



Department of Landscape, University of Sheffield

Community Capacity

A case study investigation of open space resourcing through partnership capacity



Alice Mathers, Mel Burton, Sonya Creevey, Roisin O'Riordan and Emma Whitaker
10/25/2011

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
Executive Summary	3
Introduction	4
Capacity	4
Community involvement and volunteering	5
National and local community involvement contexts	5
Case Study contexts	9
Case Study site images	10
Millhouses Park.....	10
Firth Park	11
Comparative Overview	12
Case Study findings	13
Discussion	19
Capital.....	19
Commitment.....	20
Skill Base	21
Motivation.....	22
Communication	22
Political Influence.....	23
Summary	25
Partnership Networks	26
Millhouses Park Network	27
Firth Park Network	28
Report Recommendations	31
Partnership recommendations	31
Council.....	31
Community.....	32
Appendix	33
Glossary	33
References	34
Online resources	35

Nb. Report cover image ‘The Sensory Garden’, Millhouses Park, Sheffield (Author’s own image).

Executive Summary

This report forms part of the research into practice output from the EU INTERREG IVB-funded 'MP4: Making Places Profitable, Public and Private Open spaces' project. MP4 is a transnational collaborative research and practical implementation project, undertaken by a partnership of nine Project Partners that include Universities and public bodies in the EU 'North Sea Region'. The MP4 project aims to demonstrate how the positive socio-economic impacts of open space improvements can be maintained in the long term through innovative 'place keeping' approaches.

Through a focussed investigation of community involvement in green space, this report reveals the network connections that exist to facilitate place keeping and identifies factors of 'capacity' that affect community partners' ability to contribute to the sustainment of open spaces.

Recommendations generated as a result of this report, highlight a need for greater research into the concept of community capacity and associated implications for community-public partnerships, particularly in times of economic constraint. Through evaluation of place keeping network partnerships, this report identifies clear potential for an evolution of community, wider stakeholder and Council roles in place keeping .

Finally, we hope that this report will enable both councils and communities to further engage with partnership approaches to place keeping , with greater understanding as to how these can have mutually beneficial outcomes.

Introduction

Capacity

This report introduces the concept of community capacity as a means to understand and respond to issues of sustainability in public involvement. In the wider context, capacity may be defined as ‘the power of containing, receiving, experiencing or producing’ (The Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1995) as well as a measure of ability to perform or produce. It has also been employed within landscape theory when related to environmental attributes within landscape character assessment:

‘Landscape capacity refers to the degree to which a particular landscape character type or area is able to accommodate change without significant effects on its character, or overall change of landscape character type. Capacity is likely to vary according to the type and nature of change being proposed’ (Carys Swanwick and Land Use Consultants (2002) Landscape Character Assessment Guidance. Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage).

These definitions are also applicable when analysing the degree to which community partners can sustain involvement in place keeping . Therefore community capacity in the context of this study is defined as:

Community capacity is the degree to which community organisations are able to withstand and respond to changes in support, and as a result continue to be actively involved and effective in developing and sustaining landscape quality.

Understanding factors that contribute to community capacity is a key aim of this report. This knowledge is particularly relevant in the current economic and political climate in the UK, where public service cuts are forcing local authorities to look more closely at external and community partnerships as a means to sustain service delivery.

The political climate to which this report refers is driven by the current UK governmental agenda of the Big Society. This is the latest incarnation of devolved control from governmental to non-governmental bodies, continuing to alter the emphasis on governance and thereby reducing local authority access to funds. In place of centrally funded provision there is a commitment to ‘transforming government action from top-down micromanagement and one-size-fits-all solutions to a flexible approach defined by transparency, payment by results, and support for social enterprise and cooperatives’ (Cameron, 2010). Therefore, the Big Society agenda is to be delivered by:

- *Community empowerment:* giving local councils and neighbourhoods more power to take decisions and shape their area.
- *Opening up public services:* public service reforms will enable charities, social enterprises, private companies and employee-owned co-operatives to compete to offer people high quality services.
- *Social action:* encouraging and enabling people to play a more active part in society.

This study into the capacity of community groups to deliver place keeping , provides a template for evaluating whether these three drivers of the Big Society, community empowerment, opening up public services and social action, are realistic approaches to ensure open space sustainability. Within this, we seek to unpack the idea of ‘community’ as a homogenous and transferable resource, and instead look to develop a practical understanding of the factors that contribute to greater capacity.

Through this we can identify dimensions of capacity that facilitate groups to work successfully within the Big Society, whilst recognising key limitations and areas for development of public support.

Community involvement and volunteering

Within this study, community involvement relates to the engagement of communities in green and open space decision-making and action. This involvement is a form of volunteering, which may be understood within an international context as activity which 'should not be undertaken primarily for financial reward' (UN, 2001). The United Nations concept of volunteering also states that this 'activity should be of benefit to someone other than the volunteer, or to society at large, although it is recognised that volunteering brings significant benefit to the volunteer as well' (UN, 2001). Voluntary contribution, as described above, is therefore the means by which the Big Society may be delivered, whereby community involvement delivers a 'free' service. This service may come in a variety of forms, with volunteering covering 'mutual aid or self-help; philanthropy or service to others; participation or civic engagement; and advocacy or campaigning' (UN, 2001). Where volunteering relates to involvement with open or green spaces, this may occur at multiple stages within the design and management process. Studies to date support the fact that community involvement in local green space activities has many social benefits and acts as a means to increase wider awareness of global environmental problems (Van Herzele and Denutte, 2003; Speller and Ravenscroft, 2005; Van Herzele *et al.*, 2005b; Ohmer *et al.*, 2009). When open space decision-making is inclusive of a community and conducted in a transparent manner, there appears to be an increase of feelings of site ownership by the involved community, which has been seen to lead to a reduction in vandalism and anti-social behaviour (Van Herzele and Denutte, 2003; Ohmer *et al.*, 2009). In addition community involvement can help facilitate funding which is a light relief from public funding cuts (Jones, 2002; Moskell, 2010). As a result of the above mentioned a noticeable improvement to the physical local environment can be seen (Jones, 2002; Van Herzele and Denutte, 2003).

In the UK a number of national open space programmes have sought to encourage community involvement through place making and more infrequently place keeping . The first of these initiatives was the Pocket Parks scheme. Formed in 1980 by Northamptonshire County Council the scheme created over 80 spaces, which were owned and managed by local people. Unfortunately limited funding, staff and support for community training and a reliance on few dedicated individuals were not sufficient to support the high demand for and of the spaces. Following this the Countryside Agency took the initiative of Community involvement to a new level with the development of Millennium Greens and Doorstep Greens. In 1966-2000, Millennium Greens programme took the approach that communities would undertake full responsibility for the purchase or lease and then management of sites. This was overambitious and complex and with too few volunteers. Place making of 250 new public open spaces were achieved but the place keeping of these proved un-sustainable. The Doorstep Greens programme was launched 2001, focused on developing the restorative benefits of contact with green spaces. Two hundred communities received grants to 'create and manage their own special local space' (Countryside Agency, 2006). More recently a new open grants programme funded through the Big Lottery Fund's Changing Spaces initiative introduced Community Spaces (2009 - 2011). This scheme, managed by Groundwork UK, had once again a similar aim of empowering community groups to improve public spaces in their neighbourhood. The impact of this is yet to be fully felt, but once again achieving meaningful community involvement is placed at the centre of the schemes success.

National and local community involvement contexts

In the UK, many charities and organisations support volunteering activities on a nationwide basis. These include national charities, further and higher education, arts and sports organisations, NHS Trusts, Volunteer Centres and local community projects. Within England, the government funded charity 'Volunteering England' acts as the overseeing body promoting volunteering and community involvement nationwide. Volunteering England define volunteering as 'any activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or someone (individuals or groups) other than, or in addition to, close relatives.' A significant development within promotion of voluntary opportunities is the use of online databases. These aim to more efficiently connect

individuals with voluntary opportunities throughout the country and for organisations or charities to advertise when they are in need of a specific skill set.

Volunteering England is broken down into regional sub groups, with the overseeing body in Sheffield located at the Volunteer Centre Sheffield. This centre provides a network of volunteering opportunities across the city and aims to facilitate opportunities for people of all ages, abilities and ethnic backgrounds to become involved. The University of Sheffield volunteering service, Sheffield Volunteering, provides another source of opportunities focused on assisting students to become involved in their city, as part of their civic university commitment and to encourage 'active citizenship'. Sheffield City Council also provides opportunities for volunteering, including voluntary participation within the Parks and Countryside Department (such as the setting up or membership of 'Friends of groups) or becoming a children's reading volunteer.

