



MP4 WP4.1

Retroactive evaluation of on-the-ground benefits



Evaluation report:
Sheaf Valley Park
Sheffield, UK



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**The Interreg IVB
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Introduction to the pilot project

The city of Sheffield is located in the county of South Yorkshire with a population of approximately 555,500 (Office for National Statistics, 2010). Since the beginning of the 21st Century there has been extensive redevelopment in Sheffield. As a result, the city's GVA ([gross value added](#)) has increased 60 per cent and in 2006 reached £8.7 billion^[2]. The overall economy experienced steady growth averaging around five per cent annually, and has been growing at a higher rate than has been experienced across the rest of the Yorkshire and the Humber region.

The city is geographically diverse, located at the confluence of five rivers, with much of the urban form built on hillsides with views into the city centre or out to the countryside. With an estimated total of over two million trees, Sheffield has more trees per person than any other city in Europe¹ and 61% of the city is designated green space. Sheffield is governed by the elected [Sheffield City Council](#) (SCC). For most of the council's history it has been controlled by the [Labour Party](#), and has historically been noted for its [leftist](#) sympathies.

Sheaf Valley Park is located on the periphery of Sheffield City Centre. It is a high profile site, visible from much of the central Sheffield area. It lies immediately behind Sheffield Train Station and is a steeply sloping park currently, which until its recent redevelopment was managed to a minimal level by SCC. The park suffers from a lack of connection with the main city centre and it's recently regenerated areas. As a result it has endured a predominantly negative perception by local people, being 'trapped' between the Train Station and an area of older housing and dilapidated council owned flats (Park Hill Flats). Park Hill Flats are currently undergoing a programme of large-scale regeneration, led by private developer [Urban Splash](#). The regeneration of Sheaf Valley Park is intended to be implemented in parallel and will include links to the city centre area and adjacent open spaces, leading to the outskirts of Sheffield and open countryside beyond. The Sheaf Valley Park project has been implemented in several stages, of which the MP4 investment is Phase 1 of a potential five stage phasing.

The site was identified for redevelopment as it lies at the centre of the key green infrastructure network that traverses the city (Figure 1). At this point the landform splits the city into two poorly connected districts, with the major modes of transport located in this valley. The area suffers from a lack of standard pedestrian and Disability Discrimination Act (DDA 1995) compliant routes between the city centre, Train Station, Park Hill Flats and the Manor and Castle neighbourhoods. The main existing bridge linkage between Sheaf Valley Park and the city centre is safe and attractive but is threatened with closure to non train station users the remaining routes are of poor quality and potentially areas of anti social behaviour (Figure 2). As such the site, and access through and to it, is seen as a key piece in Sheffield's open space jigsaw, connecting the city centre to the urban fringe and a natural complement to the successful regeneration of the Train Station area.

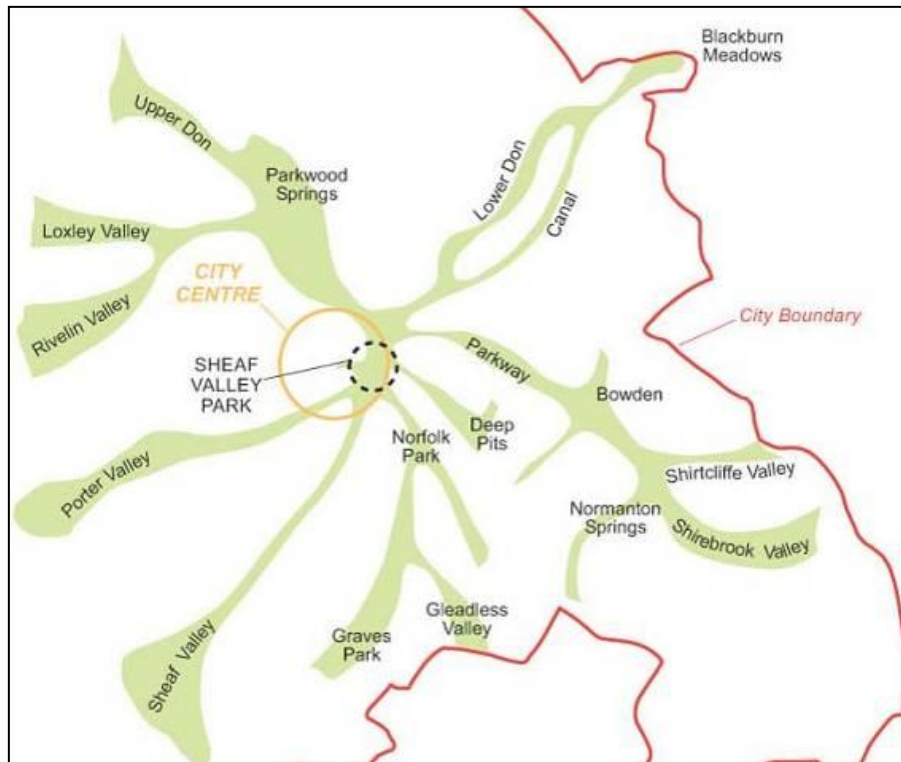


Figure 1: Sheffield's Green Infrastructure Network

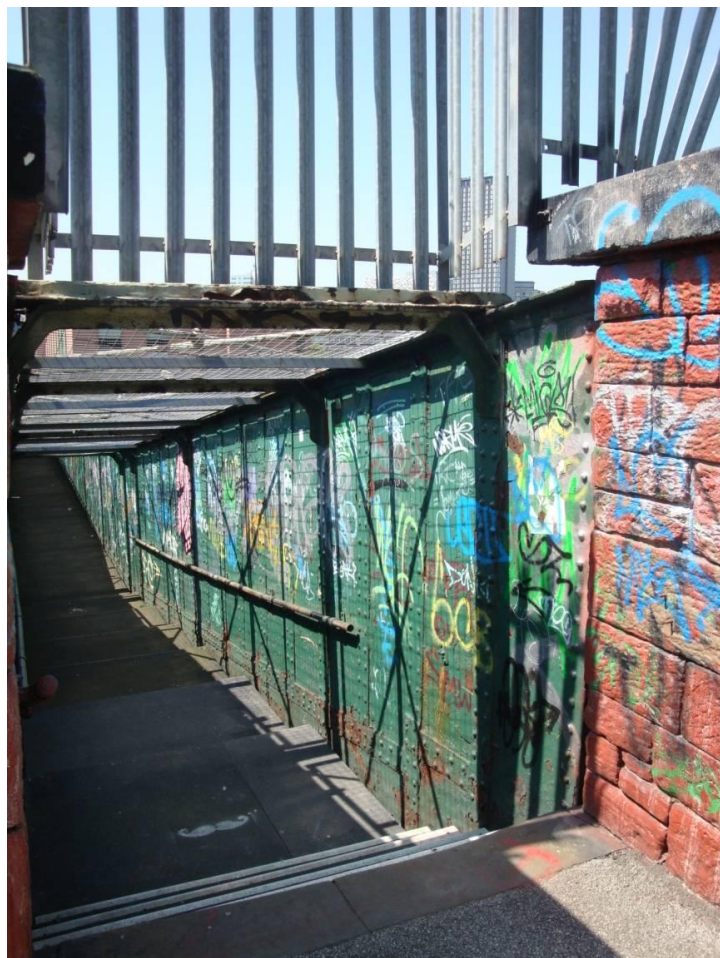


Figure 2: Poor existing bridge connections.

