



# **Doncaster Future Parks: Key learning from partnership working in Hexthorpe Park**

**Case Study July 2023**





## About the Doncaster Local Delivery Pilot

Sport England is investing in 12 Local Delivery Pilots in selected areas of England to help understand how taking a population behaviour change approach in a specific place has the potential to deliver a sustainable reduction in inactivity levels. Many people in communities face a multitude of stubborn barriers that stop physical activity being the norm. As a sector we've often focused on these barriers in isolation without understanding how they connect to the wider social and economic conditions that exist in our communities.

Physical inactivity is driven by a range of influences across multiple levels of the system we live in: our individual and social connections; the physical environments where we live and work; and the policies in place locally, regionally and nationally – so change requires everyone in a place to connect and play their part. The Doncaster Local Delivery Pilot aims to create healthy and vibrant communities through physical activity and sport. The pilot will engage, support and collaborate with a wide network of residents, groups and organisations, and will take an iterative approach to test and learn from a number of themes.

It is being evaluated by CFE Research, an independent social research organisation specialising in wellbeing, education and the economy.

# Hexthorpe Park

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This case study covers the key learning about partnership working in Hexthorpe Park. This park is one of the 15 capital sites as part of the Doncaster Future Parks (DFP) project funded by the LDP. Alongside this investment the DFP team support partners to utilise the park to increase park usage. This report briefly summarises the progress made to date in line with the Bespoke Park Plan, but primarily focuses on key partnership work undertaken to support physical activity on the park.

The findings are based on interviews with members of the DFP team as well as residents who are engaged with different groups and activities in the park and a local college. Interviews were conducted in June and July 2023.

## Doncaster Future Parks

Parks and open spaces are widely recognised as important assets within Doncaster which provide free, local and accessible opportunities for residents to be active. The Doncaster Future Parks (DFP) project (funded through the LDP) is the name given to Doncaster's approach to understand and improve the provision of parks and open spaces within the borough, with an emphasis on reducing physical inactivity. The DFP team is embedded in the Get Doncaster Moving (GDM) team who support communities to be physical activity and help contribute to the borough's wider health, wellbeing and environmental objectives. Bespoke Park Plans have been developed for 15 parks across Doncaster<sup>1</sup> following engagement with stakeholders, including residents, volunteer groups and other organisations. The DFP team know from extensive research<sup>2</sup> and evidence that each site and the community it serves is unique, therefore, the DFP team are committed to adapting how they engage with those who use each park to reflect these differences. Ahead of capital investments starting, the DFP team undertake further engagement with communities to finalise plans. This ensures they understand what communities want to see happening in their parks to encourage physical activity and how they can play a role in this.

DFP works to achieve three objectives which are underpinned by an emphasis on systems thinking and collaborative engagement with all stakeholders:

- Empowered and active people
- Distinct and vibrant places
- Strong and effective partnerships

A number of parks in Doncaster have a 'Friends of' Group (FoG) who have been involved in the development of the work in relation to their individual park. On a day-to-day basis, the FoGs play an important role in supporting residents to be active through maintaining the spaces and setting up events and activities<sup>3</sup>. The FoGs are all groups of volunteers who work in partnership

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<sup>1</sup> Developed by Land Use Consultants.

<sup>2</sup> Including phase [one](#), [two](#) and [three](#) of Behavioural Insight work; Resident panel [surveys](#); [Doncaster Talks](#); and [Well Doncaster](#) community insight.

<sup>3</sup> The size and scope of each FoG varies. Some only have a small number of members and primarily focus on maintaining the park, others are much larger and/or have a wider remit.

with City of Doncaster Council, DFP, GDM and the Doncaster Green Space Network to ensure that Doncaster’s parks and green spaces are well-used and maintained.

Within Doncaster, parks are operating without a dedicated parks department in the Council. The spaces are managed as part of a wider network of public spaces, green space assets and facilities provided for community use. Delivery of services associated with wider parks management are spread across five Council directorates. Consultation has highlighted this presents challenges to providing a coordinated and strategically planned parks service. The DFP team and partners have to work within, and navigate this system, to support change.

## Hexthorpe Park

Hexthorpe Park is a 13-hectare site that serves the Balby North and Town Centre community areas. It is a diverse environment, with a variety of facilities, natural spaces and opportunities for users to be active. The park has children’s play areas, playing fields, two bowling greens, a multi-use games area, a skate park, a BMX track, tennis courts and a basketball post. In relation to nature and horticultural environments, Hexthorpe Park includes scenic woodlands, The Dell (a garden of special interest), the borough’s only public aviary, nature walks, and access to the River Don and public walkways. Doncaster Rowing Club also operate out of Hexthorpe Park.



Hexthorpe Park also has an established Friends of Group<sup>4</sup>. Hexthorpe Park was awarded Green Flag<sup>5</sup> status in 2022. The Judges highlighted the Friends of Group as being a clear asset. The Judges’ summary recognised the continued development of the park and its forward momentum as a clear strength. In 2021 Hexthorpe failed at Green Flag, the only significant change which happened between the 2021/2022 judging was the Future Parks Engagement, gathering of insight and planning through our approach. Members of the DFP team were present on the day of judging to discuss the DFP way of working, involvement, integration in setting a path built on community insight aligned, parks standards along with the future parks overall aims.

