



MP4 WP4.1 Retroactive evaluation of on-the-ground benefits

Evaluation Report:
Firth Park, Sheffield,
UK



The
University
Of
Sheffield.



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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. 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.

Firth Park, located in a residential area in the North East of Sheffield, is a designated as a City Park and listed as having special historic interest (English Heritage.) The Firth Park and Burngreave wards, within which the park lies, are amongst the 10% most deprived on the UK, with a high ethnic mix compared to the rest of Sheffield. The Park was given to the people of Sheffield by Mark Firth in 1875, and is held in trust by Sheffield City Council for the residents and visitors of the city to enjoy. The park covers a total area of 15.2 hectares and consists of parkland landscape and ancient woodland and historic Clock Tower dating from the early 1900's.

Despite it's inherent qualities the park had declined since the 1970's, due to reducing Local Authority budgets and changing priorities, and was little used by local people. This decline reached a critical point in the late 1990's when a fire destroyed part of the historic Clock Tower. Soon after the Friends of Firth Park (the Friends) were set up with the aim to *'improve the park and its adjacent areas in partnership with Sheffield City Council. To make it a safer and friendlier and safer environment for everyone to use'*. The Friends were very influential in generating local interest in the park, lobbying for change and working with Sheffield City Council (SCC) to secure funding and implement improvements. In 2002 they worked with Sheffield City Council to secure funding to develop a regeneration masterplan for the Park of which the MP4 pilot project 'Ripples in the Pond' (Ripples) is the final piece.

The park is now a Green Flag award winner (since 2008) and offers many facilities for users; children's play area, formal gardens, bowling green, café and toilets and car parking. The majority of these facilities are clustered around the north entrance to the park adjacent to the main Firth Park shopping area. The Ripples project is situated next to the Clock Tower at the southern entrance to the park.

Context and the need for place-keeping

The Friends and Sheffield City Council partnership have been very successful in bringing funding to regenerate the park, however the derelict boating lake outside the Clock Tower remained an outstanding issue. This area had become an eyesore and very visible from one of the main roads to Firth Park commercial area. Due to its isolated location at the southern end of the park and cut off

from the main body of the park by the main access road it was little used and was attracting anti-social behaviour, see figure 1.



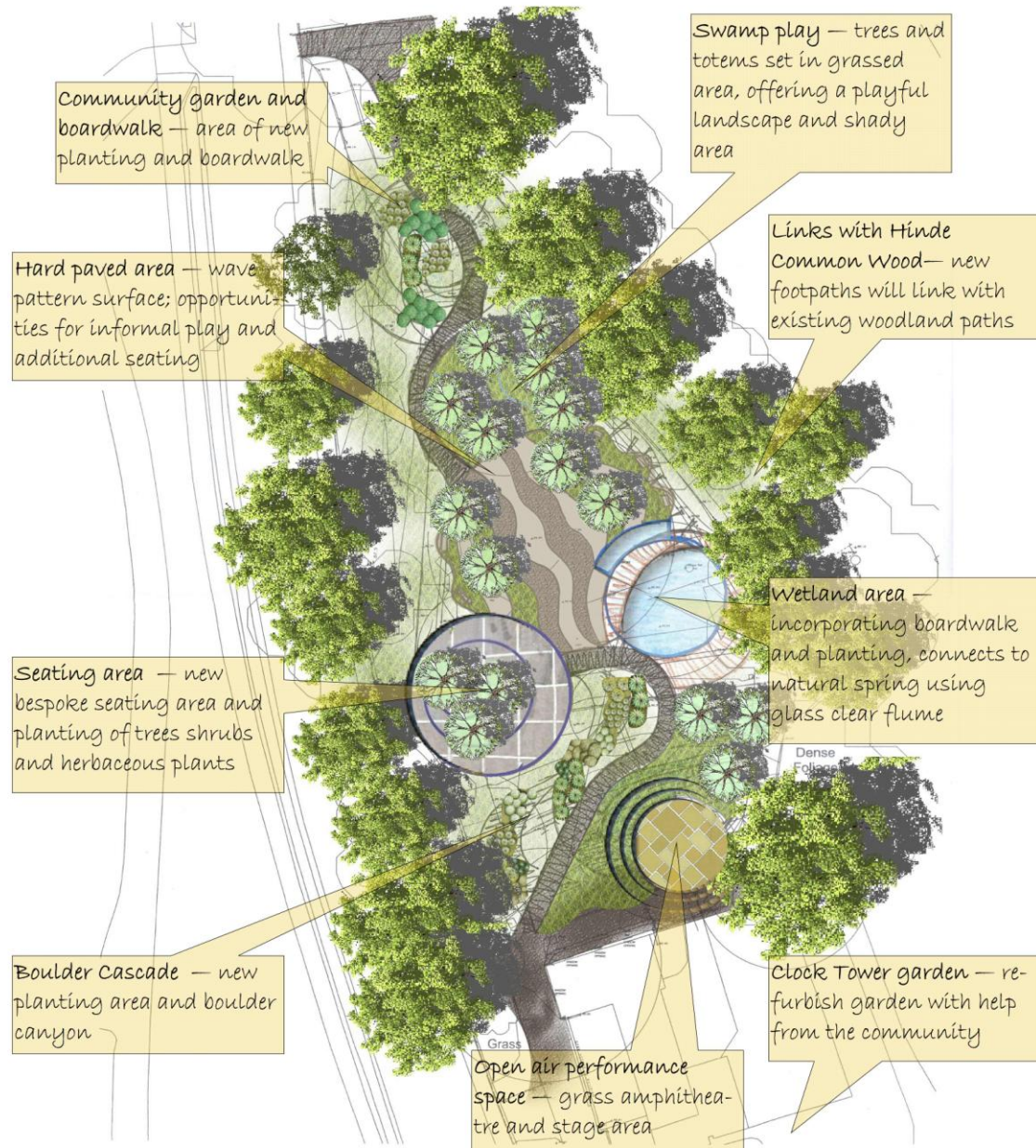
Figure 1. The space, once a boating lake, was unused and had become an eyesore.