Context and the aim of the project

Plans for the regeneration of Sheaf Valley Park began when the site was identified as a part of the **City Centre Regeneration Strategy** (1994) as it lies at the centre of the open network in Sheffield. Following the creation of the **Sheffield City Centre Masterplan** (2000) funding for improvements to the site were sought as part of a Big Lottery bid in 2006. Whilst this was unsuccessful a new opportunity was identified when private developer Urban Splash won the contract to renovate the adjacent Park Hill Flats. This led to formation of the **Sheaf Valley Park Steering Group**, led by SCC, comprising members of the SCC Development Division, Parks and Countryside, Planning Department, Highways and local interest groups. Capital works over all phases are expected to be in the region of £14 million including major infrastructure and access works to key access links. Phase 1 costs are estimated at £1.1 million. Current maintenance on the site will cost £23,000 per annum just for a basic litter picking and mowing regime. The long-term higher specification for the site, once all implementation phases have been completed and including security/ambassadors, is expected to be approximately £200,000 per annum.

Project plan:

MP4 investment in Sheaf Valley Park focused on the creation of a direct stepped path from South Street to the Railway Station tram stop (Figures 3-4). While this was being created, earth would be moved to form a level space for events, with a series of seating terraces above where people could enjoy views of Sheffield City Centre and beyond. The council's focus was *'to make this a mutually beneficial site. To make it a valuable space and to keep access open'* (Rodger Nowell, SCC Project officer, March 2012). This resulted in the following aims and objectives:

Project aims:

1. Regenerate open area into a well-used, safe 'place for all' with activity terraces and events space;
2. Improve pedestrian and disabled access to site and its connection to city centre/other neighbourhoods;
3. Enhance the biodiversity of the area and site's habitat and connect to other areas of habitat importance;
4. Create a space that people will use and want to use in the future by improving people's perceptions of the site, increasing its accessibility and the potential for activity.

Project objectives:

1. To create a new purpose built 40metre diameter events space with seating for 1000 people on natural stone and grass terraces
2. To build a 163 step new key access from the top of the hill to the tram and railway station
3. To create DDA compliant new access from the tram to the events space and further up to the adjacent Shrewsbury Road
4. To build a new cycle access to the Tram and railway station
5. To upgrade 2 hectares of land from neglected incidental space to one with activity and attractive naturalistic planting.



Figure 3: The new park entrance from Sheffield Train Station and stepped access through Sheaf Valley Park (2011).



Figure 4: The view from above the Sheaf Valley Park amphitheatre to the Train Station and city centre beyond (2012).

The specific place-keeping approach

As with most current UK green and open space projects, the funding focus on capital improvements rather than revenue support has resulted in the Sheaf Valley Park project being place-making dominant with the approach to, and future support of, place-keeping less securely defined. The long-term picture of place-keeping at Sheaf Valley Park is therefore very much one of evolution.

Sheaf Valley Park is a public open space and as such place-keeping will primarily remain the responsibility of the public landowner (SCC), undertaken by the SCC Park Management Team and Events Team. Demonstrating the strategic value of the project and ensuring a sustained public profile is therefore paramount to ensuring political support to resource place-keeping at Sheaf Valley Park. Central to this has been the prominent success of the events space, which has generated interest from a wide range of potential partners from across the city and beyond. In times of economic constraint, building this external support network is particularly important to sustaining the future of Sheaf Valley Park, when due to public funding cuts the capacity of SCC to carry out place-keeping in isolation is greatly reduced.

Whilst still in its infancy, the future focus of place-keeping is set to evolve around use of the events space, with new partners from the community, public and private sectors engaged to facilitate this. Like place-making, place-keeping at Sheaf Valley Park will (at its centre) involve a cross-sector partnership with continued involvement of community groups, particularly the Friends of Sheaf Valley Park. There is a long established tradition in Sheffield of working in partnership with Friends groups to deliver a range of place-keeping activities in parks and open spaces across the city. Friends groups associated with green spaces in Sheffield are usually made up from residents with a particular interest in a specific site and their main aim is usually to support the improvement and promotion of that place. Depending on the type of green space and location there may be a focus on natural or built heritage. Sheffield boasts one of the largest numbers of Friends groups in the UK in comparison to other major cities (over 80 in 2011).

Having now entered the place-keeping phase, the role of the Friends of Sheaf Valley Park is also evolving. With events identified as the main use of the site, a new Chair of the Friends has emerged with connection to organisations and private businesses across the city. Many of these are identified as potential clients and users of the event space. Again in its infancy these new partnerships provide the opportunity to generate additional financial support for place-keeping through hire of the events space. The considerable interest in (and number of bookings of) the events space since the project launch in 2011, suggests it has the capacity to be a considerable financial generator. However, this also implies that it will require a high level of long-term management due to high levels of use. To support this, SCC is exploring precedent examples of sites across the city that host events and retain the income generated by these, such as Sheffield Botanical Gardens.

Place-keeping: looked at from five dimensions
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1. **Partnerships**

The Partners: Sheffield City Council (public, local land owner and manager), Urban Splash (private developer), Friends of Sheaf Valley Park (community), Yorkshire Forward (public, regional), Residents Against Station Closure (RASC) (community). At the core of the project partnership is a **cross directorate client team** of local council departments (including Parks and Countryside, Housing Regeneration, City Centre Regeneration, Events and Health and Safety). Within the wider partnership, public (SCC) and private (Urban Splash) relations are formalised through a written commitment to the design of, financial contribution to and delivery of certain physical aspects and stages of the Sheaf Valley Park regeneration.

Creating and sustaining a strong partnership to steer the project has not been an easy task due to a number of factors. Firstly, the **character of the site**, a large landscape attribute (feature) rather than traditional park, does not lend itself easily to community involvement. Secondly, **previous misuse** of the space (i.e. antisocial behaviour such as drug taking) does not encourage a sense of community ownership. Finally, **changes in the wider economic climate** (recession) have affected the input of the developer (Urban Splash) and public resources (SCC) available to support community involvement.

Key factors affecting the role and responsibility of the public sector (SCC) are:

1. **The current localism drive in England.** This has devolved budgets to Community Assemblies (CA), where CAs represent the lowest level of local government. CAs now wield demonstrable influence on non statutory service spending such as budgets for parks.
2. **Local government restructuring.** For example, where previously the Development Officer for Sheaf Valley Park would have worked in partnership with a Ranger or Development Assistant through the transfer of responsibility for a site (from place-making to place-keeping), this transferral system no longer exists. Restructuring also creates issues for the council and community regarding project officer continuity in terms of information and trust transferral.
3. **Devolution benefits.** There has been closer involvement of the Parks Development Officer with the CAs, which whilst not necessarily ensuring delivery does provide an obvious point of contact for local people.

Community involvement in the Sheaf Valley Park project was instigated by SCC during the application for a Lottery Living Landmarks bid in 2005, leading to the formation of the **Friends of Sheaf Valley Park**. Early community interest in the project was high with 40 - 50 attendees at Friends group meetings, however as time passed membership declined to approximately six individuals and became more localised (primarily Norfolk Park residents). This was a result of: *little obvious progress on site; a shrinking of community representation from across the city (outside the local ward/neighbourhood); and a breakdown in communication channels between the Friends and individuals from the public (SCC) and private (Urban Splash) partnership who were involved at that time* (Chair of the Friends of Sheaf Valley Park, 2011).