## Reason Hexthorpe Park was chosen

As part of the selection process for the 15 DFP sites, a series of metrics<sup>6</sup> for each park were developed which included assessments on levels of deprivation, physical activity levels, geographical location and the communities each park serves. When considering income and

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/HexthorpePark/>

<sup>5</sup> Green Flag award is the recognised national standard for parks and green spaces.

<sup>6</sup> When the initial analysis was conducted by the Land Use in 2019–2020 over 4,000 people who live within 1km of the park were categorised in IMD decile 1 – the most deprived. A series of site assessments were also undertaken which identified and audited local provision to highlight areas of most need for investment. From the quality and value assessments, it was identified that Hexthorpe Park offers areas of educational interest which could be enhanced through capital investment.

physical inactivity levels, the park is in one of the most deprived and least physically active areas of Doncaster. From this analysis, Hexthorpe Park scored highly on the various measures and there was a range of opportunities identified to develop interventions which met the vision and aims of DFP.

## Developing the Bespoke Park Plan

The initial Bespoke Park Plan for Hexthorpe Park proposed investment in both the physical appearance of the park as well as in interventions which support sustainable community engagement. This was based on limited engagement with residents, therefore DFP undertook further engagement to refine this. Residents were invited to complete a survey based on the original plan as well as further questions to understand the enablers and barriers to park usage. In total, 162 people responded to the survey, of which only 40% visited the park daily (see Appendix 1 for summary of findings). The main reasons identified as to why people do not visit Hexthorpe park were perceptions of safety, environmental hygiene (e.g. litter) and a lack of knowledge about the activities available. Survey responses also identified that people would appreciate more nature walks and community events, as well as improved lighting and visibility in the park. These reasons are similar to resident views across Doncaster's other parks.

## Progress against the Bespoke Park Plan

A wide range of work has been undertaken in the park but the capital work has not yet started. Key reasons for this include:

- The ways of working which are important to the DFP team centred on community engagement and co-design are new. This has been challenging for everyone to embrace; this new way of working takes time to learn and work needs to be continually adapted in line with community engagement.
- There was not enough capacity within the design and delivery team in the council leading to delays in designing, approving and commissioning the capital work. The DFP team are recruiting an external landscape designer to support DFP and add capacity to speed up the process. The DFP team know it is potentially a risk as the appointed landscape designers need be fully aware of, and embrace, the DFP ways of working which could affect what has been successful so far.

As a result of perceived slow progress, residents and other key stakeholders have expressed frustration which has threatened relationship building activity. This has required careful and regular communication to manage expectations.

Whilst the capital plans are still being developed, the DFP team have focused on other aspects of the park plan (Appendix 2 provides a summary of progress against the Bespoke Park Plan in relation to its original format before engagement to how it looks now). A range of new activities have started on Hexthorpe Park (such as those summarised in this report). The Hexthorpe Friends of Group have also been working with DFP to help improve the 'look' of the park including planting new flowerbeds and an orchard in the Dell and clearing footpaths to make them safe to walk on (e.g. removing leaves and mud). Whilst the FoG has ambitions to make changes, the scale at which they can currently work is limited as they currently only have six members, and only three who are 'active' doing practical work in the park<sup>7</sup>. The intention is that

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<sup>7</sup> Other members of the FoG attend DGSN meetings, but due to age and availability are not practically active in their park.

this all of these aspects of work will ‘animate’ the park so that by the time the capital work is completed there will be more residents using the facilities. Safety is a key concern for residents, therefore increasing the number of people using the park will in part help to alleviate some of those concerns.

## Key partnerships developed

This section of the report highlights key partnership work which the DFP team have been supporting to increase physical activity opportunities on the park. A key principle which underpins the work of DFP is the community being at the heart of decision making. This is seen through the development of the park plans. However, engagement from young people in this was low. Engaging the youth voice and supporting young people to use the park is key and this has DFP’s approach as evidenced in the Enigma Room and Doncaster College examples. In addition communities leading change and being empowered to tackle physical inactivity is important; DFP support this and can be seen in both the Pétanque and tennis partnership examples.

## Enigma Live Escape Room

DFP have learnt from the successes of the Mumbler routes<sup>8</sup> to encourage physical activity in parks amongst families and wanted to adapt this model for use with young people. Young people were identified as a group with fewer activities or initiatives that were directed at them in parks that were not traditional sports. During a business showcase and networking event, DFP team members and Enigma Escape Room creators were sat together and began exploring the possibility of creating an escape ‘room’ in a park. This was a new concept and not something Enigma had trialled before. This highlights the importance of DFP being visible at wider networking meetings to develop connections and take advantage of opportunities that arise. Following this meeting, Enigma, in collaboration with DFP have designed an Alien-themed escape ‘room’ in the park. Residents search for clues around the park which are positioned on a decreasing circular spiral, meaning that the distances for participants to travel reduce as the clues are solved to maintain interest. The escape ‘room’ was launched in May and is free for residents to take part in (they just need to download the free App).