In addition to regenerating this area of the park, the project was seen as an opportunity to develop the Friends group, widen its scope for involvement in the ongoing management of the park and engender ownership for the park amongst the wider community. The pond concept developed for the area was inspired by its original use as a boating lake. Figure 2 shows the original concept for the Ripples on the Pond project.

The main aims of the project were described as;

- Provide a **new 'gateway'** to the Firth Park area. The Clock Tower and associated area is the first impression that visitors have of the area when travelling from the south.
- To provide **new recreational facilities, opportunities and experiences** through creating a new landscape of pools and wetlands, providing **natural play opportunities**, providing an amphitheatre for **local events**, providing new meeting spaces and **improving access** throughout the new area.
- Revitalise the park, **improve the natural social and cultural offer** of the area for **all members of the community**;
- Make **use of available funding streams** targeted at the areas (HMR, Section 106) to achieve the above;
- Increase membership and scope of 'Friends of' groups and potentially give wider remit in the longer-term management of the parks;
- Engage all sectors of the community in the long-term use and care for the parks (and engender a sense of ownership).

Firth Park - "Ripples in the Pond"



Firth Park - Connecting the parts



Figure 2. 'Ripples in the Pond' concept developed by Sheffield City Council.



The completed Ripples project May 2012.



The place-keeping approach

The responsibility for place-keeping at Firth Park lies with SCC as trustees of the land, and the Parks and Parks and Countryside Service (P&CS) in particular. The P&CS (<http://www.sheffield.gov.uk/out-about/parks-woodlands-countryside>) is responsible for the management, maintenance and development of the city's parks woodlands, allotments and other recreational green spaces, including Firth Park. Where there are specific projects the Service acts as the client and may commission work from other Services within the Council such as those relating to landscape design.

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 (74 in 2007). The formation of Friends groups has been actively facilitated and supported by the Community Services section of P&CS and the Policy and Projects Section support Friends groups to develop projects such as Ripples.

It was the establishment of the Friends in 1999 that was central to the reversal of the Firth Parks decline. The Friends provided a forum for stakeholder discussion about the management of the park, lobbied for increased resources and worked with stakeholders, SCC in particular, to deliver a range of improvements projects, events and activities. On a day to day basis they helped to informally monitor parks use and management providing a contact point for park users.

The type of activities Friends have been involved in has changed since it first formed. Initially the focus was practical, trying to make small improvements through litter picks, painting railings and bulb planting. They organised awareness raising events such as fun days and the Firth Park Festival. In 2002 they worked with SCC to engage consultants to develop a masterplan for the park to take

forward improvements and have since focussed their activity on delivering elements of the plan well and the annual festival.

Alongside delivering the physical aspects of the Ripples project, one of the aims of the MP4 Ripples project was to explore a wider remit for the Friends in the place-keeping of the park and to engage the wider community. How this has been achieved, particularly in terms of the changing political and economic context since the start of MP4, will be discussed further in the themes below and the critical appraisal of the project.

Place-keeping: looked at from five angles¹

1. Partnerships

The public-community partnership between SCC P&CS and the Friends has been very successful in securing additional resources for the park and driving forward the regeneration of the park including the Ripples project. The Friends have played an important role in raising awareness of the Ripples project in the wider community as well as working with SCC to secure funding.