Maintaining community involvement and managing expectations throughout the project required considerable support from the SCC Project Officer. The Friends were a vulnerable group, due to changes in leadership, frustrations with project process, access to information and difficulties in widening participation. However, the project greatly benefited from their involvement and site user knowledge i.e. ensuring consideration was given to DDA accessible routes, safety and lighting (Figure 5). More recently, the Friends have been significantly strengthened through their association, and network development, with the visible **Residents Against Station Closure** (RASC) group. The RASC group formed in reaction to the proposed introduction of barriers (by East Midland Trains) within Sheffield Train Station. This planned development would close another access route to residents and workers between the city centre and the Manor and castle neighbourhoods. This issue received (and continues to receive) citywide support and attention, and as a natural extension of this link, access through Sheaf Valley Park was supported by RASC. By working together, due to mutually compatible aims, both the Friends of Sheaf Valley Park and RASC have benefited. Their individual interests have received greater attention, communication and development of a more powerful support network.

Now the first phase of the place-making is complete at Sheaf Valley Park, it is the landowner's (SCC) view that the **place-keeping partnership must evolve** to involve new stakeholders with an interest in events, which will form the main use of the site. Interest has been shown from a number of third sector and private organisations located in the adjacent Cultural Industries Quarter including an independent cinema ([The Showroom](#)), annual music festival ([Tramlines](#)), a Sheffield university ([Sheffield Hallam](#)) and local and national theatre groups. With a new, younger Chair of the Friends now in place and the original Chair staying on in the role of Treasurer and membership growing, it is seen that the Friends will continue to play a role within the evolving partnership i.e. organising events, providing SCC with information on site use and any antisocial behaviour such as littering. As such a new Project Officer (SCC) will be employed to support them. However, **the Friends still remain vulnerable to collapse** if membership numbers are not sustained, a formal agreement with SCC is not created, if there are delays (as anticipated) until the next phase of the project (no evidence of action) and if Project Officer support is reduced (as a result of further Local authority restructuring and cuts).

This new place-keeping phase, is therefore one of **evolving partnership**. To demonstrate this, Figure 6 illustrates the changing nature of the Sheaf Valley Park stakeholder network from the perspective of the Friends of Sheaf Valley Park. At the centre of the network is the site of Sheaf Valley Park (outlined in green), the place-keeping potential of which benefits from the combined partnership capacity (capital, commitment, skill base, motivation, political influence and communication) of the identified stakeholders.

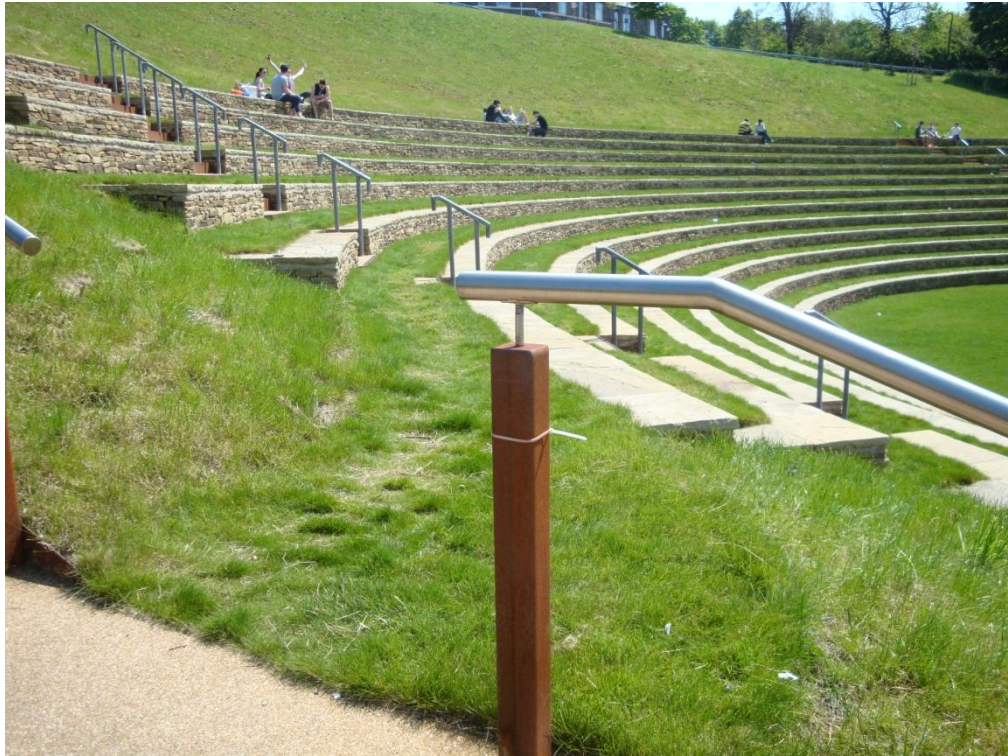


Figure 5: Handrail detail and stepped events space at Sheaf Valley Park

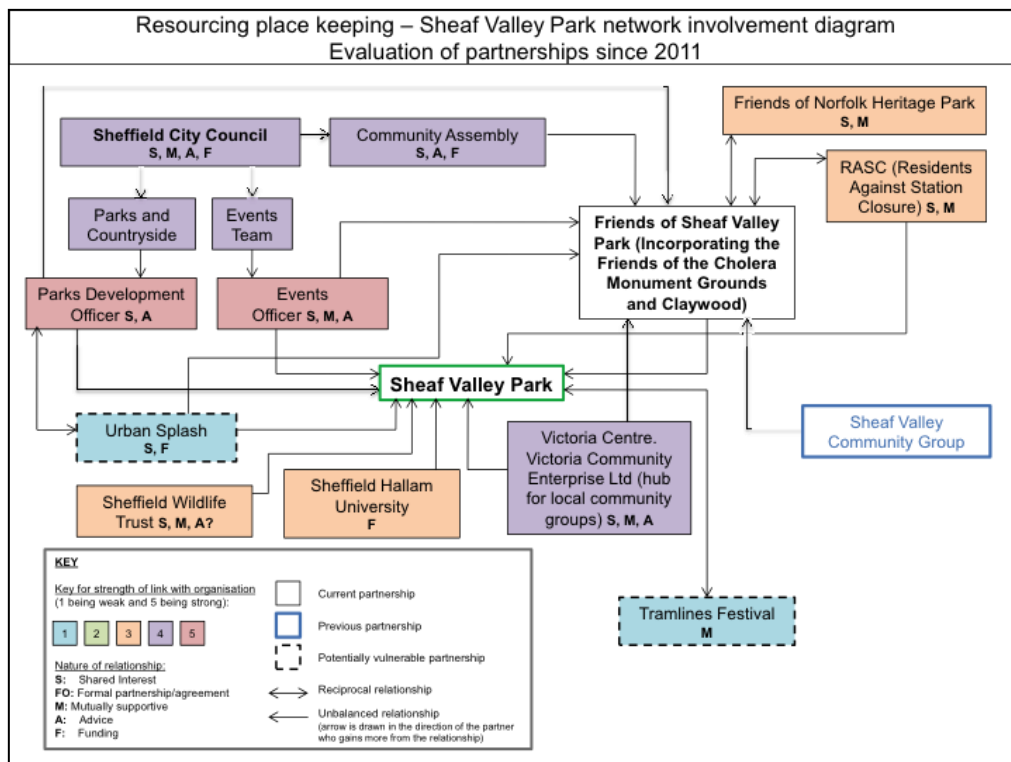


Figure 6: Sheaf Valley Park network¹

¹ Figure 6, the Sheaf Valley Park network diagram, was produced following two interviews with the Friends in 2011 (prior to completion of works of site) and 2012 (post site launch). It identifies current vulnerabilities within the partnership and future opportunities for greater stakeholder collaboration.