Enigma designed and provided the technology for the escape room in Hexthorpe Park free of charge<sup>9</sup>, based on their desire to be socially responsible, give back to their communities and test

<sup>8</sup> Mumbler routes are free trail routes, ‘quests’ and activities to encourage families with younger children to walk and be active in parks and open spaces in Doncaster. The Mumbler routes regularly form part of the LDP communications campaign following a successful trial to promote walking in Doncaster

<sup>9</sup> The cost to DFP was primarily related to printing costs (for QR codes in the park) and promotion.

whether the technology would work in a different context (e.g. outside). For both Enigma and DFP, a key part of the process was that they engaged in ‘test and learn’ to explore whether such an idea was feasible and whether it would gain interest.

The relationship between the DFP team and Enigma rooms has been positive due to those shared values, although a few design challenges were presented. In particular, deciding on the escape room theme was challenging, because the initial concept put forward by Enigma focused on solving a crime in the park. The DFP team believed this was not appropriate given their learning about resident perceptions of safety in the park, so encouraged the concept to be reconsidered. Another challenge has been to create sustainable clues around the park. Due to concerns about potential vandalism which could damage the clues (and therefore prevent residents from completing the puzzle), all clues have been based on existing features in the park. There has been one clue that has been slightly damaged, but overall, the DFP team are happy that the clues will remain so the escape room can continue to be accessed.

Through the App which is downloaded to access the escape room, users can be tracked. Current download figures show that between May and July, there were 400 individual downloads. Evidence suggests that multiple people complete the escape room per download, so numbers of residents who are being active using the Escape

“Myself and 3 friends heard about the Enigma rooms challenge at Hexthorpe Park on Insta and decided to give it a try, we didn’t know what it would be like but it was fantastic, best thing we’ve done in a park for a long time and Hexthorpe was a really nice place.”

19yr old female Balby resident



██████████  
We did this 3 grown ups and 7 children with ages ranging from 8-12. We all LOVED it! Cx

Like Reply



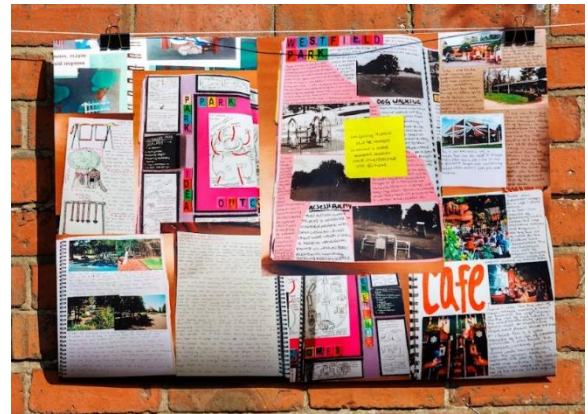
Room are likely to be much higher than the numbers suggest. Following the initial successes, DFP have commissioned a funded contract with Enigma to run Escape Rooms in eight other parks in Doncaster over the summer to coincide with school summer holidays to further test the concept.

## College engagement

DFP were keen to ensure that they engaged young people in their plans for the park, and approached Doncaster College to see if their Art students would like to be involved. Doncaster College were keen to be involved, using it as an opportunity to develop students’ employability skills and commercial understanding. Furthermore, the college had noticed a negative change in their students’ mental health following the COVID-19 pandemic, such as increased social anxiety, and focusing a project on wellbeing and being outside was deemed to coordinate with this emerging need in their students.



The DFP team led a session at the college outlining the project and encouraging the students to reflect on the types of spaces which would appeal to them. Within their work, the students produced a series of ideas and plans for what they would like to see in the park. Initially, many of the students' ideas focused on what they thought younger children would want, rather than their own age group. Examples of this included specific climbing frames with interactive activities for children and climbing apparatus shaped like wild animals. After further support and encouragement from the DFP team, the designs became more relevant to teenagers, and included a bench which was designed to be safe place for teens to sit and talk and encourage them to use their local park. During the GDM network meeting held in Hexthorpe Park in June, a series of students' designs for the park were displayed to highlight the research and background work conducted.



Make Space for Girls is a national campaign to ensure that girls are included in spaces to be active in their local parks and green spaces. This campaign aligned with a number of the students' designs and as a result one specific design of the bench was adopted by the DFP team and is currently being commissioned to be installed in the park. The bench design was also believed to help DFP overcome some of the challenges associated with encouraging teenagers and younger adults to use the park. The

expectation is that if young people use the park more for a wide range of reasons this may encourage them to also use it for physical activity.

The college were pleased with the openness of working with DFP to create a project that was mutually beneficial and offered their students wider opportunities to engage with clients and gain 'real-world' employment experience. The students identified a perception that young people are not normally considered in planning. Therefore, they appreciated being listened to and consulted with, as well as being reassured that people are committed to addressing parks and improving the green spaces in Doncaster. This project also emphasised the value of empowering local people to be involved in leading change in their communities. Students identified that the project has increased their confidence and they were pleased that they could use the project on their CVs or to talk about during interviews as an example of when they have worked with clients to a brief.