This is a long-standing partnership that has benefitted from good working relationships between the active members of the Friends and the individual P&CS Project Officers. One of the strengths of the partnership has been a clear recognition of the relative expertise, knowledge and skills that each partner can bring. The Friends feel that each of the successive Project Officers they have worked with (there have been several staff changes over the course of the parks development) have been dedicated to the development of the park and shared in their enthusiasm for seeing that work completed. The strong personal as well as professional and environmental motivation demonstrated by the individuals involved was highlighted in an evaluation of the partnership capacity. The strong professional and community pride in the park having achieved Green Flag status has contributed to this.

The Project has provided a focus for consultation with the wider community during the place-making phase and events held during that phase and immediately on completion, such as willow weaving, bulb planting and the launch event, have been aimed at raising awareness of the project and sought to engage people in the on-going management of the space; primarily through the invitation to join the Friends. Activities have also been undertaken with North Sheffield Conservation Volunteers (NSCV), who have been involved in some of the practical management of the area, in management work at the adjacent Clock Tower garden as well as bulb planting on the site itself.

Despite events being well attended however few new members have joined the Friends and beyond the work with NSCV there is also little evidence of increased partnership working with others. Several suggested reasons were given for this including P&CS staff changes through which contacts with groups may have been lost, potential partners being focussed on their own agendas

¹ 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.

(which may be culturally motivated) and the fact that budget cuts might be affecting the capacity of other groups that might consider contributing to place-keeping in the park.

Internal partnership working between different departments and sections within SCC has had an impact on the project. Meetings between those responsible for the place-making and place-keeping (as part of standard procedures) have influenced the design of the project to avoid potential maintenance issues. However Parks management staff think that this could happen earlier and more frequently in the process. Delays caused by changes in Council wide procurement and project management procedures, which have not been communicated well internally, and in obtaining planning permission due to workloads of Environmental Planning staff not prioritising the project have frustrated the Project Officer and friends alike. In addition contractor delays in the implementation of the project on site lead to the postponement of the official opening. These internal issues have a stressful impact on the external Friends SCC partnership, particularly in relation to the postponed launch event.

Maintaining good communication with Friends throughout the Ripples project was thought by SCC to be very important. The project officer has acted as a conduit between other SCC offices and has helped to communicate the sometimes complex and 'boring' technicalities of the project to the Friends. The reported impact of this, along with the strong personal working relationship has help to overcome has been to strengthen the partnership between the Council and the Friends of Firth Park.

Lessons learnt / implemented

The shared strong personal and professional motivation of the individuals involved in the partnership, shared commitment and recognition of partners' roles, responsibilities and skills, has contributed greatly to the successful working relationship.

A trusted mediator (SCC Project Officer) has played a vital role as the conduit of information from the wider SCC and the Friends.

The Project Officer has provided invaluable technical support to the Friends to enable them to develop funding bids and contribute to the project management and decision-making.

Official recognition of the partnerships achievement, i.e. Green Flag status, is an important motivator for on-going place-keeping.

Obtaining commitment from individuals to contribute to existing partner groups, or to persuade new groups to join partnerships is not easy.

Issues arising within individual partners (sections restructuring, procedural changes) outside the control of particular individual partner members can have a negative impact on the relationship with external partner and threaten successful partnerships.

2. Governance

Governance in relation to Firth Park can be described as a combination of state-centred and user-centred models. Sheffield City Council, as the land-owners, are ultimately responsible for decision made regarding place-making and on-going place-keeping at Firth Park in terms of resource allocation and prioritisation (state-centred). However this is changing with the devolution of decision-making around resource allocation for some Council provided services including parks to Community Assemblies, the lowest rungs of government. Sheffield has seven

Community Assemblies (Northern, North East, East, Central, West, South West and South East) and Firth Park lies in the North east Area. Due to recent political changes within the Council (a move from Lib-Dem control back to Labour) the exact form of decision making at the Community Assembly level is still being decided, but essentially the structure enables local people to have more of a say in the decisions that affect their local area. To ensure the role of green spaces is properly considered a tasking officer from Parks and Countryside Section has been aligned with each Community Assembly to advise and agree how parks should be managed in their area. The Friends have proved in the past to be adept at lobbying local politicians and the Community Panel (forerunner to Community Assembly) for additional resources for the park and have enjoyed strong local political support.

The Friends were instrumental in securing funding for and appointing consultants for the parks regeneration masterplan and have played an active role in decisions about which projects to progress demonstrating a user-centred approach. This involvement has continued throughout the Ripples project and much effort has been made by SCC to involve the Friends in the design and implementation process. Through monthly project meetings with SCC (Project Officer and Landscape Architect) the Friends have been able to influence some of the decision-making relating to the Ripples project. They have also been involved in some of the more technical aspects such as tendering which Friends groups would not normally be involved with. This has helped the Friends understand the difficulties inherent in such as project and reasons for delays and from the Councils perspective helped to make the process more transparent. The Friends did express concern however that they had less influence on the outcome of the project once it moved from the concept stage to the detailed design and implementation stage. During this detailed design process, undertaken by the Councils Landscape Architect, the project changed from being a mostly soft, planted scheme to a much harder (paving) design. Although the technical plans were presented to the Friends they did not understand the extent of the design changes that were proposed, or some of the materials proposed.

