks Groups will report that young people have had a positive impact on their ability to look after heritage parks and landscapes.
- *For people:* young people will be able to demonstrate a more positive attitude towards local heritage; develop new confidence and skills through their participation; and have increased commitment to volunteering.
- *For communities:* site users will agree that young people play a positive role in their local parks; young people will report a more positive attitude towards other generations; and feel more empowered to make change happen in their local community.



The key delivery activities will be as follows:

- **Initial capacity building for Friends of Parks Groups** to become more young person friendly, through one-to-one and one-to-many training and development support. This will include an initial needs-assessment process and basic training covering safeguarding arrangements.
- **Young person recruitment and engagement** through outreach and local partnerships. The aim will be to recruit young people resident in areas served by the project site, ensuring relevance and resonance. Engagement activities will include an 'Exploring Heritage' module, designed to inspire young people around the heritage value of the site.
- Facilitate **site-based events, activities and volunteering opportunities** offering opportunities for young people and Friends of Parks Group members, facilitating relationship building.
- **Joint action planning between young people and the Friends of Parks Group** designed to increase the involvement of young people in the management and development of the site.

- **Training and mentoring for young people** to develop skills such as event management, volunteer management and leadership development, building confidence and enhancing their employment prospects.
- **Deliver programme of activities and events** to support sustainable engagement of young people on the project site.
- Support **young people's involvement in management and governance of the project site** as active members of the Friends of Parks Group, and/or as representatives of a young Friends of Parks Group that engages with existing governance arrangement structures.
- Ongoing **sustainability planning and support** to groups and young people, to ensure ongoing good practice in relation to young person involvement and improvements to heritage.

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