"The highlight for me was seeing the designs come to life. Seeing the art not on the paper, but becoming a physical thing that people can use. Our designs have actually affected something – they've changed things "

**Doncaster College Student**

This project was identified as changing the way that young people think about parks. The students suggested that the improved facilities and activities in parks as a result of the DFP

programme will make them more appealing to young people. They highlighted that young people are often perceived negatively in relation to anti-social behaviour in parks; however, the provision of safe spaces and opportunities to do purposeful activities in parks could help overcome these perceptions. College teachers and students believed that a ripple effect could be achieved through this work whereby students involved will talk to their peers about what is happening in the park, which will spread the word and encourage others to visit and use the park. The project was identified as generating optimism and interest across staff and students that “change can happen”.

The college are keen to explore future similar projects with DFP because of the perceived benefits to students. However, in developing future collaboration DFP and the college intend to formally plan activities into the curriculum in advance to ensure the maximum impacts and outcomes are achieved.

## Pétanque court

A group of people who played Pétanque had to drive over 20 miles out of the borough to take part. They were unable to be flexible about when they could play and this also inhibited their ability to become a club. One of the members was aware of the Get Doncaster Moving approach and explored the potential for funding for a court in Doncaster. The group approached the DFP team with a business plan to become a club and grow over the next two years (up to 60 members) and serve local communities. The group emphasised the importance of this for not only physical activity but to bring about wider physical and mental health benefits for their members alongside regular social activities for their players.



The approach presented strongly aligned with the principles of DFP to develop capacity and empower local groups to take agency to increase physical activity levels in Doncaster – ensuring local people are leading change in their own area. The group had a strategy for how they would increase their membership, as well as plans for sustainable maintenance of the courts. As a result, their request was supported and the DFP team

assisted the group. This involved the construction of the pitch, but also promotional materials and training for the group, basic equipment so they had capacity to encourage others as well as basic maintenance tools. Through providing these tools (e.g. rake), the club can maintain their own courts and reduces the need for ongoing council intervention.

The DFP team and the club engaged with regional organisations to develop their own knowledge and learning to ensure their courts were high quality and representative of best practice. Some challenges were faced relating to the quality of the court that was laid, although through constructive conversations, the groups' needs were met through additional building work. The DFP team are still involved to address any health and safety concerns, such as putting higher



boards around the edge of the courts so that any wayward boule does not cause injury to people outside of the court area. Furthermore, there are plans to introduce benches around the courts to encourage greater use, particularly for more elderly adults with lower mobility. An important element of the design and delivery of the Pétanque court was the inclusion of accessibility ramps (prompted by the DFP team). There are no other courts in England that have such accessibility. This is an example of where this project embraces one of the main six principles that underpin the LDP – to tackle inequalities throughout its work.

A key factor underpinning the positive process and its success was the alignment of aims between the club and the DFP team. The members are keen to grow and develop as well as taking ownership of their activities, but needed initial support to enable it to start. The development of the courts offers the opportunity for more people to be active in parks and green spaces, which directly aligns with the objectives of DFP. As a result of the development of the new courts, the members have now created the Doncaster Pétanque club, they are playing more and have experienced an increase in membership, having already increased from four to 35. The courts are also open to anyone to use, so it offers wider opportunities for residents to play outside of the club itself.



Dave Maxwell

August 11 at 5:04 PM · 🌐

We were honoured this morning to have two chaps from Pétanque England who came to give our new pitch "the once over".

They were positively impressed by the pitch and our setup and made some constructive comments afterwards about how we take the club forward.

Well done everyone! 😊😊



16

4 comments Seen by 34

They have promoted their club and sport to different local community groups (with discounted rates), including those that specifically work with vulnerable adults with mental health problems or who are experiencing loneliness. The Pétanque Club want to further grow their membership

and are planning on working with colleagues in the DFP and GDM team to build their capacity to improve their marketing and promotional strategies to reach new potential members. As a result of the work to build their courts alongside other developments in Hexthorpe park, the club believe that it is a 'nicer' place, and it will encourage more people to visit.

## Doncaster Community Tennis Programme

Apply for funding of up to £500 to support people in your area to be more active!

GET DONCASTER MOVING

Active Communities Grants of up to £500 are available to local residents, groups and organisations to fund ideas that help people get out and about more, and be active where they live.

**We've already awarded over 100 Active Communities Grants in Doncaster!**

**We're open to fresh ideas**

What's important is that your idea supports Doncaster communities to be more active. We are keen to hear about different, bold and innovative ways in which the funding may be used. Examples of ideas that we have funded so far include:

- To support the hosting of a family fun community sport event
- To pilot community exercise sessions so that local people can try a new activity
- To fund sports equipment for a tennis group
- Sports First Aid and Mental Health First Aid Training to upskill leaders of a running group
- To subsidise room hire or instructor costs to support a new session to become sustainable

Doncaster Community Tennis Programme started in 2020 when a local resident discovered a passion for tennis. During COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions, they started playing tennis in Hexthorpe Park as a way out of loneliness and to gain personal connections that they had been missing. Their passion, enjoyment of playing tennis, and desire to meet new people was instrumental in their application for an Active Communities Grant<sup>10</sup> (funded through the LDP). The grant was used to buy equipment such as tennis rackets, balls and bags. The resident initially inquired about the funding and was then supported by Well Doncaster Officers (who support the grant and are part funded through the LDP) to complete the application form. This equipment was initially used to encourage and spontaneously invite other local residents and passers-by to take part in informal tennis sessions.