As the project moves into the place-keeping phase it is unclear what role the Friends will play in the on-going governance of the park. Traditionally decision-making relating to the day-to-day management of the park has rested primarily within the four sections of P&CS who worked closely together, and with the Friends, to deliver place-keeping. Restructuring of the P&CS has meant considerable changes to these internal governance structures. However, combining some of the maintenance tasks, such as grass cutting of different areas inside and outside the park under the remit of one area manager, may reduce some the existing complexity.

Although the Friends have been involved with decision-making they are not fully representative of the wider community. Genuine attempt has been made to involve a wider cross section of the community, both by the Friends and project Officers. Although there has been wide consultation on the Ripples project at the annual festival, there has been very limited involvement of other sectors for the community beyond this. Despite the park being well used by all sectors of the community there appears to be no wish for representatives of the various ethnic and user groups to join the Friends, or have involvement in the management of the Park.

Lessons learnt / implemented

Despite attempts to widen membership Partner groups involved in decision-making may not be fully representative of the local area.

Although it is possible to consult widely on strategic decisions regarding place-making and place-keeping e.g. which project to prioritise it is less easy to have wide inclusion in decision making during the development and implementation place-making projects due to the increased complexity of decision making involving many different Council departments and officers.

Different officers may be involved in the on-going place-keeping stage than the place-making and this can make it difficult to embed place-keeping during the place-making stage.

Unless this is clearly communicated it can lead to negative perceptions of partners of being excluded, particularly if decision are being made that the Friends are not part of.

Community members and non-technical staff may not be able to understand technical information (for example detailed design plans) being shared with them and are therefore unable to contribute meaningfully to decision-making.

The governance of green spaces is subject to changing political and organisational structures Although this may ultimately provide the community with a greater role in decision making through the Community Assemblies, in the short term it can cause uncertainty, frustration and delays.

3. Finance

The partnership between the Friends and SCC has been very successful in securing funding from a wide range of sources for the Ripples project. Funding was secured from: Section 106², MP4 Interreg, and a number of charitable and lottery funded sources; Graves Trust, Sheffield Homes, Viridor Landfill Tax credits, Community Spaces, Changing Spaces. The partnership has enabled SCC to access funding that is only accessible to community groups, or public-community partnerships and SCC have provided the Friends with the skills to write funding bids and manage incoming resources and project. The tendering process had ensured that the cost of the place-making stage was very competitive.

Funding has been secured for activities in the first year of the Ripples project, including the launch event. The focus of these are to raise awareness of the new project amongst park users and to help establish new uses and use of the project. However the on-going place-keeping of the park has been subject to budget cuts resulting from austerity measures which have dramatically cut Local Authority budgets. For SCC overall this has reduced the parks maintenance teams from 4 teams to 3. Whilst the on-site team for Firth Park is in place until end of March 2012 it is unclear whether they will remain. The number of Facilities Managers is being reduced; at Firth Park the Premises Manger is responsible for the management of the buildings and is instrumental in the delivery of the Festival.

Although it is too early to predict exactly what impact this reduction in resources will have on place-keeping both the Friends and the SCC parks maintenance staff are concerned that it will have a negative impact of the Green Flag status of the park. It is not expected that on-going management of the Ripples project will be an issues due to its low maintenance design but other more resource intensive areas of the Park such as the formal flower beds may be affected.

² 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.

Whether they have capacity or not to contribute to practical maintenance, the Friends feel very strongly that they should not undertake tasks currently being undertaken by parks staff as this is 'taking jobs away from others'.

The reduction in resources will also have an impact of the level of support the Friends will receive from SCC Project Officers. Fewer Project Officers will struggle to give the same level of support to community groups they are currently working with. Place-making project are only likely to be supported by the Community Assemblies if they are renewal project (replacing an existing facility) where the on-going maintenance is already covered by existing budgets. 'New' projects will only be supported if five years revenue for management costs has been secured. Now the place-making stage of the Ripples project is complete the park is no longer a priority for the Community Assembly and this means that the level of support from the Project Officer will reduce. This comes at a time when there may be pressure on Friends groups and volunteers to take an increased role in delivering the on-going management of the Ripples project and wider park if existing standards are to be maintained.

Lessons learnt / implemented

Partnership working between SCC and Friends has proved to be a successful and mutually beneficial approach to securing resources for place-making and place-keeping projects and events.

Partnerships that require the input of paid SCC officers to maintain them are vulnerable in times of reducing Council budgets.