Within Sheffield City Council, the Parks and Countryside Department define volunteers as 'individuals who put their experience, knowledge and skills at the disposal of an organisation free of charge, with the primary aim of contributing to achieving service objectives and providing a benefit to local community' (Sheffield City Council, 2009). SCC Information for Volunteers (2009) guidance continues by categorising volunteering as being one of the following as:

- Casual Volunteers: volunteering on a one off or irregular basis
- Regular volunteers: volunteer on a regular or repeated basis
- Community Groups: such as 'Friends of' groups, residential associations, people working together with a common goal
- Charities: with a specific cause / concern
- Corporate Volunteers: working towards team building, community involvement

Through this guidance, the community is encouraged to take a greater interest and active role in the improvement, management, use, access and conservation of public green spaces and facilities. Community involvement in relation to a public park may consist of a variety of tasks and volunteering with many different teams or departments. The SCC Information for Volunteers (2009) document therefore identifies the following opportunities for open space involvement:

- Volunteering with a ranger team
- The Community Foresters: tree planting
- The Ecology Unit: cataloguing habitats and species
- Graves Park Animal Farm: opportunities for working with animals
- Events team: event management opportunities

Within this framework of volunteering in Sheffield, this report focuses upon the specific capacity of community groups, such as 'Friends of' groups and residential associations (as identified by Sheffield City Council) to take a more leading role in the place keeping of green and open spaces.

Research methodology

This study evolved from a prior 2011 research collaboration with the University of Copenhagen regarding the role of Friends groups in place making and place keeping¹. Friends are community groups whose voluntary commitment to the place making and or place keeping of open space is officially recognised by the local authority. Once a Friends group is constituted, the local authority enters into a formal community-public partnership with the group to support their activities and development.

The methodology for this study is described in **Phase 1**. Recommendations arising from 'Evolving Involvement', suggested a need for greater understanding regarding dimensions of capacity that facilitated community participation in green and open space place keeping. In order to facilitate this, two case studies were chosen from within the previous 'Evolving involvement' study, where it was known that the local community had an active role in open space participation. In this study the focus on involvement capacity was extended to include partners (public, private and community) identified through the previous work. The case study sites chosen were Firth Park and Millhouses Park, both located in Sheffield, UK.

Phase 1

Introductory interviews were undertaken with members of the Friends at each case study site. These interviews identified a network of partners involved in the open space who were currently known to the Friends (identified as the central community partner). The Friends were chosen as the reference point for Phase 2, on the acknowledgement that they represented the constituted² community interest in the site and therefore were (potentially) best positioned to have access to wider involvement networks. This information provided a basis on which an initial partnership network was drawn up for each site, identifying (from the Friends perspectives) significant partner connections. The Friends Groups were then asked to provide contact details for the identified partners.

Phase 2

All partners identified by the Friends were contacted by email and an interview was requested. All participating individuals were then sent a copy of the interview format and network diagram prior to the date of interview. An in-depth semi-structured interview³ was then carried out with each partner (including the Friends) regarding their capacity for involvement in place keeping.

The semi-structured interview format was developed around a framework of 6 key capacity themes. Questioning was open ended, allowing the interviewee to expand their responses to include relevant, related topics not prescribed in the original interview format. This more informal style of qualitative interviewing facilitated a rapport between interviewer and interviewee, with the flexibility to respond with additional questions should new topics arise. The aim of the interviews was to gain an understanding of the network partners' capacity to be involved in place keeping, and their perception of how this capacity was sustained now and might be in the future. Interviewees were also asked to reflect on the network diagram that had been established in Phase 1, to identify the most significant partner connections for them and highlight missing partners. The interviews were conducted within the park grounds themselves, often in the park cafe, or within the place of work of the partners. The interviews that were conducted within the parks gave the interviewees the opportunity to practically demonstrate their role while discussing their involvement. The interviews were then transcribed, and the data collected used to determine the roles each partner plays, and their capacity for place keeping.

¹ Mathers, A., Molin, J. F. and Burton, M. (2011) *Evolving involvement: exploring the devolution effect on patterns of UK community involvement in urban green space*. Tallinn, Estonia: EFLA.

² By the local authority.

³ See Appendix for interview format.

Table 1 shows all partners identified and approached from Phase 1 and those from whom positive interview responses were received.

Table 1: Open space partners as identified by the Friends groups⁴

Millhouses Park	Interviewed	Firth Park	Interviewed
Parks Manager	Yes	Green Space Project Officer	Yes
Area Officer	Yes	Community Assembly	Yes
Green Space Project Officer	Yes	Area Officer	Yes
Park Keeper	No	Friends Group	Yes
Property and Facilities	Yes	Park Café (Sure Start Building)	No
Community Assembly	Yes	Bowling Club	No
Friends Group	Yes		
Millhouses Bowling club	Yes		
Local Councillor	Yes		
Carterknowle & Millhouses Community Group	Yes		
Millhouses Park Café	Yes		
Police Community Support Officer	No		
Millhouses Works Cricket Club	No		

The initial ‘Evolving Involvement’ partnership study with the University of Copenhagen identified areas relating the community capacity that warranted further investigation. These were distilled into six capacity themes (see Table 2), which were discussed within the semi-structured interviews.

Table 2: Capacity themes discussed in interviews

	Capacity theme	Theme description
1	Capital	The financial contribution made by the partner to the development and management of the site.
2	Commitment	The type of commitment (voluntary, paid etc.) made by the partner, including amount of time spent and number of people involved, to contribute to the development and management of the site.
3	Skill base	The skill base of the partner in terms of relevant training, professional background, familiarity with the site etc., that contributes to the development and management of the site.
4	Motivation	The motivational drive of the partner’s involvement in the site in terms of social, environmental or political interest etc.
5	Communication	The communication capability of the partner (both internally and externally) in facilitating the development and management of the site.
6	Political influence	The degree and level of influence each partner has in facilitating the development and management of the site.

⁴ Please note that the interviews were conducted over a time frame of a month and not all those who were contacted for interview were available at the time for interview.

Case Study contexts

Table 3 below outlines background information to the two study sites.

Table 3: Case study site contexts

	Millhouses Park	Firth Park
History	A proportion of the park was gifted to the city in 1909 with the remainder purchased by Sheffield City Council. In the 1980s the lido was closed, with the paddling pools were closed in the 1990s due to fears of water pollution from the River Sheaf. Since 2010 new features have been added to the park including the Splash water play, Millhouses Cafe, the fish pass and zip wire.	The park was gifted to the city by Mark Firth in 1875, and since then has been held in trust by the City Council. In the 1980's, the park was run down and little used by local people. The Friends were established in 1999 to rejuvenate the site and with it brought great change. Recent additions to the park include: the Sure Start Centre and nursery, the round walk and renovation of the boating lake.
Size	12.87 hectares	15.2 hectares
Designations	City Park Green Flag Award winner 2011	City Park Green Flag Award winning site in 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 Registered as an Ancient Woodland (Hinde Common Wood) Grade II Listed Clock tower
Character	Millhouses Park is a long thin site running between a major arterial road (Abbeydale Road) and a main railway line. It is made up of a series of open sports fields, a boating lake and various play areas.	The park consists of ancient woodland (Hinde Common Wood) plus a substantial area of parkland, often sloping. Known landmarks include the community centre, the Clock Tower and old Library.
Features (as listed on the Sheffield City Council website)	Splash! Water Play Boating Lake Café Children's Playground Skate Park Outdoor Events Outdoor Sports: Bowling Greens, Cricket, Tennis Floral Features Riverside Walk Woodlands Car Parking Public Toilets	First Start Building Clock Tower Café Children's Playground Firth Park Bowling Club Floral Displays Outdoor Sports - Football, Basket Ball and Multi Games area Public Toilets Outdoor events Landscape quality Parks and Countryside Ranger Service Ancient Woodland Children's Centre Health Walks Car Parking
Ward	Millhouses Park is in the ward of Ecclesall, and is located approximately 3 miles southwest of Sheffield city centre along Abbeydale Road South, S8.	Firth Park is in the ward of Firth Park, and is situated 5 km northeast of Sheffield city centre on Firth Park Road.
Socio-economic makeup	The ward of Eccleshall is one of the wealthiest areas of the city with a ward deprivation rank within local authority of 1 out of 28 wards (2007). The population of the Eccleshall was 19,211 people (2007) in 7,626 households (2008). The percentage of ward residents born abroad is currently 9% (city average 14%). Relating to this, the ethnic makeup of the Eccleshall ward (and Sheffield average, 2001 Census) is as follows: White: 93.3% (91.2%) Mixed: 1.2% (1.6%) Asian/Asian British: 4.1% (4.6%) Black/Black British: 0.3% (1.8%) Chinese/other: 1.1% (0.8%)	Firth Park ward is within the 10% most deprived wards in England (1890 in 2007), with a ward deprivation rank within the local authority of 27 out of 28 wards (2007). In 2007 the population of Firth Park was 20,224 people in 10,698 households (2008). The percentage of ward residents born abroad is currently 13% (city average 14%). The adjacent Burngreave ward is also amongst the most 10% most deprived in the country (698 in 2007). The ethnic makeup of the Firth Park ward (and Sheffield average, 2001 Census) is as follows: White: 67.1% (91.2%) Mixed: 5.8% (1.6%) Asian/Asian British: 18.4% (4.6%) Black/Black British: 7.1% (1.8%) Chinese/other: 1.6% (0.8%)

Case Study site images

Millhouses Park



Image 1: Design concept for the Splash! Water Play



Image 2: The Fish Pass

Firth Park



Image 3: Community artwork in the park.