Following the development of informal tennis sessions they were leading, the resident has been supported by GDM to complete their Level 1 LTA coaching course. Following the successful completion of this course, the resident has become a coach and has been supported to set up regular sessions through the Doncaster Community Tennis programme in Hexthorpe park. This aims to break down the barriers for people to be involved and physically active through tennis. The tennis coach brings outstanding personal skills and an ability to engage and bring people together.

Further support for the coach comes from the LTA Serves programme which empowers and equips tennis activators to lead community tennis sessions. GDM also supports the tennis programme by paying the coach up to five hours a week to deliver free community tennis sessions. Sustainability of the programme is a key factor, because without the coach, there is currently not the workforce to keep the programme going. The coach is supported by volunteer activators with the intention that this will eventually improve the sustainability of the programme as it is currently reliant on one resident. Volunteers are gaining skills and experience, and in the future could be considered for funding for a coaching course.

<sup>10</sup> The Active Communities Grant is funding of up to £500 for local residents, groups and organisations to fund ideas that help people be more active where they live.

The GDM team have faced some challenges about how to support the programme. The resident was not part of a constituted group, and therefore accessing funding and support to continue to grow the programme is challenging. At the start of the process, the Active Communities Grant was accessible because it provides equipment for residents who are not part of constituted groups. However, funding such as from the LTA, requires the recipient to be part of a constituted group. Therefore, Well Doncaster have arranged for a collaboration to develop between the coach and Flourish CIC to act as the anchor organisation for the project. Flourish CIC also provide the project with support to develop social media skills, as well as providing free DBS checks and managing the booking system for the courts.



At times, the coach has expressed frustration when it has not been possible to have exclusive use of the tennis courts which counters the principles of open access and community use that underpins the provision of opportunities in parks and open spaces across the borough. The same principle of ensuring open access is applicable and important in relation to the provision of the pétanque courts in the park. They have supported the coach to understand the GDM ways of working and while this is not possible. In addition, the coach has needed support to understand of the best way of putting on events and promoting their work. Through working with the local GDM Community Connector (also funded by the LDP) who has local knowledge, the coach has been well placed to plan celebratory events at the 'best' time to increase their effectiveness at raising awareness and encouraging additional participants to engage with the programme.

A further challenge is that the courts in Hexthorpe Park are in need of renovation. The LTA offers funding for court renovation; however, this funding is conditional on the court being locked with keycode access. This differs from the principles of GDM and DFP in making parks and open spaces freely available to all residents. This poses a challenge between the desire for redevelopment of the courts and perceived 'ownership' and access.

The work with sports clubs falls within one council department whilst the support from Flourish CIC as a community enterprise falls within the Well Doncaster team. It was critical that the resident was supported in a coordinated way by both teams as they have complimentary skill sets and are able to advise in different areas. It is important to ensure that this support remains coordinated ensuring there is clarity over responsibility for developing the coach, the programme, the sport and community to enable resources to be deployed efficiently.

For their work with the Community Tennis Programme, the coach has been awarded runner up in the 2023 National LTA 'Connecting Communities' award. At Hexthorpe Park, there are now approximately 20 people who attend the sessions each week, and there are plans for expansion into other parks in the borough. Moving forwards, the coach would like to expand their

coaching expertise by completing their Level 2. However, there is a significant gap in tennis skills and coaching competencies required between Level 1 and Level 2 qualifications and therefore more experience is required before they can successfully undertake this training. As a result, the coach is being paid to support and shadow a Level 3 coach in Doncaster to gain experience.

## **What is the learning from experiences in Hexthorpe Park?**

### **Encouraging greater opportunities through linking DFP with GDM**

A key lesson and one of the reasons why the work in Hexthorpe Park has been successful is the joining up of the DFP team with other strands of Get Doncaster Moving and LDP funding through the backbone support function. Various members of the GDM team (not part of the DFP team) have supported the different activities including communications and media teams to promote different events, Well Doncaster for work with community connectors and Flourish CIC, as well as the wider GDM team. This emphasises the benefits of the joined-up approach to ensure efforts are not duplicated, connections and networks can be drawn upon and the most impact can be achieved.

### **Ability to seize opportunities when they arise**

The development of the Enigma escape room trails, Pétanque courts and the College bench all arose from unexpected avenues and were not initially part of the bespoke park plans. This shows the value of having experienced staff who are fully embedded in the project and understand the GDM and DFP principles to be able to seize on these opportunities to offer additional activities within parks and green spaces.

### **Strong alignment between projects and DFP/GDM ways of working**

As the development of the pétanque courts and the Community Tennis Programme has shown, when projects align with the vision and way of working that characterises DFP and GDM, these are likely to be successful. For the DFP team, being selective with the groups and individuals they engage with means that they are more likely to encourage distributed leadership and promote sustainability of projects beyond the lifespan of DFP. The team do not progress with every opportunity and prioritise projects that share the same values as GDM and are willing to work in collaboration.

Applications for funding (as evidenced by the Pétanque Club and for the Active Communities Grant) emphasise the importance of residents and community groups understanding GDM and its principles so that they can align their request with the GDM/DFP way of working. This highlights the importance of promoting GDM and the wide range of opportunities so that it is clearly understood across different communities.