Ensuring that the Ripples project was designed to be low maintenance will help to ensure the standard of maintenance is maintained despite decreasing resources.

4. Policy

The development of the Ripples project contributes to Sheffield's Green and Open Space Strategy, a 20 year plan (approved in 2009) that was produced collaboratively with key stakeholders across Sheffield. This sets out the long-term strategy for future use and management of the City's green and open spaces and sets out a large number of policy statements around the key themes of people, places, environment and sustainability and quality management. The strategy however was written before the imposition of budget cuts and has largely remained an un-activated document. SCC have recognised that the strategy needs to be revisited to review priorities and approaches to the delivery of these in order to make it relevant for today's economic situation. The impact this review will have on Firth Park, and the relationship between the Friends (and other groups) and SCC is unclear but it may give a renewed place-keeping focus.

The Ripples project was identified as an output of the North East Community Assembly's Community Action Plan. However as outlined above now the project is completed the park is no longer a priority for the Community Assembly although the annual festival will continue to be supported. The level and priorities for on-going management in the park will be determined by whether SCC and the Community Assembly decide to try and maintain the park's Green Flag status, and by the Sheffield Standard. The Sheffield Standard is a city-wide green space quality measure developed by SCC that is being used to evaluate whether sites meet an acceptable level

of maintenance. Alongside this simple (one page) management plans are being developed for all green spaces to identify priorities and for management and key management tasks. Developing these with input from user groups such as the Friends is being piloted. This work is at an early stage and has not been applied yet to Firth Park.

Lessons learnt / implemented

The policy framework in which place-keeping of a site sits is subject to changing political and economic context and this may have far reaching impacts on the long-term success of place-keeping.

Area based policies (as interpretations of wider policy) have more influence on the resources available for individual sites and projects than city-wide policy

5. Evaluation

SCC and the Friends feel it is too early to tell whether the site will fulfil its aims for increased use, reduced crime and improved perceptions but anecdotal evidence suggest the site is already being used more than before, and by a wider range of people.

Several evaluation methods to determine the benefits of the Ripples project were prosed for after its completion however undertaking systematic evaluation of the project, which would have meant gathering baseline data before the implementation of the project against which to measure changes, has proved to be difficult for the Project Officer. This is partly because of very real time constraints and competing priorities faced by SCC staff, and due to the change in Project Officers (both SCC and SYFP) part way through the process. Events such as the festival are very well attended but both the Friends and SCC say it is too difficult to record exact numbers due to the layout of the park (many entrances) and number of activities going on. The value of having data on the social and economic benefits of the Ripples and other projects is recognised, particularly by SCC, primarily in order to justify future funding proposals and securing resources. It was less clear however how exactly that information would be used and what the systems and responsibilities within the Council for collecting and disseminating this type of information are.

Working with project partners (UoS and UoC) SCC and the Friends undertook an evaluation of the recreational experiences of the park, including the Ripples project area before implementation, as part of the development of that methodology. A follow up exercise is planned but has not yet been undertaken. An evaluation of the capacity of the Friends / SCC partnership was also undertaken by UoS and the findings of this have fed into this report.

Post completion a user questionnaire has been produced by UoS to evaluate use of Ripples which was used at the project launch in May 2012. The responses of 19 people were collected. Most of these lived within 1 mile of the park, the majority were adults, only 3 under 16 years old and most used the park less than once a week. The responses to the project were mostly positive identifying the Ripples as a tranquil place, a place to relax and a space they would use again. They liked the natural aspects of the project and would like the space to be used for events. Negative comments identified the drainage issues, lack of bins and questioning whether the basket ball net was the right thing to have in this space (possibly indicating perceived conflicting uses).

A survey to record what the project site is being used for, by whom and when was undertaken by UoS in July 2012. This recorded activity on the site, twice a day, 8.00-9.30am and 3.30 – 5.00pm for five week days. The gender, age category (child – elderly) as well as the type of activity was recorded. Activity was also recorded in the main area of the Park, across the road from the Ripples project, primarily to see if people were crossing over the road to access the Ripples area. The observations showed that the Ripples was much less used than the main area of the park (total use 96 users main area, 23 Ripples) and that only one person was observed crossing the road to use the Ripples project. The Ripples was used more in the afternoon than the morning (8 morning and 15 afternoon). In the morning activity was limited to mostly adults walking through the space or dog walking but in the afternoon it was more used for sitting and increased use by children / teenagers was observed. During the same period there was only one recording of sitting in the main park area which indicates that the Ripples is providing a use not catered for nearby in the main park (although there is much more opportunity for this at the main park entrance). Although this is a limited study it shows that most users of the Ripples project access it from the same side of the road as the site rather than those crossing from the main park to use it. Additional observations, particularly at weekends, are needed to assess the full extent of use and as a benchmark to assess how use changes as the project develops.