Image 4: New gates to prevent anti-social behaviour.

Comparative Overview

Both sites have Green Flag and City Park status, are of a similar size and are regarded as important parks for the city. There has been a dramatic improvement in quality of both the parks over the past 10 years coinciding with the existence and activities of the Friends groups. These improvements have included the addition of play features within the parks, improved maintenance contributing to an increase in public use and improved perception of the parks. Firth Park has significant historical importance, including two listed buildings from 1900. Millhouses Park does not have any listed buildings, however one of the current projects of the Friends of Millhouses Park focuses upon the renovation the onsite Mill Buildings.

What differentiates these parks is their location in the city. There is a significant contrast between the socio-economic background of each of the wards, with Millhouses Park located in the ward of Ecclesall, and Firth Park in the ward of Firth Park. The ward of Eccleshall is one of the most affluent in the city, and is lowest in the ward deprivation ranking for the city (ranked number 1 out of 28 wards). Firth Park ward ranks 27 out of 28 wards (Local Area Statistics, 2007). The ethnic background of the population is also more diverse in Firth Park, with 13% of the population being born abroad, whilst only 9% were born abroad in Eccleshall.

Case Study findings

Please see below the responses received from those interviewed in relation to the capacity themes. Please note with regards to 'Capital' not all figures were made available and the figures indicated are approximate considering time constraints and the difficulty in accurately assessing this information.

Capacity theme 1: Capital

Millhouses Park	Firth Park
<p>City Council: Parks & Countryside City Park Status = contingency budget: £4,000 Flood damage repair cost: £20-30,000</p> <p>Area Officer Budget for park maintenance (inc. staff wages): £28,790 Premises: £9,700 Supplies and services: £4,000 Income (from sports fees; cricket, tennis, bowling green): £10,500 Total cost (2010): £31,990</p> <p>Property and Facilities Park 'Property Maintenance' budget: £2-3,000</p> <p>Community Assembly Budget for all services (priority based) in SW Assembly: £170,000</p> <p>Green Space Project Officer Funded by Community Assembly</p> <p>Community: Friends Group Funded bids raised: £142,600.91 Events (duck race) raised: £300</p> <p>Bowling Club Green maintenance cost provided by council: £8000 Income (from greens and tennis courts): £10,000</p> <p>Carterknowle and Millhouses Community Group Council funding: £300-400 Income from membership fees: £1000 annually (approx)</p> <p>Private: Millhouses Park Café Facilitate events and host and cater on their premises. Value in kind approximately £3-4,000 in time and food each year. Would advise Friends Group about funding if requested.</p>	<p>City Council: Area Officer Staff wages: £106,450 Premises: £13,600 Supplies and Services: £4,000 Income (from meeting room / pavilion hire, sports fees): £13,000 Total cost (2010): £111,050</p> <p>Community Assembly Budget for all services (priority based) in NE Assembly: £400,000 Give grants for festivals: £5-6,000 winter festival and £2,000 summer festival</p> <p>Green Space Project Officer Funded by Community Assembly</p> <p>Community: Friends Group Funding received for boating lake project from: MP4; The Big Lottery Fund (Changing Spaces); Graves Trust; Sheffield Homes, Section 106 Agreements. Income from membership fees (£2 each): £60 annually Occasional donations (Mark Firth's land income): £400 Smaller one-offs / yearly donations: £10</p>

Capacity theme 2: Commitment

Millhouses Park	Firth Park
<p>City Council: Parks & Countryside 5 people committed to Millhouses (also have commitment elsewhere in the city) Area Officer Park maintenance staff: 3 fulltime, 1 part time. Property and Facilities 5 people to cover all of Sheffield, but they do support Friends Group with Mill Buildings project (2 people). Community Assembly Allowance determines commitment Local Councillor Up to the Councillor how much time they put it, varies across the year. Green Space Project Officer 2 officers in the Southwest Area due to Community Assembly funding a second post.</p> <p>Community: Friends Group 15-30 regular and active volunteers. Approximately 300 members in total but not all active. People often participate in particular projects. Bowling Club Rely on 50 regular volunteers to man the hut. Each volunteer covers a minimum of 18 hours per year Carterknowle and Millhouses Community Group 20-30 active members, approximately 10 very dedicated.</p> <p>Private: Millhouses Park Café Cater/host events in relation to the park (free of charge), support local charities, schools and community</p>	<p>City Council: Area Officer Park maintenance comprising 7 staff including the Area Officer (or site manager), supervisor, 2 gardeners, and 3 caretakers (caretakers wages paid 50% by park budget). Few people volunteer with the maintenance or gardening staff Community Assembly 5 staff: 3 full time and 2 part time Green Space Project Officer 1 paid officer who covers all of Northeast Assembly.</p> <p>Community: Friends Group 20-30 members, only 4 active</p>

Capacity theme 3: Skill base

Millhouses Park	Firth Park
<p>City Council: Parks & Countryside Gardeners work on the ground, whilst managers work on a citywide basis. Services can be brought in from other departments in Council if required. P & C have to evolve and grow with demands of the public</p> <p>Area Officer Relevant training and qualifications: e.g. supervisor has NVQ level 2 in horticultural training. Staff know the area and local community well.</p> <p>Property and Facilities Staff are surveyors and managers. Recent budget cuts – loss of staff and specialist skills, e.g. water surveyor. Specialist skills must now be out sourced.</p> <p>Local Councillor Familiar with site, got involved as wanted to see park improve.</p> <p>Green Space Project Officer Postgraduate Diploma in Landscape Architecture, good knowledge of the park.</p> <p>Community: Friends Group Members are professionals with relevant training and skills. Well connected, and are able to access those with additional skills if required. Many are capable of applying for grants and funding.</p> <p>Bowling Club Members mostly retired and living locally (few do manual work on bowling greens)</p> <p>Carterknowle and Millhouses Community Group Middle class area, most people have professional backgrounds. Those with science and geography backgrounds are useful in challenging planning applications.</p> <p>Private: Millhouses Park Café Public relations are key (besides catering). The café is the main centre in the park, and therefore is seen as a ‘go to’ or official authority in the park.</p>	<p>City Council: Area Officer Team members have relevant training and have worked in parks for many years. Most staff are long standing, very familiar with site and have a good understanding of the park and community.</p> <p>Community Assembly Various backgrounds, including Early Years education and administration. All staff familiar with the park local community. Long-term link to the Friends group.</p> <p>Green Space Project Officer Educated in Environmental Science and Politics, with experience from the Groundwork Trust.</p> <p>Community: Friends Group Members have professional backgrounds but most are now retired. Members very familiar with the park</p>

Capacity theme 4: Motivation

Millhouses Park	Firth Park
<p>City Council: Parks & Countryside Paid roles - professional pride and desire to achieve high standard i.e. Green Flag award. Social welfare; importance of access to green space, sport, and nature, all aiding a healthier lifestyle.</p> <p>Area Officer Paid staff are also interest driven. Socially - making a good place for people, creating more ownership. Economically - destination park, maintenance team have to work as cheaply as possible.</p> <p>Property and Facilities Paid role, economic focus on maintaining a high standard to ensure Millhouses remains a destination park.</p> <p>Community Assembly Economic importance for image of the city - attracting future investors and students. Parks are environmental investment for the city. Political importance – park’s success reflects well on the city and its people.</p> <p>Local Councillor Social responsibility and professional ambition.</p> <p>Green Space Project Officer Paid role, also professional interest in landscape, community and environment.</p> <p>Community: Friends Group Volunteers - socially and environmentally motivated. People are motivated by community involvement.</p> <p>Bowling Club Volunteers - social driven, also competitive drive with other park Bowling Clubs.</p> <p>Carterknowle and Millhouses Community Group Volunteers - socially and environmentally driven. Have seen the park improve and want to maintain the high standard.</p> <p>Private: Millhouses Park Cafe: Paid role, also socially driven - provides a meeting place for the community in the park.</p>	<p>City Council: Area Officer Paid staff, also socially and environmentally driven.</p> <p>Community Assembly Socially - want to use investment in public realm to demonstrate to people that they have value, reducing anti-social behaviour.</p> <p>Green Space Project Officer Paid role, also socially driven. Some political motivation from ‘higher up’ causes certain parks to be pushed forward for development.</p> <p>Community: Friends group Social - want to make the park a place for everybody. Strengthening the local community, especially with the Sure Start Centre providing key services.</p>