### **Consideration of sustainability throughout projects**

Linked to creating the conditions for distributed leadership is the importance of considering sustainability during projects. As the pétanque project has shown, the provision of maintenance tools means that the courts will be looked after beyond the end of DFP involvement. This is not delivery of a one-off project which ends when funding ceases. Furthermore, there is an effort within the tennis programme to ensure there is sustainability by training up volunteers. The

work on Hexthorpe Park has shown the importance of considering sustainability from a very early stage of planning.

### Including local input and community voice

The work and engagement with the college and the pétanque club has shown the importance of including community voice, both for the success of the project, and for having positive benefits for local residents who feel valued. This can help override historical perceptions from communities about working with the council and can ensure that all decisions about plans are insight driven and based on community need. It is local people leading change in their area on matters which are important to them. The Pétanque Club and FoG appreciate the regular communication they have had with the DFP team to feel valued and supported in achieving their goals.

### What is happening next in Hexthorpe Park?

The capital work in the park will be starting soon. The expectation is that the activities DFP have supported so far will pave a positive path for these works to be completed and to bring more people into the park to enjoy and benefit from these. Currently, there are no toilet facilities in the park. This was identified as a barrier by the FoG and the Pétanque Club for growing their membership as some potential members are put off by this lack of facilities. They highlighted how the DFP team are working with stakeholders and are scoping options for reopening the café (with toilets) currently on the site to try and overcome this barrier.

In August, Right Up Our Street, in partnership with DFP, are holding a performance art session in the park, which is based on the premise of interactive art with a community. During the event in August, there will be an, large movable creative puppet, as well as music and arts performances. The aim of this event is to promote parks and that 'good things happen in parks'. This event is being jointly promoted by the Friends of Hexthorpe Park and Right Up Our Street with the intent of increasing the capacity and confidence of Friends of Groups to put events on and engage with wider communities. This is an example of developing capacity through adhering to the principles of DFP's way of working and ensuring sustainability of the activities and events in Hexthorpe Park.

# Appendix 1: How Doncaster currently manage play parks

These two pages include extracts from the Doncaster Play Parks Strategy 2023 which highlights how play parks are managed, the challenges with this and considerations for the future.

## City of Doncaster Council managed play parks

Many play parks in Doncaster are located within parks or wider open spaces. It should therefore be recognised that play parks are managed as part of a wider network of public spaces, green space assets and facilities provided for community use.

Day to day management of play parks is the responsibility of the Street Scene Team which sits within the Economy and Environment Directorate.

The management of CDC play parks is focussed around a rolling programme of play safety and condition surveys and independent assessors are engaged to undertake safety inspections as part of the annual cycle of management. The associated maintenance operations carried out on play parks ensures equipment and surfacing complies with EN1176 and EN1177.

Other services that are managed as part of the wider Street Scene and Environment Service include arboriculture and horticulture, street cleaning, parks, biodiversity and climate change. City of Doncaster Council has a Green Space Team which is responsible for wider parks management, which includes a team of Parks and Countryside rangers.



City of Doncaster Council also facilitates and supports Doncaster Green Space Network which is a collaborative network of community groups, volunteers and organisations with an interest in protecting and enhancing the natural environment and supporting others to do the same.

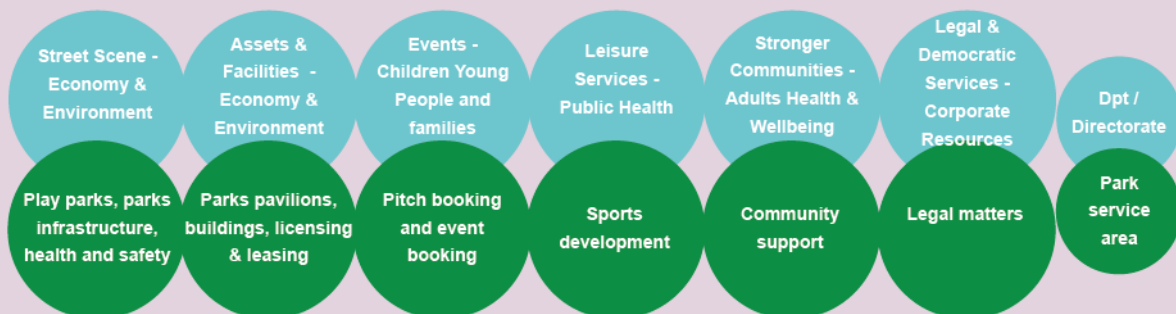
Whilst this network does not necessarily have direct involvement with the management of play parks, the associated groups wider aims, interests and activities may need to be considered as part of future planning and management of play park enhancements in the future.

## Play parks managed by others

Whilst the primary focus of the strategy is on play parks managed by CDC, analysis of the quantity of play parks and access to play includes play parks managed by others. Most play parks in Doncaster are managed by CDC (189), Parish Councils manage around 75 play parks. Around 22 other play parks in Doncaster are managed by other organisations.

These include:

- St Leger (Housing provider for CDC owned housing stock).
- Doncaster Culture & Leisure Trust.
- South Yorkshire Housing Association.
- Bawtry Action for Recreation & Sports.
- Play parks on private developments.