Lessons learnt²

- *Collaborating with those who have mutually beneficial agendas strengthens partnerships.* For the Friends of Sheaf Valley Park, joining forces with RASC resulted in increased community momentum and project visibility, and positively benefited the communicative capacity of the group.
- *Community partnerships require considerable resourcing and support.* In certain instances where the community group is very small, vulnerable or unrepresentative, public officer time may be more productively employed supporting other groups or progressing work directly.
- *Partnerships should evolve in response to project phasing.* As projects are completed and move into the place-keeping phase it is important to identify and involve new partners who may have a more relevant and vested interest at this stage. Early identification and interest from event-focused stakeholders at Sheaf Valley Park could extend the partnership network to include a diversity of public, private and third sector stakeholders (see Figure 6).
- *Project officer continuity is important.* Changes in officer, officer role, remit and communication greatly affects the stability of the community partnership. Partnerships can take a long time to develop and changes in political agendas that do not account for this can be counterproductive to project progress.
- *Launch events provide the means to catalyse new partnerships and celebrate the achievements of existing ones.* Events provide the opportunity for community groups to take a leading, effective and visible role in the site's development; they also demonstrate how the site can be used positively.
- *Employing and valuing knowledge from across the partnership:* by working together professionals (public and private) and communities can combine their capacity for involvement to create a more successful design (place-making) and to deliver effective management in the long-term (place-keeping).

2. Governance

Governance of Sheaf Valley Park was planned to through **a combination of user-centred, market-centred and state-centred models**. However, **unforeseen changes in the economic climate and difficulties in communication between some partners have resulted in a predominantly state-centred approach**. Whilst the site is publicly owned and managed by (SCC), its development has been driven by **cross sector steering group**, with representation from public (SCC), private (Urban Splash) and community (Friends of Sheaf Valley Park) sectors. Whilst the **public-private partnership has been formalised**, through written commitment to joint and individual delivery of site design, **the remit of the community role and responsibility is less clear** (see also 'Partnerships'). Although the

² Lessons learnt for each key theme (partnerships, governance, finance, policy and evaluation) are drawn from a three sources: interviews with the Friends of Sheaf Valley Park, interviews and a site evaluation visit with the SCC Project Officer and observations made by the University of Sheffield in the role of evaluator.

Friends have been encouraged by SCC to provide feedback and suggestions regarding the evolving site plan, they do not have constituted power to pass or halt final design or management decisions.

Interviews undertaken by the University of Sheffield in 2011, with the Friends of Sheaf Valley Park and SCC Project Officer, identified **the importance of individuals** from the public (SCC), private (Urban Splash) and community (Friends of Sheaf Valley Park) organisations to sustaining project momentum. Where communication between individual contacts for the partnership has been positive, collective support for the project has thrived. Where communication has been limited (for example between the Friends and Urban Splash) project momentum and support has been constrained. Therefore **the Sheaf Valley Park model of involvement is one of undulation**, peaks and troughs of interest and commitment driven by a variety of external factors, now described.

As the private developer, **Urban Splash has a vested interest in the design and financing of the site to add value to their redevelopment of the neighbouring Park Hill Flats**. In addition the redevelopment of Park Hill came with the condition (from SCC) of a financial and design contribution from Urban Splash to the regeneration of Sheaf Valley Park. Original **designs drawn up by Urban Splash for the site were not well received by community representatives as they were difficult to interpret and did not appear site specific** (Friends of Sheaf Valley Park, 2011). Since these early stages communication with the local community by Urban Splash has been limited. More recently, Urban Splash's capacity for engagement in the project has diminished as the impact of the current economic recession upon their involvement has become clear (SCC, 2012). This has left the public partner (SCC) to direct and ensure sustained momentum of the project through a more traditional state-centred approach.

Participation and engagement of the community (predominately the Friends of Sheaf Valley Park) throughout the project has been variably successful. Central to this has been SCC public spending cuts, which have affected the amount of public officer support. This has associated implications for the amount of officer time and resources available to: support of Friends groups citywide, produce publicity materials and information, and ensure effective internal/ external communication between departments and wider organisations. The **capacity of the Friends to engage has also been limited** as a result of small group size, skill base and sphere of communicative and political influence until they joined with RASC midway through project delivery. However, **engagement of the Friends by SCC has been successful when there have been opportunities for the community to participate in actively** (i.e. through information sharing, events on site, tree planting) and by the actions of committed individual project officers to sustain involvement.

Due to the nature of the site's development (i.e. large scale earth works and interventions) and the Friends' limited capacity for onsite work it has not been appropriate for the community to be onsite and be actively involved during construction phases, although this has created feelings of community exclusion from the process. Where **the Friends have played a key role has been in reporting changes in levels of onsite maintenance** (i.e. grass cutting, benches, litter, dog waste/dog bins), assisting in site development towards achieving Green Flag status, tree planting and organisation (in association with RASC) of the

Sheaf Valley Park Launch event on September 17th 2011 (attended by over 500 people). This event aptly demonstrates the capacity of community groups to garner positive public support for such projects, a role that has the potential to be further developed.

Governance in place-keeping of the site is envisaged to alter after place-making. The Friends motivation to stay involved in the process has been as a result of personal desire to see the space become a positive and safe place. Now construction is complete the Friends have stated (2012) that reasons to engage may diminish, especially if antisocial behaviour on the site also declines and stays low. **If there is to be further community involvement in place-keeping, through a focus on event organisation, this will require further resourcing and training by SCC.** Once all stages of site construction are complete, Urban Splash's role will also be over; therefore governance of the project is likely to return to a state-centred model led by SCC. Traditionally, long-term open space responsibility by SCC's Parks Department was delivered through a number of different teams: the Development Team (*place-making*), Parks Management (*place-keeping*), and the Rangers and Trees and Woodlands Teams (*place-keeping and community involvement i.e. working with Friends Groups*). However, these roles and responsibilities have now altered, and continue to alter, as a result of changes in political will. With SCC taking a lead on place-keeping, central responsibility for the site's future is expected to lie with a more defined partnership between the Events Team and Parks Management, resolution of this shared responsibility is at present under discussion.

Lessons learnt / implemented

- *The nature and scale of projects greatly affects the model of governance:* a very large scale, feature site, with no immediate community surrounding it, such as Sheaf Valley Park, may not be best suited to a user-centred approach to governance.
- *Individuals are central to successful governance:* the involvement or otherwise of committed and dedicated individuals can propel a project forward, or halt progress entirely. Get the right people involved from the start!
- *Sustaining involvement means adapting to change:* this is a recommendation for both communities and public bodies. Key individuals may move away (as in the case of the original Chair of the Friends), no longer wish to continue (as in the case of the previous Chair of the Friends who is now in her eighties) or may leave the project due to changes in employment (fixed term contracts and spending cuts). Governance of such projects must be able to adjust to this shift, looking to new stakeholders, individual and models of involvement.
- *Developing trust and engagement takes time:* at Sheaf Valley Park the Friends felt they were not always as involved throughout the process as they might have been, and therefore community representation was small. Change occurred when motivated Local authority officers became involved and the community felt included and valued.
- *Transparent communication is key to ensuring engagement:* in communication between Friends and the private developer (Urban Splash) and Local authority (SCC), the Friends did not always (at the beginning) feel listened to. At these early stages getting communication right - visual (plans and designs), verbal (meetings) and written (actions and minutes) - can facilitate a sense of ownership, commitment and motivation.