Capacity theme 5: Communication

Millhouses Park	Firth Park
<p>City Council: <i>Parks & Countryside</i> Internal: email and meetings External: Council media team deals with external communication, plus 'Park Users Forum' and quarterly newsletter.</p> <p><i>Area Officer</i> Internal: Face to face communication at P&C head office, monthly team meetings. Internal newsletter. External: Uses P&C and Friends' websites, 'Parklife' bimonthly publication.</p> <p><i>Property and Facilities</i> Internal: Regular meetings with Manager of P&C service. External: Monthly talks with Friends Group for Mill Buildings project, links with Bowling Club, meetings with 'Pudding Ladies' regarding potential cafe in Mill Buildings.</p> <p><i>Community Assembly</i> Internal: briefing meetings, communication to other Council departments. External: hold 4 public meetings a year, newsletter, webpage and a blog.</p> <p><i>Lord Mayor</i> External: host of annual Friends Civic Reception i.e. discussion of strategies, experiences and best practise.</p> <p><i>Local Councillor</i> External: public road shows.</p> <p><i>Green Space Project Officer</i> Internal: Shares office with Green Space Project Officers, open office environment. External: email and telephone to Friends. Regular meetings, site visits, and contact with Friends.</p> <p>Community: <i>Friends Group</i> Internal: Regular meetings and an AGM. External: Website, blog and newsletter. Extensive network of contacts to other community groups and press (local radio and newspapers).</p> <p><i>Bowling Club</i> Internal: AGMs. External: Notice boards.</p> <p><i>Carterknowle and Millhouses Community Group</i> Internal: predominantly email communication, 2-3 times week, newsletter 4 times a year, quarterly meetings. External: Hand out leaflets</p> <p>Private: <i>Millhouses Park Café</i> External: face to face communication within the park.</p>	<p>City Council: <i>Area Officer</i> Internal: Emails and face-to-face meetings with supervisor. Regularly visits P&C head office. External: Good communication with Friends Group and Community Assembly. Goes to Friends' monthly meetings.</p> <p><i>Community Assembly</i> Internal: Daily communication with various depts. in Council. Regular meetings for Assembly workers, weekly managers meetings. External: webpage and blog, public consultation via Councillors. Face to face communication with Friends in the park.</p> <p><i>Green Space Project Officer</i> Internal: Shares office with Green Space Project Officers, open office environment. External: Communicates by email with project parties, attends friends meetings, Community Assembly meetings, Resident Association meetings, Activity Sheffield meetings etc.</p> <p>Community: <i>Friends Group</i> Internal: minutes sent to members and Council officials each month. Emails sent to members on mailing list, though not all members have email. External: Notice boards in park, Community Assembly put newsletter on their web page. Friends' website (not up to date), new Facebook page is used as a forum not to advertise events.</p>

Capacity theme 6: Political influence

Millhouses Park	Firth Park
<p>City Council: <i>Parks & Countryside</i> City Wide influence. Department held in high regard nationally, their code of practice is used as a good example in other departments.</p> <p>Area Officer Localised influence. Dependant on finance, small scale decisions about park maintenance and concessions.</p> <p>Property and Facilities Localised influence. Ideas stage for each park very localised, Community Assembly have influence on where P&C should put most work into.</p> <p>Community Assembly Localised/area wide influence. Dependant on who is in power and what party you are, can make recommendations to the cabinet and query cabinet decisions on budget making.</p> <p>Local Councillor Area wide influence. More influence as a Councillor than on Community Assembly. Councillors can make the case for funding for P&C but can't directly influence how much there is. Can influence how money in P&C is spent.</p> <p>Green Space Project Officer Localised influence. Make small-scale decisions. Large-scale projects and vision for the park are decided higher up. Influence often from Friends rather than Officer (e.g. Mill Buildings).</p> <p>Community: Friends Group Area wide influence. Influence is strong, potentially more than Council staff. Will go to Community Assembly with ideas, have good relationship with Local Councillors.</p> <p>Bowling Club Localised influence. Any influence beyond their own organization is channelled through Friends.</p> <p>Carterknowle and Millhouses Community Group Localised influence. Have had influence on Council regarding planning application appeals.</p> <p>Private: Millhouses Park Café Localised influence. Any influence beyond their own organization is channelled through Friends.</p>	<p>City Council: Area Officer Localised influence. Informs Community Assembly of park issues, which may or may not be taken up. Assembly priorities come first, e.g. 'uplift sites'.</p> <p>Community Assembly Area wide influence. Can relocate funds based on priority. Have made decisions against community groups' wishes in the past, e.g. keeping vision for the wider area Section 106.</p> <p>Green Space Project Officer Localised influence. Can't avoid political influence from above with certain parks being pushed forward for development.</p> <p>Community: Friends Group Localised influence. Good relationship with Community Assembly. Good relationship with Local Councillors, have access to high levels within Council.</p>

Discussion

Partner capacity results for each case study site, generated by the semi-structured interviews, are now discussed in more detail through a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis of the six individual capacity themes.

Capital

Strengths:

Millhouses Park: is supported by a very active Friends group, who have the ability to source large funding grants. This has greatly contributed to the creation and establishment of a number of new projects in the park. As a 'City Park', Millhouses Park benefits from an additional £4,000 contingency fund from the Parks and Countryside Department. Parks have been identified as a priority by the Southwest Community Assembly, and therefore receive additional Community Assembly financial support. Millhouses Park is currently a high priority for both the local community and the local council, with all parties are eager to maintain the high standard that has been achieved.

Firth Park: has been very successful to date with successful funding applications facilitated by the Friends involvement, and ensuring the development of new projects in the park. Like Millhouses Park, Firth Park has 'City Park' designation and therefore receives an additional £4,000 contingency fund, and preferential treatment over other parks in the Northeast Area. To date, the park has achieved a very high standard of consistent quality (reflected in the retention of Green Flag status) with the support of the Council and local community.

Weaknesses:

Millhouses Park: The Friends has sourced funding for many new site features but much of this capital funding does not cover additional maintenance costs. This puts huge pressure on an already overstretched Council budget, which is set to decline further. The Council is however heavily reliant on the Friends ability to source funding for projects that otherwise would be unavailable.

Firth Park: The Friends generate their main source of income from funded bids, receiving little financial support beyond that. The park is no longer a priority for the Northeast Community Assembly, with the last significant investment in 2004. The Community Assembly supports the park festivals, however these are not driven by capital return.

Opportunities:

Millhouses Park: The Friends ability to bring in funding could be applied to bringing in additional resourcing for place keeping as well as place-making. With enthusiastic support from the community and the Council there is the capacity and willingness to take on additional responsibilities that may be needed in the future.

Firth Park: Due to the park's location and significance for the local community, there is great potential for additional community groups and private investors from the surrounding area to become more involved (once identified and approached).

Threats:

Millhouses Park: The additional pressure placed on shrinking Council budgets to support new projects could have an overall negative effect on the general upkeep of the park. Projects may be initiated but without the supporting maintenance they could quickly fall into disrepair. Additional future funding cuts may also lead to the loss of the additional Green Space Project Officer in the Southwest Area, which would impact the progress and implementation of future projects.

Firth Park: The Friends ability and willingness to apply for further funding bids will be limited by the lack of younger members, and dwindling membership number. These factors suggest the future of the

Friends is perhaps not very secure. With the Northeast Assembly seeking to address a range of issues in the area, the impact of unforeseen and unprepared for circumstances such as theft and vandalism, resources may be stretched, once again negatively impacting the park and local community.

Commitment

Strengths:

Millhouses Park: The Friends currently have 15-30 active members and a wider collective of around 300 people. Past projects have been well supported with members actively seeking involvement. There are currently two Green Space Project Officers employed to work in the Southwest, providing greater support for projects in this area than that of other Community Assemblies. Additional support has also been received from the Council Properties and Facilities Department in terms of future development of the onsite Mill Buildings. The café is the central focus of the park and benefits from owners who are very committed to the park's community. There are also a number of active community groups, such as Carterknowle and Millhouses Community Group, who are very committed to the park and surrounding area.

Firth Park: Those that are committed within the Friends are very active and have been influential in the park's regeneration, however this number of individuals is small (approximately 4). The Council maintenance staff are very familiar with the site having been involved in the park for a number of years. The Community Assembly staff, who have also worked in the area for many years, and have developed and sustained good relations with the local community.