## Delivery of services associated with wider parks management.

Responsibilities are currently spread across CDC's five directorates.

Consultation has highlighted this may present challenges to providing a co-ordinated and strategically planned parks service.



# Considerations for future management

## Issues

Consultation undertaken as part of the development of the strategy has highlighted several issues and opportunities related to effective planning and management of play park provision:

- The current management of parks is at times fragmented. Improved co-ordination of the planning and management of all assets within parks (including play parks) would help to ensure investment and management regimes provide maximum benefit, are cost effective and provide a better experience to communities.
- Management of play parks by the Street Scene Team is often reactive and generally focuses on essential safety work, with little proactive planning for enhancement work due to lack of time and resources.
- Opportunities to involve young people in 'active planning' rather than repeated consultation exercises (which could add to 'consultation fatigue') should be considered. There are existing forums (such as the Youth Council), which may provide future opportunities for better long term engagement.
- There may be opportunities for parks management to be more entrepreneurial. This may also support the development of 'destination sites' which provide a wider offer for communities and families with young children. This could include ice cream kiosks, coffee vans or other facilities that can add to the value of a play park. Money from such activities such as car parking at parks should be ring fenced to spent on park management.
- Management and future enhancements to play parks should consider sustainability and consider recycled features within parks and including recycling bins.
- There is a general consensus of ensuring the quality of play parks over the quantity and number of play parks that are provided. Future maintenance requirements are also a key factor in determining the number of play parks that can be maintained to the highest standard within current resource and management arrangements.
- Inclusivity and ensuring play parks provide for the needs of a wide range of ages and abilities (both physical and mental ability) should be a priority for the future. This includes creating suitable spaces for teenagers and teenage girls.
- Creating fun spaces does not need to involve lots of expensive equipment. There is also room for incorporating QR codes, public art, sensory play, water play.

## Wider financial context

City of Doncaster's revenue budget 2023/24 – 2025/26 report sets out that the Council has identified a funding gap of £10.2m for 2023/24, rising to £22.3m over the next three years (at time of publication). The Council has seen its core Government funding reduce by 27% in real terms since 2010 compared to an average of 20% for England. This equates to a £340 reduction per resident. Local spending is becoming more narrowly focused on Children and Adult's Services, including Public Health, with over 67% being spent in these areas in 2023/24.

## Opportunities for future management

A future effective strategy for play parks would likely benefit from a strategic review of the delivery of services associated with parks which are currently spread across all directorates. This could include the development of a strategic group to ensure co-ordination in the delivery of the strategy. This would help to develop a co-ordinated approach to:

- Identify potential cross benefits across different services and being opportunistic when allocating resources for open space and play park investment.
- Develop open spaces within local areas that act as destinations and offer a range of facilities for different types of users.
- Maximise any income generating opportunities and deciding where income is best re-invested.
- Build a case for site enhancement plans and rationalisation of play parks, ensuring benefits from investment are maximised in locations of most need and not spread too thinly. For example, a neighbourhood will likely derive more benefits from one high quality, high value open space than multiple low value sites that cannot feasibly be maintained to a high standard.
- Provide a more user-friendly service to customers and residents, who would benefit from a co-ordinated approach when interacting and engaging with different service areas associated with parks and open spaces – including play parks.

## Appendix 2: Progress on the Bespoke Park Plan

As part of the initial Bespoke Park Plan devised by LUC a series of interventions and physical improvements to the park have been proposed. The below table indicates what has taken place and what is set to take place as actions against these plans.

LUC Bespoke Park Plan Proposals for Hexthorpe Park	Work to date	Planned for completion 23/24
Enhance cultural links by enhancing the signage and interpretation of The Dell to increase understanding of the site's heritage significance and value	Parks and open spaces across Doncaster have never had a uniform style, identifying parks as relatable assets within the borough. DFP have worked with Council's communications team to produce a unique parks design guide which will 'brand' all the parks under the Future Parks programme as well as other Doncaster Parks in the Future.	Installation of waymarking, signage and interpretation (cultural heritage & biodiversity) directed by the design guide. This will include describing the site's heritage as outlined in the original proposal.
Links to local schools and colleges to be strengthened to promote green spaces to young people	The Friends of group partnered with the local primary school to plant their new orchard in underutilised area of the park. Engagement of young people in the park consultation, alongside the work with the college outlined in the report.	Installation of seating area designed by college student in line with 'Make space for Girls' campaign.
Promote community food growing by creating links to allotments within the wider Hexthorpe areas to link with local businesses and Good Food Doncaster	The image at the end of this table is the design of the interpretation for the orchard, illustrating both the parks design guide. The sign also encourages visitors to pick the fruit when in season.	Elsewhere in Doncaster 'build it and they will come' growing planters have been installed in Doncaster Parks and have been unsuccessful. Unless the second round of consultation shows a clear desire to engage with food growing planters from the community, this will not be progressed in Hexthorpe.