3. Finance

The origins of Sheaf Valley Park's regeneration were found in a **Lottery Living Landmarks** bid, which facilitated early design work and consultation. The Living Landmarks call was launched by the [Big Lottery](#) fund June 2005 (closing in 2006) to fund *'major projects that will have a real impact on communities. Across the UK, woodlands, waterways, cycle bridges, parks, buildings, open public spaces - projects that enhance the natural and built environments - are set to benefit'* (Living Landmarks, 2005).

Through a funding agreement with the **Homes and Communities Agency**³, Sheaf Valley Park was identified as a key space in supporting the renovation of Park Hill Flats, with the potential to draw in extra resources to the area, should it become a Green Flag Park. At this early stage, SCC Parks and Countryside were identified as the body responsible for financing the development and management of the site.

Primary funding for the redevelopment of Sheaf Valley Park came from a variety of sources: **Transform South Yorkshire**⁴, **Section 106 agreements**⁵, **Interreg IVB**, **Urban Splash** and **SCC**. Following completion of Phase 1 (which has been place-making dominant), minor further works are dependent on an additional successful bid which in the current financial climate has proven difficult to secure. **Funding gaps have been bridged through developer contributions**, to be paid back at a later date when the funding is finalised (with an estimate of late summer 2012). During the next period, the defects period will have finished and the site will be under SCC responsibility. As the project enters this stage, **funding for place-keeping is unclear** (bar that from MP4) leaving the future of the site uncertain. The hope, and assumption, is that from initial interest and events such as the launch, the unique and iconic nature of the events space will keep the site high profile high, and in turn draw in resourcing for management. Little concrete evidence exists, as yet (although the project is still in its infancy), to support this. The project has secured a small amount of Section 106 for management, which may be pooled with other 106 agreements across other sites to deliver a more efficient service.

The project was procured using standard SCC procurement guidelines, which closely follow EU procurement rules. Full tendering was undertaken for the majority of works, as they exceeded the £25,000 threshold. The tenders received for the project were very low, as a result of the competitive market and a reduction in scheme scope. Therefore further funding was not sought to support Phase 1, as all access and place-making elements could be delivered within this budget. **The low tenders allowed SCC to increase the number of**

³ The Homes and Communities Agency is a national UK government department set up to aid local partnerships in the provision of affordable housing.

⁴ Yorkshire Forward was the regional development agency (RDA) for the Yorkshire and the Humber region of the United Kingdom. It supported the development of business in the region by encouraging public and private investment in education, skills, environment and infrastructure. It was abolished on 31 March 2012 following the public spending review announced in 2010.

⁵ Section 106 (S106) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 allows a local planning authority (LPA) to enter into a legally-binding agreement or planning obligation with a landowner in association with the granting of planning permission. The obligation is termed a Section 106 Agreement.

planned terraces within the events space by nine, resulting in a design of twelve terraces which could seat over 1000 people. **The argument made by SCC to support this funding decision, centred on the critical and strategic nature of the site, which warranted a significant events area that would attract events on a city scale and bring long-term socio-economic benefits.** Implementation of the project by SCC appointed contractor was monitored by the SCC Project Development Officer, in conjunction with officers from SCC City Development Unit and Housing Regeneration team.

The dominant focus on place-making, and early, large losses from contingencies (due to mistakes in the bill of quantities) resulted in a project budget with ‘no slack’ to absorb unforeseen changes (SCC Project officer, 2012). However, issues regarding safety as identified by SCC Health and Safety Officers, raised the need for supplementary requirements associated with events management. These unplanned for occurrences, resulted in the contract running over budget requiring further finance, for which an additional successful bid was placed allowing the work to be delivered and overspend accommodated.

Financial support for development of such a significant site has been predominately drawn from city, regional, national and international sources. However the Friends, who receive no financial support from SCC for their activities, have secured additional small scale funding from local sources to support events on site such as from the **Small Grants**⁶ scheme to support the 2011 events space Launch Event. **Applying for funding as a community group, without professional skills to support development of applications, is a time-consuming occupation.** SCC project officers have provided some support in grant writing, but due to over-stretched officer time this has been limited.

Financing of the place-keeping stage of the project has appeared to date uncertain. **A potential opportunity for generation of income for place-keeping lies with events held with the new events space.** However, at present any money generated by events is expected to be absorbed within the wider Culture Directorate budget (within which Parks and Countryside now sits). With the events space predicted (through current event booking levels) to be a considerable financial generator but also to require high levels of long-term management due to high levels of use, SCC is exploring precedent examples of sites across the city that host events and retain the income generated by these, such as Sheffield Botanical Gardens.

Lessons learnt / implemented

- *Where possible allow ‘breathing room’ in budgets:* unforeseen costs and the longitudinal nature of place-keeping are expensive. In some cases it might be better not to stretch budgets to their limit at the start to ensure projects progress smoothly, even if obstacles arise.
- *Community groups can bring in external funding, but this is dependent on partner capacity and motivation:* providing Local authority officer support to enable community

⁶ The Sheffield Small Grants scheme is a funding scheme run by SCC since 2003. It provides small financial grants (typically £1,000 or less) to community organisations to help aid their activities. In the current financial year, 2012-2013, the seven Sheffield Community Assemblies will play an active role in distributing these grants within their area and setting individual grant levels.

groups to apply for funding may be effective in some instances. However if support is not continuous, or takes up large proportions of officer time for an outcome which is not guaranteed, time and resources may be best spent in other ways.

- *Funding for place-keeping still takes second place to place-making:* this creates great uncertainty as to how the quality of the place created can now be sustained. For place-keeping to have been given equal priority to place-making a change in national funding culture would have to occur. Including revenue costing for place-keeping within grant applications would dramatically increase costs on the outset, meaning many high specification and high maintenance projects might not initially get funded. However this might lead to greater focus and innovation on cost effective place-keeping and management approaches.
- *Without a place-keeping strategy and partnership the quality of a site's future is uncertain:* there is a need for political support to change attitudes and practices towards capital and revenue funding, otherwise the current quality of all new developments is in danger, and can only be short term solutions to long term issues.
- *Green and open space events provide the opportunity to generate income for place-keeping of the site in which they are held:* when seeking to offset budgetary shortfalls public authorities should look to this opportunity and develop guidance, in the form of formal agreements, through which public spaces may finance their own place-keeping requirements as a result of event income generation.

4. Policy

In the UK provision of parks and green and open spaces is not a statutory policy requirement, and has been further affected by the **recent localism drive**. At a national level increased devolution of power was promoted by the [Conservative Party](#) in their 2010 Big Society election manifesto. This was enforced in 2011 with adoption of the Localism Act, following election of the UK Conservative/[Liberal Democrat](#) Coalition Government in 2010. Following the Localism Act 2011, **Area Panels** and **Community Assemblies** (the lowest rungs of government) were given further budgetary control to provide communities with significant rights regarding local government expenditure on provision and delivery of services within their area including budgetary allocation including parks.