Weaknesses:

Millhouses Park: There are few volunteers involved in Millhouses Park beyond the Friends and the Bowling Club. Members of the Friends have a tendency to become involved with projects in which they have a personal interest and the time they commit can be limited. The Bowling Club relies on its volunteers to man the hut, which brings in the income that subsequently supports the running of the club.

Firth Park: Friends membership number is low, between 20-30, and most members are inactive, mainly attending monthly meetings in a social capacity. Most members are elderly and retired, and in collaboration with the difficult terrain of the site there is little opportunity for manual involvement. Beyond the Friends and the Firth Park Bowling Club there are no other volunteer groups currently involved in the park.

Opportunities:

Millhouses Park: The Friends has the membership capacity and the potential to encourage and sustain greater community involvement in place keeping . There is also the opportunity to work with surrounding schools and Universities in the future. With two Green Space Project Officers, these partnerships have the potential for greater onsite impact and the undertaking of further projects. The development of the Mill Buildings could bring in additional private investment and increase the appeal of the park. There is also the opportunity to extend connections with additional community groups and potentially pool resources and work together.

Firth Park: If the membership number of the Friends was increased, their impact and drive could be refocused and they could become more actively involved in the park. An increase in community involvement could lead to a renewed commitment (in terms of priorities and funding) from the Community Assembly and wider council.

Threats:

Millhouses Park: Ensuring an active commitment from individual Friends members appears to be determined by the members own personal interest in particular projects. Therefore if funding for such projects is reduced (and there is a concentration on maintaining a park 'status quo') will member numbers and support also be reduced? As the main input of volunteers is facilitated through the Friends this is an important consideration for the council, where the input of volunteers is increasingly

important for the survival of parks. Funding cuts, current and future, will impact all Council bodies and their commitment capacity in relation to individual parks.

Firth Park: Active Friends numbers are worryingly low, therefore if these members move on (and not replaced) the Friends group may cease to function. In line with this, additional pressures on Council funding and resources may mean less face-to-face contact time with the Friends, risking the possibility that some Friends groups become forgotten and unsupported. The nature of the site also makes it a difficult site for volunteers to work on without the aid of specialist equipment and training. This raises the invaluable nature of the Council maintenance staff, with any loss of staff (with intimate site understanding) having an extreme impact upon the park quality. The Community Assembly is currently experiencing a cut in long-term staff and with this the danger of a loss of knowledge and breakdown of long standing relationships.

Skill Base

Strengths:

Millhouses Park: Friends members have a high level of training and skills available to them and the ability to seek out those skills that they may require in the future. Many professional backgrounds exist within the group with many members are actively involved in the completion of funding applications. The park has the support of qualified maintenance staff and two active Green Space officers. The Parks and Countryside department to date has had the capacity to grow, develop and respond to the demands of the public.

Firth Park: Friends members also hold professional backgrounds alongside familiarity and pride in the park. The park is currently supported by long standing committed members of the Community Assembly and maintenance team. Green Space Officers have provided excellent support to date, regarding new projects and facilitation of the Friends group to develop successful funding bids.

Weaknesses:

Millhouses Park: The Council are losing staff and with that are skills and knowledge. External organisations are now often needed when sourcing these skills. This puts additional pressure on staff time and resources.

Firth Park: Friends members are mostly retired, few in number with a limited capacity to contribute to certain areas of park development. There is a heavy reliance on the support of the Council to provide individuals with relevant skills in terms of park maintenance, funding assistance and project management.

Opportunities

Millhouses Park: The Friends have the ability to adapt their skills as required. Their skill base is flexible and large in number. There is the opportunity to work in an additional capacity in terms of professional application when it comes to assisting the Council with the placemaking and place keeping of Millhouses Park.

Firth Park: There is plenty of room for the Friends group to grow and increase their capacity in terms of their current skill base. This could potentially aid a more independent relationship from the Council or greater partnership depending on interests of the Council and the Friends.

Threats:

Millhouses Park: The park is heavily reliant on the skills of both the Friends and the council. With the loss of skills comes the inevitable decline of the park. The Council and the Friends are currently heavily reliant on each other and do not currently display the ability to be independent of one another.

Firth Park: The current skill base is limited in terms of the Friends and they are highly reliant on the support of the council. There is currently no means of an independent relationship here.

Motivation

Strengths:

Millhouses Park: All parties involved are socially and environmentally driven. They all appreciate how much the park has improved to date and the value it brings to the community. The park is seen as an economic resource that reflects well on the city, and encourages new business and people to the area. Professional pride and achievement is reflected in the Green Flag award. All who are currently involved with the site have great pride in the park and are eager to maintain its success.

Firth Park: All parties involved are socially and environmentally driven. The park has been greatly improved over the years. Its City Park status combined with continued success regarding retention of a Green Flag award has ensured that there is a great sense of professional and community pride in how far the park has come.

Weaknesses:

Millhouses Park: The Friends are not motivated by maintenance responsibilities. There is a heavy reliance and expectation on the Council to provide all maintenance of newly implemented projects. Within the active Friends membership, capability to undertake maintenance activities is relatively low with many older members, some retired.

Firth Park: Members are mostly retired and are motivated in a social capacity. None are currently interested or capable in becoming actively involved in onsite maintenance.

Opportunities:

Millhouses Park: As the park has achieved City Park status and holds a Green Flag award continued Council and community support is can be relatively assured.

Firth Park: As a City Park with a Green Flag award the park should remain a focus of the Council and community. All involved have seen how the park's renovation has contributed to the area and this could motivate further people to get involved if the need arises.

Threats:

Millhouses Park: Without the motivation (lack of funds) to inject new projects into the park, the wider popularity of the site at danger of potential decline. Key onsite features such as the Mill Building are therefore at risk of falling into a state of further disrepair.

Firth Park: Firth Park is essential to the surrounding area as it provides a vital community space, and since its improvement wider area benefits such as reduced anti-social behaviour. Without the motivation to maintain the park the area could decline and affect the surrounding facilities of the Sure Start centre, nursery and beyond.

Communication

Strengths:

Millhouses Park: The Friends have an extensive network of contacts including the wider community, Council and media. They have a successful website and blog that is updated regularly and hold regular meetings as well as AGM's. All groups involved in the park (including the council, community and private business) are well informed of each other and park activity.

Firth Park: The Friends communicate at a local level through park notice boards and their newsletter, which appears on the Community Assembly webpage. One Friends member has also developed a new Facebook page with the potential to extend its communication capacity. There is currently good communication between Council and the Friends.

Weaknesses:

Millhouses Park: Council-community communication is mainly facilitated through the Friends and Carterknowle and Millhouses Community Group. These groups are not representative of the community as a whole. Also all groups involved have reliance on the community being versed in technology to access the majority of their communication i.e. web pages.

Firth Park: The Friends do not update their website and this is a great loss in terms of transferral of information on both a formal and informal basis. There is reliance upon the community to read the park notice boards to gain information. Therefore if you don't, and are not on the Friends mailing list, there is no way of understanding the current work or aspirations of the group.

Opportunities:

Millhouses Park: Community events are a great way to get the community together and are a platform/ opportunity to raise issues and get the community actively involved.

Firth Park: The park already holds festivals and greater advantage could be made of these events.

Threats:

Millhouses Park: A relatively closed community communication network exists in terms of those actively informed of action relating to the park on a Council and community level. If you are not involved as a group or Council member you are excluded to a certain degree. The Green space officer holds the key to communication between the Council and community groups, therefore their loss could be detrimental.

Firth Park: The Friends do not use their website actively if at all. They have a new Facebook page but this isn't used to advertise events. They rely on their notice boards and the Community Assembly to communication information to the wider community. Without a strong and identifiable voice in the community the Friend's impact is severely limited and future support uncertain.

Political Influence

Strengths:

Millhouses Park: Have considerable influence beyond the limits of their own organisation, e.g. they actively approach the Community Assembly with ideas and have a good relationship with local councillors. In addition they currently receive further Council support in relation to the Mill buildings project and have (through the Community Assembly) secured an additional Green space officer for the Southwest area.

Firth Park: Good relations exist with the Community Assembly and local councillors, therefore the friends group do hold some influence at a localised level.

Weaknesses:

Millhouses Park: The Green space officer can make small decisions but the large scale projects and visions for the park are decided at a higher level within the Council and are often politically driven. These decisions are therefore removed from those with intimate knowledge of the site and the wishes and needs of the community.

Firth Park: The Friends appear to rely on the personal sphere of influence of particular members when it comes to political support. Without these key and driven members it seems their influence would be greatly decreased. Community Assembly priorities are established on an 'uplift site' basis so frequently requests made in relation to the park will go unheard.