The economic benefits of the site are more difficult to measure. It was anticipated that the project would contribute to the wider regeneration of the Firth Park neighbourhood and have a positive impact on house prices and desirability of the area. The visual improvement of the site on a main access route and overlooked by houses is likely to have a positive impact on peoples perception of the area. As the project site is remote from the main shopping area of Firth Park (which was the focus for previous improvement projects in the park) the Ripples project is unlikely to bring any added benefit to businesses in that area. It is possible that bookings of the Clock Tower may increase due to the improved adjacent space but there are no figures available as yet.

In term of on-going evaluation SCC suggest that it would be beneficial to evaluate the impact that the budget cuts and reduced resources would have on levels of maintenance in the park, but as yet there is no firm proposal for doing so.

Lessons learnt / implemented

There are many different evaluation methods that can be used and the value of evaluating the impact of projects such as Ripples is recognised by SCC. Despite this SCC the resources are not available to collect data and there is no clear plan for how it might be used.

Observational data recording user activity at particular times of day are simple to undertake and provide useful information about whether the site is being used as expected, and to measure changes in use over time. To get a full picture of use however observations need to be undertaken at different times of the year, weekends and school holidays as well as week days and comparative data from other parts of the park is useful to compare use of the project to overall park use.

Working with partners (UoS) can provide support, both technical and manpower, in evaluating projects.

Critical appraisal of the pilot project

Notwithstanding some concerns the Friends have over details of the final design and on-going flooding and drainage problems, the place-making phase of the Ripples project has been completed successfully. Referring to the project aims it has made *use of available funding streams* to improve this area as a *gateway* to the Firth Park and provided a setting for *new recreational opportunities* and *improved access* and *created an amphitheatre for local events*, and *improved the 'natural, social and cultural offer'*. The aim for the site was that it will appeal to and be used for *all members of the community*. Observational data (albeit limited) shows that the project is being used, and that some users are using it for sitting and playing (i.e. not just walking through it) and that all ages (both genders – apart for elderly female) are using the site. Use however, is still limited with only one person observed crossing from the main park to access it. It seems that the majority of use will be from those living and walking on the Ripples side of the park. The improvement of the space for residents on this side of the park was one of the 'unofficial' aims of the project and the improvements mean that they no-longer have to cross the road to access quality green space. Additional events in the space will help to increase awareness of the project and hopefully attract users from further afield. The opening event was successful in attracting a wider audience and the survey shows that attendees saw the value of the Ripples as a quite, natural place to visit and a place for special events.



Enjoying the new facilities at the opening event. May 2012

Despite frustrations caused by delays and the complexity of delivering such as large project, the public-community partnership has proved to be a successful approach to place-making and the partnership has been strengthened through the process. The role of the partnership in the place-keeping phase of the project, beyond the first year of funded events, is much less certain. It seems apparent that the Friends, and the on-site park staff, have always assumed that the day-to-day maintenance of the project will be the responsibility of SCC. The project has now been absorbed into the Friends general remit for place-keeping of the park, a role of general monitoring ('eyes and ears' on site), alongside the specific events they organise such as the annual festival. The Friends have identified an opportunity for music events to be held on the Ripples site but this does not appear to be a priority for them at present.

The role of the existing partnership in the wider place-keeping of the park is also unclear. This is partly due the changed economic situation, there is no-longer SCC Officer support for the group and it is no longer a priority at the Community Assembly (Areas based) level. The Friends have

been highly successful in completing the majority of the larger projects from the park masterplan and there are many other parks in the area of lower quality and which demand resources.

One of the aims of the MP4 pilot project was to; *increase membership and scope of 'Friends of groups and potentially give wider remit in the longer-term management of the park(s).*

One of the key issues for the Partnership is that membership numbers of the Friends is fairly low, between 20-30 people, with those attending monthly meetings mainly doing so in a social capacity. Of these only a few are active members. Most of these are elderly and retired (and female) and limited in the type of place-keeping activities they can and wish to engage with. These members have an extensive working knowledge of the park and of working in partnership with SCC. However, despite this they are still very reliant on the support of SCC Project Officers. There is a real threat to the partnership if key Friends members move on or that SCC resources are reduced.

Despite their best efforts the membership of the Friends has only increased slightly and it is quite clear that they do not have the capacity or desire for an increased role in place-keeping. In particular they strongly feel that maintenance activities are the responsibility of SCC and that it would not be ethically right to 'take jobs' from others.

Another project aim was to *engage all sectors of the community in the long-term use and care for the park(s) (and engender a sense of ownership).*

Wide consultation was undertaken during the development of the project and events held on site to encourage new users. The park is extremely well used by all sectors of the community and this is reflected in attendance at the annual festival. The Friends however report a reluctance for other groups, or individuals, to engage more fully in the management of the park. They will attend events but not help to organise them. The Friends have observed that the different ethnic groups, although regular park users, focus any community involvement within their own communities.