Sheffield has seven Community Assemblies (Northern, North East, East, Central, West, South West and South East), with Sheaf Valley Park located on the edge of the [East Community Assembly](#). Whilst political power in Sheffield has traditional been under Labour Party control, in the elected period prior to the 2012 elections, the Council was led by the Liberal Democrats. Under the Liberal Democrats each Community Assembly was given the same budget (regardless of level of socio-economic wealth) to distribute as it saw fit. When Labour returned to power this changed and the more deprived wards and areas (such as the East Area) again received a higher budget. In 2012, the three main priorities set down by the East Community Assembly towards which public funding would be directed were: increasing employment and skills, education and reducing poverty. Amongst their **other priorities** were: safer communities, stronger communities, **improving the environment**, transport and highways and better health. Identification of *improving the environment* as a Community Assembly (CA) area priority raises the political profile of green space projects such as Sheaf

Valley Park, but with other more pressing *main priorities* this does not necessarily lead to parks in the East CA securing additional public funding or officer support. In addition, whilst CAs aim to provide a forum for the community voice and debate and is very supportive of the Sheaf Valley Park project, Friends groups (such as Sheaf Valley Park) do not necessarily attend CA meetings and with a dominance of loud individual interest voices, who may not have an interest in parks but are concerned with wider issues, **'parks may get lost'** (SCC Project Officer, 2011).

At a city level Sheffield's provision and development of parks and open spaces is guided by the **Sheffield Green and Open Spaces Strategy (GOSS)** (2010 - 2030). This outlines the SCCs long-term commitment *to*, and plan *for*, green and open spaces. The GOSS identifies green and open spaces as *playing a vital role in the city's sustainable development*. Sheaf Valley Park has been recognised by SCC as a **key strategic green space for Sheffield** and as **a key element in the city centre and eastern community open space strategies**. This has **enabled the site to obtain additional Section 106 funding** (planning gain) for further place-making, but it is less clear whether the same will be true for place-keeping funding. However, **the recent economic recession has shifted SCC and political focus regarding green and open space provision. Through the GOSS Steering Group (in collaboration with the University of Sheffield MP4 team), SCC is now seeking to communicate to stakeholders a new strategic focus on place-keeping.** There is now a collective understanding across SCC departments and other key stakeholder organisations (such as Green Estate and Sheffield Wildlife Trust) that continued concentration on place-making alone is not sustainable, if support for place-keeping is not in secured.

The project continues to fulfil the desire to see open spaces performing to a better standard through investment and management. In future this will be monitored by SCC through the **Sheffield Standard**. The Sheffield Standard aims to provide a generic quality standard for all of Sheffield's green and open spaces. By the end of the 20-year life of the GOSS, all publicly accessible spaces should have attained the Standard and should be managed and maintained according to it. The Sheffield Standard has not yet been applied to Sheaf Valley Park, however it is the aim of SCC for 30 sites a year to be improved and renovated in order to reach the Sheffield Standard. The programme's first year of delivery was 2010-11, with **key principles of Sheffield Standard** being to ensure that **green and open spaces are safe, accessible, welcoming and clean.**

Completion of the Sheaf Valley Park project also aids delivery of SCCs current strategic approach to transport, **A Vision for Excellent Transport in Sheffield**, by fulfilling critical access improvements as part of *non-car access promotion in the city*. In addition the new, safer, pedestrian routes through Sheaf Valley Park to the city transport hub and the city centre from the eastern communities, help fulfil a number of the East CAs other priorities regarding safer communities and transport and highways.

Lessons learnt / implemented

- *Place-keeping needs to have political support in order for it to become embedded and effective:* raising the profile of place-keeping at a local level (through strategic

planning such as the GOSS) provides the opportunity to evidence its importance to a wide and potentially influential stakeholder group.

- *Changes in political leadership and political approaches can have a significant effect upon the public financing of green and open spaces:* under the control of different political parties (Labour and the Liberal Democrats) CAs in Sheffield have received differing amounts of funding at different times. When this has not accounted for the existing level of wealth in the area, wards with higher deprivation are unlikely to prioritise spending on parks, as the CA has more pressing issues (employment, education and poverty) must be addressed with a more limited budget.
- *In association with the above point...Localism agendas can cause discrepancy in support of green and open spaces between geographic areas:* the rise in influence of CAs has the power change the financial and political support for projects such as Sheaf Valley. In the East CA area of Sheffield (where Sheaf Valley Park lies), parks are not amongst the CAs key priorities and could be in danger of suffering cut backs regarding staff and place-keeping support. In other more wealthy areas of the city, which do not have such intrinsic issues, parks are identified as a key CA priority, likely to receive greater support and have the capacity to sustain higher quality.
- *Identification and demonstration of sites as being 'strategic' pieces in the delivery of wider city policy is an important in sustaining their place-keeping support:* Sheaf Valley Park has benefited from its identification as a key strategic site from a number of policy directions, these include the GOSS, Sheffield's vision for transport and the wider city green network.

5. Evaluation

Like any investment in green space **a longitudinal timescale is involved with not all benefits appearing immediately** (SCC Project Officer, 2012). As such no formal evaluation of economic, social or environmental benefits of Sheaf Valley Park has yet taken place due to a number of factors. One key project aim was to '*Improve pedestrian and disabled access to site and its connection to city centre/other neighbourhoods, partly through the creation of a landmark bridge to the city centre*'. From informal observations made by SCC staff this aim appears to have been achieved - many people now walk through the site to access the city centre from the east of the city and vice-a-versa. However, **no baseline information exists regarding footfall prior to the development, therefore it is difficult to evaluate by how much use for access has been increased**. In Summer 2012 a footfall counter will be installed on site as part of the SCC Investment in Access, and attendance numbers at events taking place in the Events Spaces will be recorded. However these indicators will have limitations, as they only reveal the current picture of use.

As a more qualitative evaluation of project success, **SCC has noted that 'satisfaction' levels regarding the site have improved**. There has been an increase in positive comments from the general public 'that the whole site is now much better' (SCC Project Officer, 2012). SCC acknowledges that social indicators of site success (such as satisfaction levels and user activity) would profit from a more formal evaluation, and that if they were able to provide **concrete evidence of a major increase in footfall or satisfaction levels**, it

would **benefit both the current case for site funding and support an argument to invest further in access provision.**

However resourcing for project evaluation and monitoring is a key issue for SCC. Staffing levels within the Parks and Countryside Service have suffered severe cutbacks recently, with the Development team shrinking in size from seventeen to nine officers. As such the overall **SCC situation of economic constraint greatly limits the local authority's capacity to carry out project evaluation. At other sites SCC has relied upon Friends groups to undertake such monitoring**, therefore they are looking into this as possibility in relation to the Friends of Sheaf Valley Park. If the Friends of Sheaf Valley Park agreed to undertake this responsibility, they would have to be **trained in the use of the Sheffield Standard**, which is similar to a Green Flag assessment but focuses on community involvement, quality of facilities, cleanliness and site maintenance and signage. However a limitation of this approach is that it only provides a 'snap shot' of user activity and site condition on the day that the evaluation is carried out.