Opportunities:

Millhouses Park: The Friends could further consolidate relationships they have built in the past and use them in the future. The Lord Mayor resides in the Southwest area, in her the Friends have a powerful and prominent political figure who has an interest in the park and the ability to promote it's profile through her public role, for example ribbon cutting at openings. Also there are many

prominent groups in the area and there is room to build on these partnerships and potentially work together for mutual benefit through a pooling of resources.

Firth Park: At Firth Park there is room for improvement regarding exploitation of political influence. For the Friends, momentum into the future should focus on the development of partnerships where through greater political profile and new political linkages the case for sustaining the development and quality of the park can be made.

Threats:

Millhouses Park: The overall vision for the park is in danger of becoming comprised due to the pull differing community and Council visions. The activities of the Friends appear to be driven by an ever evolving master plan whilst the council's focus is embedded in the original master plan, a scheme that is now outdated and in need of revision. Although the park is now clearly rejuvenated, its development currently hinges primarily on what one portion of the community desires (the Friends), however this may not necessarily be representative of the wider area.

Firth Park: Without political influence and the determination of political power to maintain a standard of management, the future quality of Firth Park is potentially under threat.

Summary

The Friends of Millhouses Park and Firth Park have in the past demonstrated their capacity to bring in funding for the development of new projects. However this funding does not (usually) extend to the long term maintenance and place keeping of the site. To maintain the high standards that have been achieved in both parks it is important that parks remain a part of both the Council and community agenda, with active participation in funding applications maintained.

Millhouses Park and Firth Park Friends have had the support and commitment of active members to date. Millhouses Park members are active with projects that are often of a personal interest and their commitment is often limited to the program of that particular project. If funding is reduced for new (and exciting) projects the commitment of the Friends may also be reduced. The Council is reliant on the Friends as a committed voluntary group who can access funds. Without their continued commitment, the Council will be unable to connect with additional external funding sources.

Whilst Firth Park has a currently committed Friends group, the group is unlikely at present to look to taking on new projects or additional responsibilities. The nature of the site also makes it very difficult for volunteers to help with maintenance. Thus the Council and community are reliant on the commitment and resourcing of the maintenance team. Both the Friends of Millhouses Park and Firth Park have members with relevant skills and professional backgrounds, which have contributed to the parks in the past. The Friends of Millhouses Park in particular have access to many varied skills and the professional support of two Green space project officers. Without the continued commitment of these skilled professionals the future development of new projects would be impossible. The small number of Firth Park Friends means their capacity to contribute skills is limited; therefore they must rely on the support of Council bodies in terms of park funding applications and maintenance.

The Friends of Millhouses Park and Firth Park both are socially and environmentally driven. Their motivation to date has been sustained by witness to the parks progression, and pride in achieving City Park status and Green Flag designation. Neither group is motivated by manual work in their parks.

The Friends of Millhouses Park has an extensive network of contacts and a successful up-to-date website. They use this and many other forms of communication to connect with the community, Council and public media. The Friends of Firth Park rely on park notice boards and the Community Assembly webpage to disseminate information. However, both groups rely (to a greater or lesser degree) on people having access to technology to gain information. There is an argument for broadening communication and considering a more personal approach when communicating with the public, such as holding park events where people actively attend and can voice their opinions (this approach recently adopted by the Friends of Firth Park at their Summer Festival, the impact should be realised over the next period of months). The Friends of Firth Park should also consider extending their communication strategy to include social media.

Both the Friends of Millhouses Park and Firth Park have political influence beyond their own organisation, through contact with local Council and the Community Assembly. Both parks should build on these relationships to determine a cohesive plan that both the Council and community can commit to, and support in the future. Building on existing and new partnerships, pooling resources and working together in the future will help drive future projects with greater impact and support.

Partnership Networks

The interviewed partners were also asked to comment on their relationship to, and understanding of, other partners involved in place making and place keeping at each site. Partner network diagrams representing this combined interview feedback were then created, including additional partners identified by the interviewees as holding past or potential links. A partner key was also developed to help define the partners in terms of organisation association i.e. *Council Department or service, Community, Private, Funders and Trusts* (see Table 4). Within these diagrams, all links and active partnering is indicated by arrow connections, with the arrow direction defining whether the partnership is one way or reciprocal, potential links are indicated with a dashed arrow.

Table 4: Interviewed partners and network category

Millhouses Park	Category	Firth Park	Category
Parks Manager	Council	Green space project officer	Council
Area Officer	Council	Community Assembly	Council
Green space project officer	Council	Area Officer	Council
Head of Asset Management	Council	Friends Group	Community
Community Assembly	Council		
Friends Group	Community		
Millhouses Bowling club	Community		
Local Councillor	Community		
Carterknowle & Millhouses Community Group	Community		
Millhouses Park Cafe	Private		

It must be noted that the diagrams created are as a result of interviews with those who responded to the interview request, therefore they by no means representing a complete picture but do however reflect the nature of those who are active and willing partners at both Millhouses Park and Firth Park. Each partner interviewed was asked to identify and grade who they considered their key network partners on a scale of 1-5. Based on the accumulative findings from this analysis many interesting partnership alliances and potential alliances became clear.

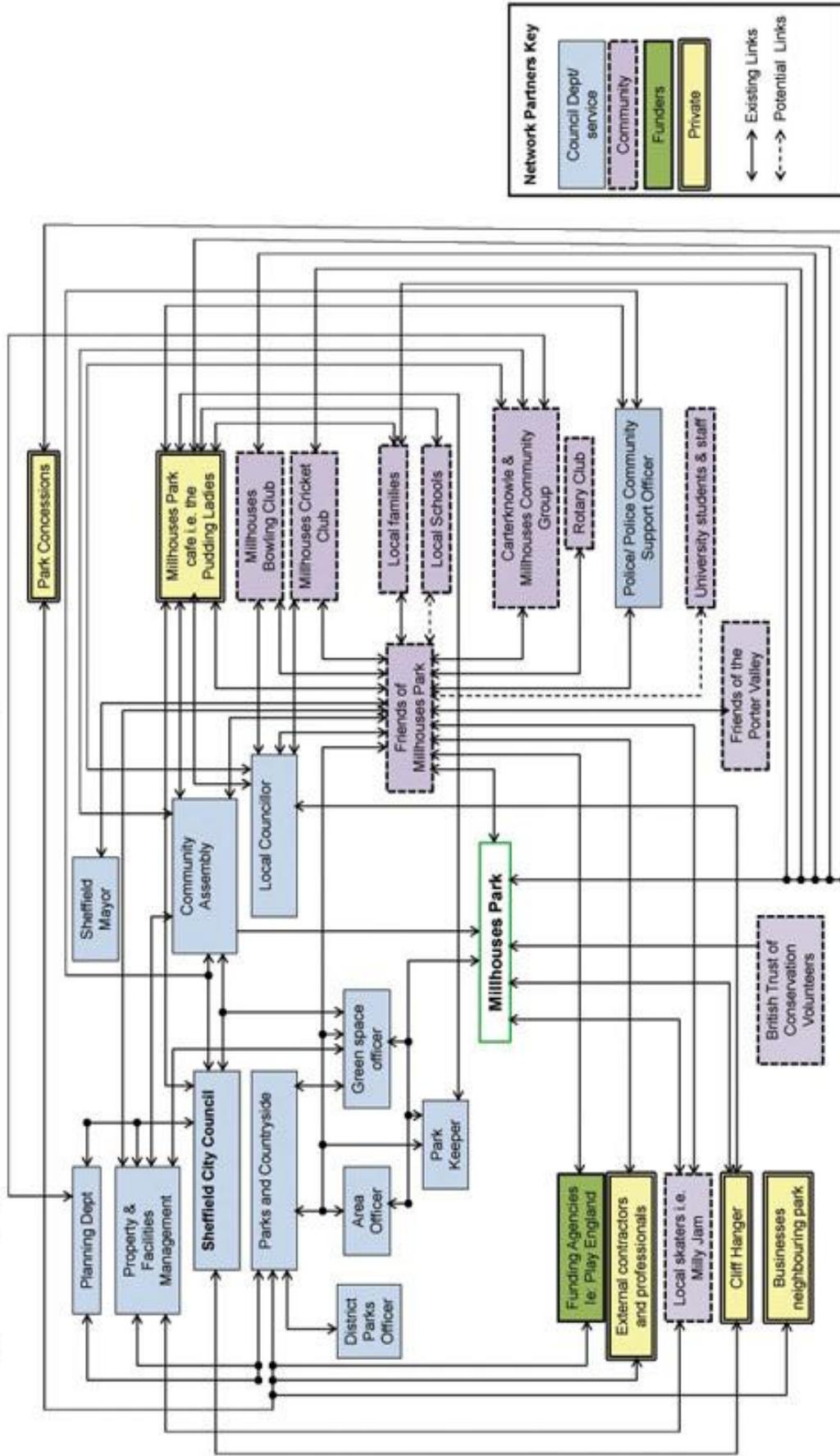
Table 5: Top 5 Ranking Network Partners

Ranking	Millhouses Park	Category
1	Friends Group	Community
2	Parks & Countryside Dept	Council
3	Green space Officer	Council
4	Community Assembly	Council
5	Park Keeper	Council

