

Wider application

The restoration of Alexandra Park, Oldham is one of more than 150 major park restoration projects supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund. All of these projects have been based on comprehensive restoration management plans, an approach regarded as the best way to combine the wide range of interests which public parks embody. It is a useful mechanism for stimulating local authorities to make long-term plans for the proper management and regeneration of parks and urban trees. The success of Alexandra Park has encouraged Oldham MBC to restore a further nine smaller parks in the borough.

Further information

National Urban Forestry Unit

This leaflet is one of a series produced by the National Urban Forestry Unit. NUFU provides a national focus for the exchange of information and good practice in urban forestry. If you would like further information on other case studies or their application, or if you have examples of good practice to share with others, please contact:

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Stafford Road	Email: info@nufu.org.uk
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Urban Parks Programme

Further information on the Urban Parks Programme can be obtained from:

Heritage Lottery Fund	Tel: 0207 591 6000
7 Holbein Place	Fax: 0207 591 6001
London	Website: www.hlf.org.uk
SW1W 8NR	

The Urban Parks Forum

Advice on all aspects of the management of urban parks can be obtained from:

The Urban Parks Forum, P O Box 266, York YO1 6YQ, Tel: 01262 674774

Green Flag Park Award Scheme

information can be obtained from:

Green Flag Parks, ILAM House, Lower Basildon, Reading RG8 9NE, Tel: 01491 874800

Further reading

Cooper S and Dingwall C, eds (1998)

Trees in the Landscape Garden History Society

Harding S (1999)

Towards a Renaissance in Urban Parks Cultural Trends 35 Policy Studies Institute, London

Woudstra J and Fieldhouse K, eds (2000)

The Regeneration of Public Parks E&FN Spon, London

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Urban Forestry in Practice

Regenerating historic urban parks



CASE STUDY 27

Regenerating historic urban parks

Introduction

Trees make an enormous contribution to the character and beauty of historic public parks and to our enjoyment of them. Although they greatly improve the quality of life in towns and cities, parks have experienced a dramatic decline over the last 25 years. Many are now being restored and regenerated with lottery funding through the Heritage Lottery Fund's *Urban Parks Programme*.

Because historic public parks are carefully designed landscapes, it is important that tree and woodland management are carried out with a sensitive understanding of the park's historic, cultural and ecological evolution. This is best achieved by producing a tree and woodland management plan which forms part of a comprehensive restoration plan for the whole park and its features and facilities.

Specific examples

Project name and location

ALEXANDRA PARK, OLDHAM Greater Manchester, UK
Grid reference SD 932 043

Project partners

- Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council
- Heritage Lottery Fund

Project objectives

- To reverse the decline in Oldham's premier historic park
- To make the park safe and attractive to current and new users
- To conserve the park's historic character and integrity
- To enhance wildlife, visual and botanical interest through tree and woodland management

Site description

Alexandra Park was opened in 1865 on 29 ha of land bought by Oldham Council. It was intended to relieve some of the problems of unemployment in the weaving industry caused by the cotton famine resulting from the blockading of southern ports in the American Civil War. It was the first public *people's park* in Oldham. Located just half a mile from the town centre, the park has served the needs of the urban population for 130 years. It remains well used even though it has suffered, like most UK parks, from a lack of investment and direction until the 1990s.



The national legacy of urban parks makes a unique contribution to the urban forest: plan of Alexandra Park, Oldham

Project design

A restoration and redevelopment plan was drawn up following guidance published by the Institute of Advanced Architectural Studies, York University and the Heritage Lottery Fund. Members of the public were consulted widely in the research of the park's history and in the production of the plan's recommendations.

Implementation

Twenty eight individual restoration projects, mostly for listed park buildings and public facilities, were identified within an overarching programme for restoring the path boundaries and the structural planting of trees, woodland and other soft landscape.

Research showed that the park's original stock of ornamental and specimen trees had been depleted by worsening air pollution up to the 1950s and that replacement planting had often been poorly placed and composed of a limited range of tolerant species, notably black poplar and sycamore. Landscape analysis revealed the extent to which the original design had been lost through indiscriminate planting: important vistas were blocked, there was heavy shading in previously sunny areas and the flow of the topography had become fragmented into small, oppressive compartments.

It was decided to return to the original style of well placed blocks of woodland, complemented by specimen trees, planted singly or in groups. Species composition would be returned to a high percentage of common native forest trees with a 5% component of ornamental specimens. As well as identifying trees for removal, the plan also specified additional tree planting and made provision for future management.

The £2.5 million grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund enabled some urgent tree management issues to be tackled, including

- felling of an over-mature and poorly sited avenue of black poplars
- removal of inappropriate species and trees in visually damaging locations
- replanting five new trees to each one specified for removal, to mirror the original composition and layout and improve the woodland age structure

Results

Most of the park's features and facilities have now been restored, the woodland management and new tree establishment having been given a high priority by the Council's park service. The park is returning to its former splendour and has received widespread public acclaim. It will be entered for a *Green Flag Award* in 2001 when the restoration project is completed.



A nursery-grown specimen cedar tree - part of the restoration project



The original design of the park has been compromised by more recent trees. Here, removal of a pair of trees has restored the simplicity of the design