Developing stronger relationships with a number of cross-sector partners who could play a bigger role in Firth Park was seen to be very important by SCC and several potential partnerships were mentioned in project reporting. SCC have reported that planning the post completion place-keeping activities has helped to widen partnership (local performers, fitness groups, sure start centre) and this is helping to ensure the site is promoted and used by the local community. The Friends have worked with North Sheffield Conservation Group on practical work in this area of the park and there appears to be potential to develop this partnership further. The network mapping exercise undertaken as part of the community capacity analysis identified a number of other groups with whom stronger links could be developed that do, or could, support the place-keeping of the park. However it is unclear whose responsibility it is to develop this potential and which organisation has the capacity to do so.

The economic and political context for the project has changed dramatically since the project (and the MP4 project) was conceived. At a strategic, city-wide, level this has served to heighten the need for a partnership approach to and shared responsibility for place-keeping. Discussions are taking place within SCC and with strategic partner organisations as to how this might be further developed. The 'Friends of' partnership model has many strengths; primarily harnessing the capacity of local people towards green space improvements and these discussions include how SCC continues to work with and support such groups. There is a strong perception among the community that the responsibility for place-keeping lies with SCC, however SCC are no

longer able to deliver this to the level that local communities would aspire to. SCC wish to see a move towards a shared, collective responsibility. There is also the need to see place-keeping as more than day-to-day maintenance such as grass cutting or weeding flower beds, but that activities such as events (running and attending), promotion and ‘keeping an eye on things’ are all valued activities.

What this means for Firth Park is unclear and there as yet is no clear place-keeping strategy to take forward partnership opportunities or new management approaches in the Park.

Recommendations and Project actions – post MP4

Although there are still uncertainties around the resources for supporting place-keeping at Firth Park it is strongly recommended that a strategic place-keeping plan for the park is developed. The existing regeneration masterplan, focussed on place-making, has largely been completed and a place-keeping plan would give the opportunity to identify place-keeping priorities for the park and actions to take these forward - what, why, who, when. This would explore the role of the Friends within the park and any new partnerships developed. The development of such a plan has a resource implications but may take the place of a Green Flag Management Plan if that is no longer to be supported by the Community Assembly, and/or be developed as part of the Sheffield Standard / management plan approach being developed by SCC.

From the evaluation of the experience of the pilot project(s) that SCC has engaged in, and from lessons drawn from elsewhere in MP4, several specific recommendations and potential ways forward can be identified, grouped under the five cross-cutting themes of MP4, which could be brought together into a strategic place-keeping plan.

Partnerships

The Friends in their current form, working in partnership with SCC, are very successful at certain elements of place-keeping including running events, Parks promotion, lobbying and day-to-day informal monitoring (the eyes and ears) of the park. However they have stated that they do not want to take on additional responsibilities, or have the capacity to do so. It is not certain that if the number of active members or support from SCC decreases that they will be able to continue to undertake the place-keeping they currently do. If SCC wishes to pursue a partnership approach to place-keeping at Firth Park then the capacity of existing SCC / Friends partnerships needs to be developed and new partnerships formed. The recommendations below include those made in the in the report on partnership capacity which highlighted a number of city-wide recommendations highlighting the need for a strategic approach to how SCC might facilitate greater partnership working and build capacity.

Build partnership networks;

- Build broader networks within and beyond the parks. Several organisations have been identified as being part of a large, informal network of groups with links to the park. The potential for these to have a greater role in certain aspects of park management should be explored.

Develop skills and knowledge;

- Share resources and knowledge with other Friends and community groups. Some work has been undertake by SCC to develop this city-wide and there are other Friends groups

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locally that might benefit from closer working and shared resources. This might be facilitated as part of an area base approach to place-keeping (ref EGOSS report when completed).

- Provide greater training (skill development) for Friends, community groups and individuals, such as the Master Gardening programme undertaken in the USA.

Improve communication

- The Friends already has a web-site and face-book page and these are methods that could be further developed to build and maintain an active on-line presence to widen appeal, to link in to existing online volunteer resources to improve and promote group profile.

Increased opportunities for volunteering

Joining the Friends as the route to volunteering in the park may not appeal to all individuals. There are several options that could be considered and it is suggested that;

- The Friends play to their strengths and focus their efforts to attract new members towards their existing demographic (retired) emphasising the social benefits as well as the environmental ones.
- The Friends group widen their appeal to attract new active members through improved communication as suggested above.
- Provide alternative outlets for volunteering through an increased network partners and, or as co-ordinated by SCC (see resources section below).

Governance

The Ripples project demonstrated how community groups can be closely involved in decision making around green spaces. However it also revealed aspects that caused frustration and where clarity regarding decision-making is needed.