Ranking	Firth Park	Category
1	Parks & Countryside	Council
2 (joint)	Friends Group	Community
2 (joint)	Community Assembly	Council
3	Area Officer	Council
4	Park Keeper	Council
5	Activity Sheffield	Council

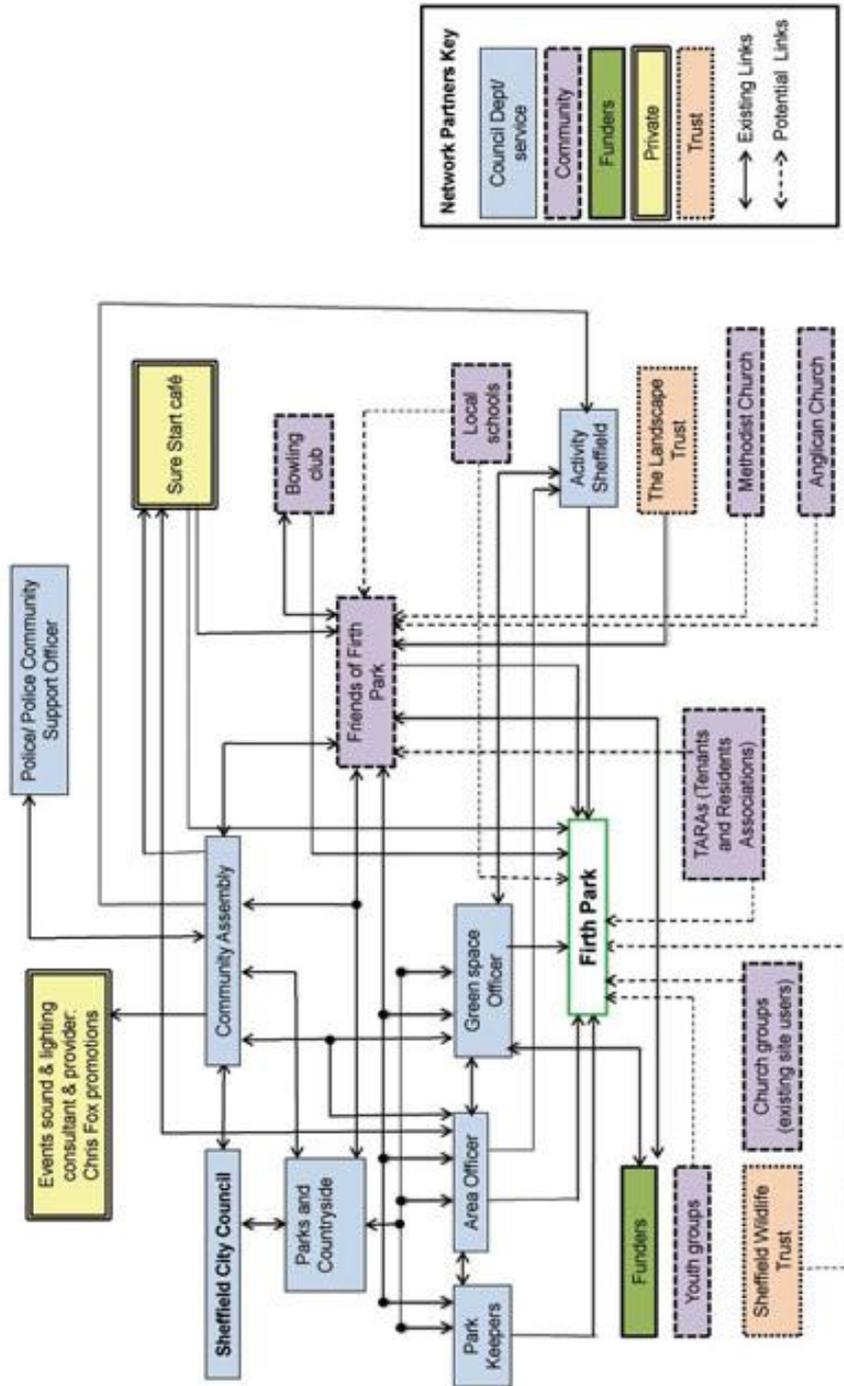
Millhouses Park Network

Resourcing place keeping – Millhouses Park network involvement diagram



Firth Park Network

Resourcing place keeping – Firth Park network involvement diagram



Partner Ranking Discussion

Millhouses Park: The Friends at Millhouses Park was seen by all other partners as central to the park's success and therefore received a ranking of 1 by those that were interviewed. The Friends of Millhouses Park are clearly a key partner for involved Council parties (which includes those at a management level within the Parks and Countryside Department to those working on the site daily). The Friends also play a key role for other community groups in the park neighbourhood and have connections to private businesses. This central role is determined by their very dynamic nature, where they are seen by others to be successful at what they do and are the most up-to-date resource regarding activity in the park. Within the partner network the Parks & Countryside Department received a rank of 2, reasons for this may be the fact that they are the main employer and managerial body for many of the Council partners who were interviewed. They are also a key contact for many of the park community groups and private park partners, with whom they hold licensing contracts. The Green space officer ranked 3rd, and was again seen as important by other Council and community bodies. In this role they facilitate projects on the ground and act as facilitator and communicator between involved parties. This role appears key to the park partnership model in order to ensure a successful passage through the development and implementation of projects. The Community Assembly was ranked 4th within the network They are a partner who bridge the gap between Council and community wishes regarding public sector spending, therefore are valued by both in the role they play. The park keeper was ranked 5th and is seen as one of the key partners 'on the ground'. They are valued due to their long-standing knowledge of the park and regular site presence, which has led to the development of partnerships and friendships.

Firth Park: The Sheffield City Council Parks and Countryside Department was ranked 1 at Firth Park. This result may be a partial reflection of those who were available and were interviewed, as three of the four interviewees are employees of the department. However, the Friends group also ranked them highly and from this it is clear that from both a Council and community partner point of view, the Parks and Countryside Department is the key partner in Firth Park. Both the Friends and the Community Assembly received an equal 2nd place ranking. This provides an indication of the nature of their role as a mediator between the community and council. The legacy of work led the Friends ensures that they are currently highly respected by other partners, and therefore deserving of a high network ranking. At Firth Park the Area Officer received a rank of 3 (whilst at Millhouses Park the Area Officer did not appear in the top 5 ranking). At Firth Park this may result from the officer's close involvement with the Sure Start centre that operates within the park. This high ranking may also be due to the more active officer role required at Firth Park, with additional involvement onsite due to a higher percentage of vandalism of park buildings and green spaces. Other partners ranked the park keeper as the 4th most important partner. All partners interviewed saw a clear value in having a park keeper on the site, and this active presence they seen as crucial by both the Council and community. Activity Sheffield received a ranking of 5 at Firth Park (whilst they did not rank at Millhouses Park in the top 5). Unlike Millhouses Park the Green space officer does not rank in the top 5. This is perhaps a reflection of who was interviewed but also perhaps the current nature of the green space officer's relationship with the other partners, as they are relatively new to their post. It is important when reviewing the ranking to consider the fact that this rank is in constant flux often determined by the political will of the time, the current economic and financial situation of both the Council and community. The ranking is also determined by what is going on in the park at any one time and who is involved. With the consultation and implementation of new projects no doubt the Green space officer plays a more active role and would go up in ranking.

At both Firth Park and Millhouses Park the Friends and the Council bodies were clearly identified as the key partners. Their partnered involvement is key to the successful running of both parks. The Friends were the only community group identified in the top 5 at either site. Community groups that were based in the park (at both sites) received the next highest ranking in the community category.

Further community involvement from other groups was identified in Millhouses Park but none was identified at Firth Park. Funding agencies had equal ranking in both cases. The leading private partner in both cases was located within the park i.e. the Park Café in Millhouses Park and the Sure Start centre in Firth Park. Those interviewed regarding involvement at Millhouses Park identified more private partners than Firth Park indicating the current partners ability to network beyond the park itself. Overall Millhouses Park appeared very well connected and the only potential links or weak links identified being that with local schools and universities. In discussions it was indicated that these links would be pursued in the future, which reflected determination on the part of the Friends (in particular) regarding expansion of their partnership network. There is also potential to create links to neighbouring businesses. At Firth Park there are several potential or weak links. There is little community group involvement in the park beyond that of the Friends and bowling club. Youth groups and religious groups had been involved in the past but these links have been lost over the years. There is also very little connection to the surrounding local businesses.