<p>Deliver improved access through introducing segregated shared use circulation routes for walking and cycling along the Trans Pennine Trail and offer cycling proficiency training for young people in conjunction with the 'Bikeability' scheme</p>	<p>'Bikeability' scheme has not been implemented. DFP focus has been on other areas of development within the park.</p>	<p>Mapping and waymarking will indicate walking routes, also certain paths will be for both cycle and pedestrian use including the links to the Trans Pennine Trail.</p>
<p>Expand the programme of community events, including mindfulness walks, conservation activities and use of the bandstand for music events</p>	<p>Events in partnership with a range of stakeholders have taken place since the initiation of DFP. Some have been as a direct result of the DFP work, other events have taken place independently by the the Friends of Group, either with or without DFP support. Events have varied in scale, from small bespoke events such as Foraging walks, through to 'Hexfest' and 'Into the Park'</p>	<p>We will continue to offer support to the Friends of Group in any future events.</p>
<p>Address perceptions of safety through improving lighting on key routes and pruning vegetation to maintain sightlines</p>	<p>Perceptions of safety (feeling unsafe or uncomfortable) were highlighted as the primary barrier to parks usage. To address the perception of safety DFP's approach has not been to use 'go-to' solutions such as CCTV and lighting. Providing natural surveillance through population of positive parks usage has been a key focus. The interventions in this case study are intended to occupy the park with positive experiences and users.</p>	<p>As part of the Capital works, Solar lighting will be introduced. This has been successful on several other parks and open spaces in Doncaster and has proven a valued addition. The purpose of the lighting is to provide a guiding path through the park during twilight hours, it is not intended to light the park and encourage use after dark. Works to open vistas through and provide access into underutilised spaces within the park will be taking place.</p> <p>Work is ongoing in partnership with a range of stakeholders to re-imagine the Bowling facilities, this will have a focus on young people</p>

		and how they would utilise the space to further increase park usage.
Enhance opportunities for active travel by improving the routes which link into the park, as well as greater promotion and awareness		Waymarking/mapping and solar lighting will provide opportunity for active travel. Entrances will also be improved to make the appearance of the park much more accessible as traveling routes, as well as
Promote the range of visitor facilities because the existing facilities and geographically central location offers the potential to become a community hub	For the park's user groups and clubs, support from DFP and wider Council teams is available when they are looking to promote activities within the park.	Welcome signage (incorporating the logos of the parks user groups friends of/petanque/rowing) will be installed.
Promote existing physical activity initiatives such as the Hexthorpe Fit and Fun Walk, 'Go Row Indoor' programme, 'Dance on Doncaster!' and the 'Get Set to Go' initiative		With the introduction of notice boards as part of the capital investment, there will be increased opportunity for community groups to promote their presence in the park.
Promote volunteering opportunities through the Friends of Group, horticultural training days, social responsibility sponsorship models and corporate volunteering packages	<p>The Friends of Group has been offered support through the Doncaster Green Space Network to allow further promotion of their presence in the park and support growth as a group.</p> <p>In terms of capacity the FO group are unable to host or facilitate Corporate Volunteering days. Corporate Volunteering has been trailed in the early stages of the DFP programme. This was in partnership with The Conservation Volunteers, it has not been pursued as a continued part of the Future Parks work.</p>	

**Manage green spaces to promote increased biodiversity**

The gardening/horticultural element to the Friends of Group have now set up regular sessions in the park and are working across the Dell. In collaboration and guidance with the Landscape Designer from the DFP team appropriate planting is taking place.

Areas of the park are being left to naturalise to support enhance biodiversity.

[Naturalisation](#) is an approach to landscape management in a park to increase biodiversity such as planting shrubs/trees/flowers and allowing grasses and wildflowers to grow. This is being monitored by the Naturalisation Trial Project working group as part of a catalogue of parks in Doncaster.

# Jubilee Orchard

## The Orchard

There are a range of fruit trees in this area of the park which comprise a small Jubilee Orchard. They partly encircle a single Whitebeam Sorbus aria, which was gifted from the Tree of Trees sculpture that was erected outside of Buckingham Palace in 2022 as part of HM The Queen's Green Canopy Platinum Jubilee celebrations.



## Heritage Trees

There are a total of 13 fruit trees (apple, pear and plum) which were planted on the 2nd of December 2022 by volunteers from The Friends of Hexthorpe Flatts Park and children from Hexthorpe Primary School.

They include:

- Balsham Apple
- Fillingham Pippin Apple
- Flower of the Town Apple
- Ribston Pippin Apple
- Conference Pear
- Hesse Pear
- Victoria Plum
- Kilnwick Plum

You are welcome to pick the fruit when in season.

## Tree of Trees



© Jonathan Banks

The sapling Whitebeam was planted, on the 10th of October 2022, by volunteers from the Friends of Hexthorpe Flatts Park and the Don Catchment Rivers Trust together with Vice Lord Lieutenant John Holt and former High Sheriff of South Yorkshire Carole O'Neill.

Part of the award included a message from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth which is shown below.

## Queen's Message

"As the planting season draws to a close, I send my sincere thanks to everyone across the country who has planted a tree to celebrate my Platinum Jubilee.

I am deeply touched that so many community groups, schools, families and individuals have made their own unique contributions to the Green Canopy Initiative.

I hope your Jubilee trees flourish and grow for many years to come, for future generations to enjoy."

ELIZABETH R.  
31 March 2022

Example of signage to be used in the Jubilee Orchard and the style of the Design Guide.