- A transparent and clearly communicated decision making structure for each stage of a project outlining when and why, and by whom decisions are made to identify the key decision making points is needed to ensure partners have a meaningful input into the decision making process and to manage expectations and so that it is clear when place-keeping decisions are being made to ensure that place-keeping is embedded in the place-making stage.
- Technical information (for example detailed design plans) needs to be communicated in a form that all parties can understand what is being shared with them so they are able to contribute meaningfully to decision-making.
- The widening of the place-keeping partnership will help ensure wider representation in decision-making.
- The Firth Park festival forms a focus for participation from all sectors of the community, gives an opportunity for consultation and awareness raising of and should continue to be supported despite decreasing resources.

Finance and Funding

MP4 WP4.1 Retroactive evaluation of on-the-ground benefits

The Ripples project has shown that partnership working can be a very successful approach to securing additional resources for place-keeping however it has also revealed how vulnerable partnerships can be to changes in resources that support them. A widening of the resource base and a change of emphasis from place-making (i.e. developing new projects) to place-keeping is needed. In addition to the recommendations made under partnership, which will serve to increase the resource base, the following recommendations are made;

- There is already a move by SCC away from supporting groups such as the Friends to develop new projects but resources should be directed more positively to help groups to build capacity for place-keeping, such as through the development of place-keeping plans.

Several suggestions in relation to increasing the volunteer resource were made in the Partnership Capacity report that are applicable here;

- Re-brand the council's approach to volunteering.
- The Council to be represented on the central voluntary hub for the Sheffield: 'Volunteer Centre Sheffield' in order to facilitate a citywide approach to volunteering.
- Reinitiate the Parks Users Forum and in association develop a Volunteering Forum.
- Tap into existing oversubscribed volunteer conservation groups.
- The Council to lead and coordinate volunteering citywide as they understand the gaps that exist.
- Utilize the influx of international students – offering volunteering as a community grounding or 'active citizenship' as part of the 'civic' university agenda (University of Sheffield).
- Create opportunities for the community to get involved beyond commitment through a Friends group by supporting casual and regular volunteers.
- Tap into the underused resource of frequent park visitors such as dog walkers and young parents.

Whether there is a decision is made to maintain the parks Green Flag status or not there is an opportunity to review the type and level of physical management in the park.

- The development of a place-keeping plan (described above) should be used as an opportunity to explore opportunities for reducing maintenance inputs such as replacing bedding schemes with perennials and identifying suitable (small) areas of the park that could be managed by interested groups or individuals.
- Building on previous work use maintenance as a training and community involvement opportunity, seed/bulb planting, biodiversity education and clean up events.
- Opportunities to explore additional sources of income such as increased use of the Clock Tower, using the Ripples project to help promote the space.

Policy

Initiatives in Sheffield that are exploring an area based approach to delivering Sheffield Green and Open Space Strategy and to develop new 'post austerity' priorities will have an impact on the policy context for Firth Park as will the role of the Community Assemblies in translating this into local policy and resource allocation. The Friends already have strong links with the Community Assembly and further strengthening their political influence by exploiting local

contacts with councilors and MP will help ensure that priority setting at a local level reflects the place-keeping needs of Firth Park.

Evaluation

Despite the recognition of the importance of evaluation SCC do not have the resources to undertake this and are unclear how information gathered would be used.

- (Simple) on-going evaluation, such as observations of activity, should form part of a place-keeping plan and the responsibilities for this and how the information would be used should be clearly set out.
- The potential for involving other organisations such as the Universities in undertaking regular evaluation should be explored.

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 cross-cutting 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

This report forms part of the output from MP4 Making Place Profitable – Public and Private Open Spaces, a project funded by the EU through its Interreg IVB North Sea Region programme 2007-2013.

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

Websites/ web pages relevant to the Firth Park project:

MP4: <http://www.mp4-interreg.eu/page/16/Firth+Park%2C+Sheffield%2C+UK.html>

Community Capacity Report: http://www.mp4-interreg.eu/cmsFiles/Capacity%20Report_FINAL.pdf

Sheffield City Council: <https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/out--about/parks-woodlands--countryside/parks/a-z-city-district--local--parks/firth-park>

<https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/planning-and-city-development/regeneration/housing-and-neighbourhood-regeneration/your-neighbourhood/firth-park.html>

Other online sources:

North East Assembly: <http://northeastassembly.wordpress.com/2012/06/26/sun-shines-on-firth-park-festival-last-sunday-24-june/>

Friends of Frith Park newsletter:

http://www.google.co.uk/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=firth+park+festival+2012&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&redir_esc=&ei=F20JUJ2EPcTL0QWb_bnNCg

Burngreave Messenger: <http://www.burngreavemessenger.org/archives/april-2012-news/firth-park-ripples-in-the-pond/>