In response to this issue, **the University of Sheffield has secured funding for two Sheffield Undergraduate Research Experience (SURE) student placements to carry out a more longitudinal monitoring of Sheaf Valley Park in June - July 2012.** This evaluation will include use of the **Sheffield Standard** and **REC mapping** (an onsite non-participant observation tool developed by MP4). Findings from this evaluation study will be initially disseminated to an invited community, policy and practitioner audience at an MP4 and SCC 'Place-keeping through Partnership' strategic event in July 2012.

Lessons learnt / implemented

- *In times of economic constraint carrying out project monitoring and evaluation (where it is not formally agreed) is financially difficult for local authorities:* resourcing project officer time to carry out evaluation may be a luxury rather than a priority where officer numbers have been dramatically reduced.
- *Friends and other community groups have the potential to assist local authorities in carrying out monitoring:* however this will require a commitment in officer time to train community members in the use of evaluation tools.
- *The Sheffield Standard is an evaluation tool template with the potential for more universal application:* use to date by community groups of the Sheffield Standard has proved that this is an accessible evaluation format for lay groups to employ.
- *Working in partnership with local organisations (such as universities) provides the opportunity for student/worker placements to offset staff shortages:* again these will require training but can ease the burden on over stretched local authority staff and contribute to the need for baseline data to support funding and investment in green and open spaces.

Critical appraisal of the pilot project

A critical appraisal of the Sheaf Valley Park project is made against the project aims and objectives, which have been grouped together where they overlap, and draws upon

interviews carried out with members of the Friends of Sheaf Valley Park, the SCC Project Officers and the MP4 Evaluation visit carried out in March 2012.

Project aims

1. *Regenerate open area into a well-used, safe 'place for all' with activity terraces and events space.*

Whilst no formal evaluation has been carried out to determine to what extent the space is now considered 'well used' and a 'place for all', informal observations from local authority and community sources (including the Friends of Sheaf Valley Park) support achievement of this aim. SCC officers have recorded that many more people now pass through the site and occupy the events space, with increasing numbers using the site to relax and enjoy the view across the city. Access routes are now heavily used and comments received by SCC from the general public have been very positive, as has local and national press coverage including Look North, Sky 1 and the [BBC](#). The current economic recession has facilitated SCC to enhance the planned events space, with low tenders for Phase 1 enabling creation of a larger number of activity terraces than first planned (increasing the initial number of nine to twelve) and resulting in a substantial, city events arena with the capacity to seat over 1000 people. The events space, which was public launched through an event hosted by the Friends of Sheaf Valley Park in September 2011, has also been deemed a success by SCC and the community.

The vision and quality of the investment in this park extends the quality and styles from the city centre. This area is now significantly changed with a sense of gathering rather than passing through. This creates a change to how the area is perceived and supports wider regeneration processes such as the Park Hill regeneration who's ground flood fronts onto part of the park. A large number of bookings to hold events in the space have already been taken by a diverse range of organisations (see 'Partnerships'), supporting the aim of the space to be a 'safe place for all'.

2. *Improve pedestrian and disabled access to site and its connection to city centre/other neighbourhoods, partly through the creation of a landmark bridge to the city centre.*

Creation of a clear connection between the city centre and east area of Sheffield was always central to the project, and in this way Sheaf Valley Park has been highly successful. The park provides both a highly visible connection between these areas and a number of pedestrian routes, which are now well used. In addition to the main stepped path that skirts the events space there is also a Disability Discrimination Act (DDA 2004) accessible sloped route that runs from the Sheffield Train Station tram stop up to Shrewsbury Road. Inclusion of this DDA route was a key concern of the Friends of Sheaf Valley Park and in its completion the Friends have gained one of their key outcomes. However, with no formal evaluation regarding footfall SCC Project Officers are unsure whether this design solution, of a separate route, is ideal or whether the level of usage achieved will validate the cost. Due to the current economic recession plans for a new landmark bridge to the city centre (to replace the existing poor quality and unsafe connection) have been put on hold. Investigation by SCC into the potential cost of a new bridge uncovered the need for a project that would greatly exceed current budgets. Ensuring this element of the project is not forgotten is essential in achieving wider strategic aims (for SCC and the East CA) of greater connectivity between the city centre and east area.

3. Enhance the biodiversity of the area and site's habitat and connect to other areas of habitat importance.

Sheaf Valley Park is a strategic site in terms of Sheffield's Green Infrastructure Network. Following completion of the project the biodiversity of the site has dramatically increased, as the site now contains the city centre arboretum of 100 trees of 18 species such as redwood and oak. As such, project delivery has seen an increase in the number of native trees and areas of wildflower meadow on site, also enhancing the ecological value of the area. Evidence to support this has been gathered through informal observed by SCC Project Officers, who have identified an increase in the number of birds and bird nests on site. However SCC do see a perceived tension between creating an environment to support biodiversity and one to encourage public use. Prior to development 'the space was totally wild before with discarded needles so there is an association with wild grassland and needle use' (SCC Project Officer, 2012). Post development large proportions of the site have now been given over to mown grass to facilitate use of the events space. SCC are still keen to explore the idea of greater areas of less managed space such as wildflowers to further increase the site's ecological value and reduce place-keeping management costs (compared to traditional mowing). Yet in aiming to achieve enhanced biodiversity SCC are naturally cautious about putting alternative management approaches into practice on such a high profile site, having identified issues regarding public perception of what constitutes a managed park.

4. Create a space that people will use and want to use in the future by improving people's perceptions of the site, increasing its accessibility and the potential for activity.

Prior to this project Sheaf Valley Park was 'nobody's space' (SCC Project Officer, 2011). It's scale, position and character made it very difficult for the local community and wider city to feel ownership. Through the involvement of the Friends of Sheaf Valley throughout the project, local interest in and contribution to the development of the site has been sustained by SCC Project Officer support. This gave an initial platform from which greater community use and ownership of the site has grown. A key point of change in site perception was the launch event in September 2011, which signified the official reopening of the park. This event, hosted by the Friends of Sheaf Valley, attracted hundreds of visitors to the site and since then interest in the site has grown from local to city-wide and beyond. Evidence of growth in site usage, as well as informal and observational, can be found in the great diversity of organisations and groups who have now booked to hold events in the event space. Amongst these groups are ShAFF Orienteering, DOC Fest, Sheffield Festival Of Ancient Drama, the Children's Festival, Heartbreak Productions and the Friends of Sheaf Valley Park. The positive way in which Sheaf Valley Park has been embraced by the city has also galvanised the involvement of the Friends of Sheaf Valley Park, who now have a younger and very active chair, keen to promote and support further development of the site as an important city space. As discussed earlier in relation to the first aim of the project, changing public perception of the site into a space that now has a *use* (through events) and is not just a transitional area has greatly contributed to the current success and securing a stable future for the site. SCC Project Officers hope that by demonstrating the increase in positive site profile, ownership and accessibility a strong case may be made for ensuring place-keeping support.

Recommendations and Outlook

Now Phase 1 of Sheaf Valley Park is complete and the project moves into a financially more uncertain but potentially innovative place-keeping phase. Sustaining a cross-sector partnership (public, private and community) through this initial place-making phase has been resource intensive for SCC, particularly in terms of project officer time. However since the 2011 launch of the site, community support and city interest has been galvanised. New partners and prospective support networks are emerging who, if captured, may hold the key to ensuring place-keeping for Sheaf Valley Park. Formalising place-keeping through creation of a place-keeping master plan (in line with the Sheffield Standard) would be a useful step towards identifying specific roles and responsibilities for the Sheaf Valley Park partnership. Times of economic constraint also create the perfect political platform to argue for a cultural shift from place-making to place-keeping, which is in evidence through recent discussions about the wider Sheffield GOSS. Ensuring place-keeping is embedded from the conception of projects (rather than post place-making) will mean all partners are encouraged to contribute, through their individual skill sets and capacities, to the development of a longitudinal legacy for projects such as Sheaf Valley Park.