Report Recommendations

The energy that the Friends of Millhouses Park applies to place making needs to include a significant emphasis on place keeping if new projects are to be sustainable. This will require more focused and an enthusiastic drive behind community involvement in maintenance. This could include promoting maintenance activities as a form of social activity and fitness for local residents, just as place making in the park does at present. There are active retired members of the community that use the park on a regular basis that could consider volunteering to bring health benefits and social interaction. For Firth Park Friends, an increase in membership number and a broader spectrum of involvement would be beneficial. Their membership is currently under representative of the communities surrounding the park, particularly in the age and ethnic background of members. Encouraging a wide range of people to be involved would bring various resources and skills, and would help to boost the activity of the Friends. This could be done by promoting the existence of the Friends to local communities, and the benefits that joining would bring to the park and the community. This is particularly crucial for Firth Park with regarding the lack of current revenue funding for place keeping, and the need to maintain the high standard if Green Flag status is to be retained.

If lessons are to be learnt from the Friends of Millhouses Park, people are generally more willing to get involved when exciting projects or events are happening. To encourage more people to join Firth Park Friends, contribute to place keeping, the Firth Park Friends need to develop and maintain a greater presence in the park, local community and online. The online aspect of the group would tap into a younger resource of volunteers, and could link the Friends with existing online Sheffield networks such as the 'Volunteer Centre Sheffield', or the University run 'Sheffield Volunteering'. Sheffield Volunteering has, at present, an oversubscribed conservation group and therefore would benefit from involvement with Firth Park. Volunteering opportunities offered by the Council on their general website are relatively hidden. Located on web pages for various teams and departments in the Council, and there is a general lack of unity in the online presentation of these opportunities. Strengthening links between existing successful online databases and Council's involvement opportunities would provide a far greater resource of volunteers. This would also greatly benefit the Council, providing the opportunity to identify exactly where gaps in resourcing and service provision exist, and where they most need people to volunteer. These databases would also provide volunteers with a wider range of ethnic and social backgrounds, ages and abilities.

Partnership recommendations

Council

- 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).
- Provide greater training (skill development) for Friends and community groups, such as the Master Gardening programme undertaken in the USA.
- Create opportunities for the community to get involved beyond commitment through a Friends group by supporting casual and regular volunteers.

- Revise masterplans for City Parks with the current economic climate in mind.
- Re-brand the future of the City Parks using a maintenance led approach.
- Review maintenance programs and reflect on sustainable maintenance with the potential for community input through:
 - Use of maintenance as a training and community involvement opportunity, seed/bulb planting, biodiversity education with clean up incentives.
 - Activation of healthy living for retired communities (older people).
- Create a citywide strategy for parks: hold events / park open days to help focus on and develop each park to its strengths and merits (creating area identity), and encourage people to visit and support the wider community of Sheffield through its City Parks.
- Use the parks as an opportunity to create more frequent community events in sports and the arts, which extend beyond the remit of traditional host parks such as the Botanical Gardens.
- Develop youth groups with the rangers
- Tap into the underused resource of frequent park visitors such as dog walkers and young mums

Community

- Build broader networks within and beyond the parks – share resources and knowledge with other Friends and community groups
- Broaden communication strategies and develop an active, personal approach.
- Build and maintain an online presence, providing an appealing source for younger volunteers.
- Link in to existing online volunteer resources to improve and promote group profile.
- Consider future maintenance requirements as a priority, and establish means to work with, and on occasion where appropriate independently of, the council.

Appendix

Glossary

Council related roles and responsibilities

Activity Sheffield: Council body that deliver a wide variety of sport, play and activity sessions across the city. Their goal is to lead the city to a more active, healthier and sporting future. They work closely with communities, leisure facilities, partners and the citizens of Sheffield, providing opportunities to become more active.

Area Officer: Public role with one Area Officer assigned to each of the 7 community Assemblies. Responsible for the management of open green spaces (and in some cases buildings) within their community Assembly area

Community Assemblies: replaced Area panels as the lowest level of UK government. Community Assemblies are aimed at enabling the general public to have a greater say regarding priorities for public spending within their area. There are 7 Community Assemblies in Sheffield covering all the wards. Typically there are 3 councillors from each ward on a community Assembly board

Green space Officer: formerly known as regeneration officer, officer leads projects through development and implementation to support green space improvements across Sheffield representing the Council and working for the people. There is 1 Green space officer working for each community assembly apart from SW (Millhouses area) as assembly in that area has funded an extra officer. Each officer is responsible for all parks and green spaces in their assembly area

Local Councillor: Public role, in Sheffield there are 84 elected Councillors with 3 councillors for each of the 28 wards

Parks & Countryside Service: Public organization responsible for the management, maintenance and development of the city's parks and recreational greens. The Parks and Countryside service manages 730 sites citywide, covering 3,230 hectares and attracts 25-40 million visits each year

Property & Facilities Section: Public organization that takes care of the maintenance and upkeep of buildings and structures under Council control. Within parks this includes all the assets and structures from river walls, dams, river bed, footpaths and walls. Currently 5 working on a city wide basis

Community organisations

Bowling clubs: Voluntary organization/ club run within the grounds of a public park.

Community groups: Voluntary organization of local community members working to improve their local area i.e. Carterknowle and Millhouses Community Groups.

'Friends of' groups: voluntary organisations comprising members of the public getting together to make a positive contribution to their local area / park and help bring about change. The size of the group and the remit are determined by the group itself.

References

- Cameron, D. (2010). *Our 'Big Society' plan*. David Cameron's manifesto speech to the Conservative Party on March 31st 2010. Accessed 10.4.11 at www.conservatives.com/News/Speeches/2010/03/David_Cameron_Our_Big_Society_plan.aspx
- The Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage (2004) *Topic paper 6: techniques and criteria for judging capacity and sensitivity*. Landscape character assessment guidance for England and Scotland. Accessed 25.10.11 at <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/landscape/englands/character/assessment/topicpapers.aspx>
- Jones, R. (2002). "Partnerships in action: Strategies for the development of voluntary community groups in urban parks." *Leisure Studies*, 21(3-4), 305-325.
- Jones, R. (2002) "With a Little Help From My Friends: Managing Public Participation in Local Government." *Public Money & Management*, 22, 31-36.
- Moskell, C., Broussard Allred, S. and Ferenz, G. (2010). "Examining volunteer motivations and recruitment strategies for engagement in urban forestry." *Cities and the Environment*, 3(1), 28.
- Ohmer, M. L., Meadowcroft, P., Freed, K. & Lewis, E. (2009). "Community gardening and community development: Individual, social and community benefits of a community conservation program." *Journal of Community Practice*, 17(4), 377-399.
- Sheffield City Council (2009) *Information for Volunteers*. SCC, Parks and countryside Service.
- Speller, G. and Ravenscroft, N. (2005). "Facilitating and evaluating public participation in urban parks management." *Local Environment*, 10(1), 41-56.
- United Nations (2001) *United Nations Volunteers Report*. Prepared for the UN General Assembly Special Session on Social Development, Geneva.
- Van Herzele, A., Collins K. & Tyrväinen, L. (2005b). "Involving People in Urban Forestry - A Discussion of Participatory Practices throughout Europe." In: Konijnendijk, C. C., Nilsson, K., Randrup, T. B. & Schipperijn, J. (eds.) *Urban Forest and Trees*. Berlin Heidelberg: Springer.
- Van Herzele, A. and T. Denutte (2003). *Neighbourhoods State of the Art Report - Public Involvement*. EU Fifth Framework Programme.

Online resources

- Volunteering England
<http://www.volunteering.org.uk/>
- Volunteer Centre Sheffield
<http://www.sheffieldvolunteercentre.org.uk/>
- Sheffield Volunteering: Sheffield University
<http://www.shef.ac.uk/union/get-involved/volunteering/>
- Local Area Statistics Online Service
<http://www.lasos.org.uk/PublicProfileWard.aspx?ward=77953>
<http://www.lasos.org.uk/PublicProfileWard.aspx?ward=77953>
- Census 2001 data obtained from NHS Sheffield Neighbourhood profiles
<http://www.sheffield.nhs.uk/healthdata/nhoods0809.php>
- Sheffield City Council website: general park information and history.
<http://www.sheffield.gov.uk/out--about/parks-woodlands--countryside/parks/a-z-city-district--local--parks/firth-park>
<http://www.sheffield.gov.uk/out--about/parks-woodlands--countryside/parks/a-z-city-district--local--parks/millhouses-park>