From evaluation of the experience of the Sheaf Valley Park project, and from lessons drawn from elsewhere in MP4, several recommendations and potential ways forward can be identified, which can be grouped under the five cross-cutting themes of MP4.

Partnerships

- *Action on site is a catalyst for community involvement.* In periods of little on site activity, community interest and involvement waned. Once visible signs of progress on site occurred levels of interest and involvement increased. Keeping the community informed, encouraging them to engage with all stages in the project (facilitating access on site) is important if partnerships are to be sustained and prosper.
- *Community partnerships require considerable resourcing and support.* In certain instances where the community group is very small, vulnerable or unrepresentative, public officer time may be more productively employed supporting other groups or progressing work directly.
- *Partnerships should evolve in response to project phasing.* As projects are completed and move into the place-keeping phase it is important to identify and involve new partners who may have a more relevant and vested interest at this stage.
- *Project officer continuity is important.* Changes in officer, officer role, remit and communication greatly affects the stability of the community partnership. Partnerships can take a long time to develop and changes in political agendas that do not account for this can be counterproductive to project progress.
- *Employing and valuing knowledge from across the partnership:* by working together professionals (public and private) and communities can combine their capacity for involvement to create a more successful design (place-making) and to deliver effective management in the long-term (place-keeping).

Governance

- *Transparent communication is key to ensuring engagement:* Particularly at early stages in the project getting communication right - visual (plans and designs), verbal (meetings) and written (actions and minutes) - can facilitate a sense of ownership, commitment and motivation.
- *Sustaining involvement means adapting to change:* this is a recommendation for both communities and public bodies. Key individuals may move away, no longer wish to continue or may leave the project due to changes in employment such as fixed term contracts and spending cuts. Governance of such projects must be able to adjust to this shift, looking to new stakeholders, individual and models of involvement.
- *Developing trust and engagement takes time:* where the community feels 'left out the loop' or not as involved as they might have been representation and commitment can decline. The involvement of motivated project officers committed to community involvement is a key factor in creating trust and ensuring involvement is sustained.

Finance

- *Community groups can bring in external funding, but this is dependent on partner capacity and motivation:* providing Local authority officer support to enable community groups to apply for funding may be effective in some instances. However if support is not continuous, or takes up large proportions of officer time for an outcome which is not guaranteed, time and resources may be best spent in other ways.
- *Funding for place-keeping still takes second place to place-making:* this creates great uncertainty as to how the quality of the place created can now be sustained. For place-keeping to have been given equal priority to place-making a change in national funding culture would have to occur. Including revenue costing for place-keeping within grant applications would dramatically increase costs on the outset, meaning many high specification and high maintenance projects might not initially get funded. However this might lead to greater focus and innovation on cost effective place-keeping and management approaches.
- *When to invest?* For a local authority with limited resources one of the challenges is to know when and where to put staff time in to facilitate to involvement to happen.

Policy

- *Place-keeping needs to have political support in order for it to become embedded and effective:* raising the profile of place-keeping at a local level through strategic planning guidance, provides the opportunity to evidence its importance to a wide and potentially influential stakeholder group.
- *Changes in political leadership and political approaches can have a significant effect upon the public financing of green and open spaces:* under the control of different political parties, amounts of funding for both geographic areas and strategic (and non-strategic) priorities may be variable. When the political situation does not account for existing levels of wealth, areas of higher deprivation are unlikely to prioritise spending on parks as more pressing issues (such as employment, education and poverty) must be addressed with limited budgets. Under these conditions, and without association to these wider issues, green and open spaces are likely to 'lose out'.
- *Identification and demonstration of sites as being 'strategic' pieces in the delivery of wider city policy is an important in sustaining their place-keeping support.*

Evaluation

- *In times of economic constraint carrying out project monitoring and evaluation (where it is not formally agreed) is financially difficult for local authorities:* resourcing project officer time to carry out evaluation may be a luxury rather than a priority where officer numbers have been dramatically reduced.
- *Friends and other community groups have the potential to assist local authorities in carrying out monitoring:* however this will require a commitment in officer time to train community members in the use of evaluation tools.
- *The Sheffield Standard is an place-keeping evaluation tool template with the potential for more universal application:* use of the Sheffield Standard to date by community organisations, has proved that this is an accessible evaluation format for lay groups to employ.

Glossary

‘Place-making’: creating high quality places that people want to visit, experience and enjoy. It implies a people-centred approach, which emphasises designing spaces that promote health, wellbeing and happiness. Such spaces engender a sense of belonging and connection for those who use them.

‘Place-keeping’: relates to maintaining the qualities and benefits – social, environmental and economic – of places through long-term management. The management required to maintain these qualities and benefits, the approach adopted and the timescale will depend on the ‘place-making’ aims, the available resources and the life span of the ‘place’.

Partnership: is defined as agreed shared responsibility between public, private and community sectors. It is a relationship, which, in this context, is normally formed between governmental and non-governmental sectors – i.e. it is a manifestation of governance relationships.

Engagement: is a crosscutting issue, which describes successful models of working with communities and encouraging appropriate use. Engagement is an aspect of governance particularly relevant in forms of participatory governance and is intrinsic to the concept of ‘governance’ as defined below.

Governance: relates to the relationship between and within government and non-governmental forces. The term implies wider participation in decision-making than representative democracy or other forms of government, recognising a wider range of actors other than the state, and allowing for varying governance contexts and processes.

Finance: describes financial models for efficient long-term management.

Policy: is discussed within the context of embedding best practice into spatial planning and other policy.

Valuation: describes the economic impacts of improvements to open spaces, but also relates to wider socio-economic and environmental benefits.

Notes on this report

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This report is based on qualitative research methods, interviews, evaluation visit, critical reports and model agreement assessments.

Websites/ web pages relevant to the Sheaf Valley Park project partnership:

MP4: <http://www.mp4-interreg.eu/page/15/Sheaf+Valley+Park.html>

Friends of Sheaf Valley Park:

http://www.sheffieldhelpyourself.org.uk/full_search_new.asp?group=23459

Sheffield City Council: <https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/planning-and-city-development/regeneration/neighbourhood-regeneration/your-neighbourhood/park-hill/south-street-open-space.html>

Urban Splash: [Park Hill, Sheffield - project information | Urban Splash](#)

RASC: <http://www.rasc-sheffield.com/agree.html>

Other online sources:

The Sheffield Blog: <http://sheffieldblog.com/2010/10/18/sheaf-valley-park-open-air-theatre/>

Sheffield Forum: <http://www.sheffieldforum.co.uk/showthread.php?t=646933>

Sheffield Green Party (the opening of Sheaf Valley Park):

<http://manorcastlegreens.sheffieldgreenparty.org.uk/2011/09/19/grand-opening-of-sheaf-valley-park/>

Cycle Sheffield: <http://www.cyclesheffield.org.uk/2010/08/12/sheaf-valley-park-elsewhere/>

BBC news: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-south-yorkshire-14950920>