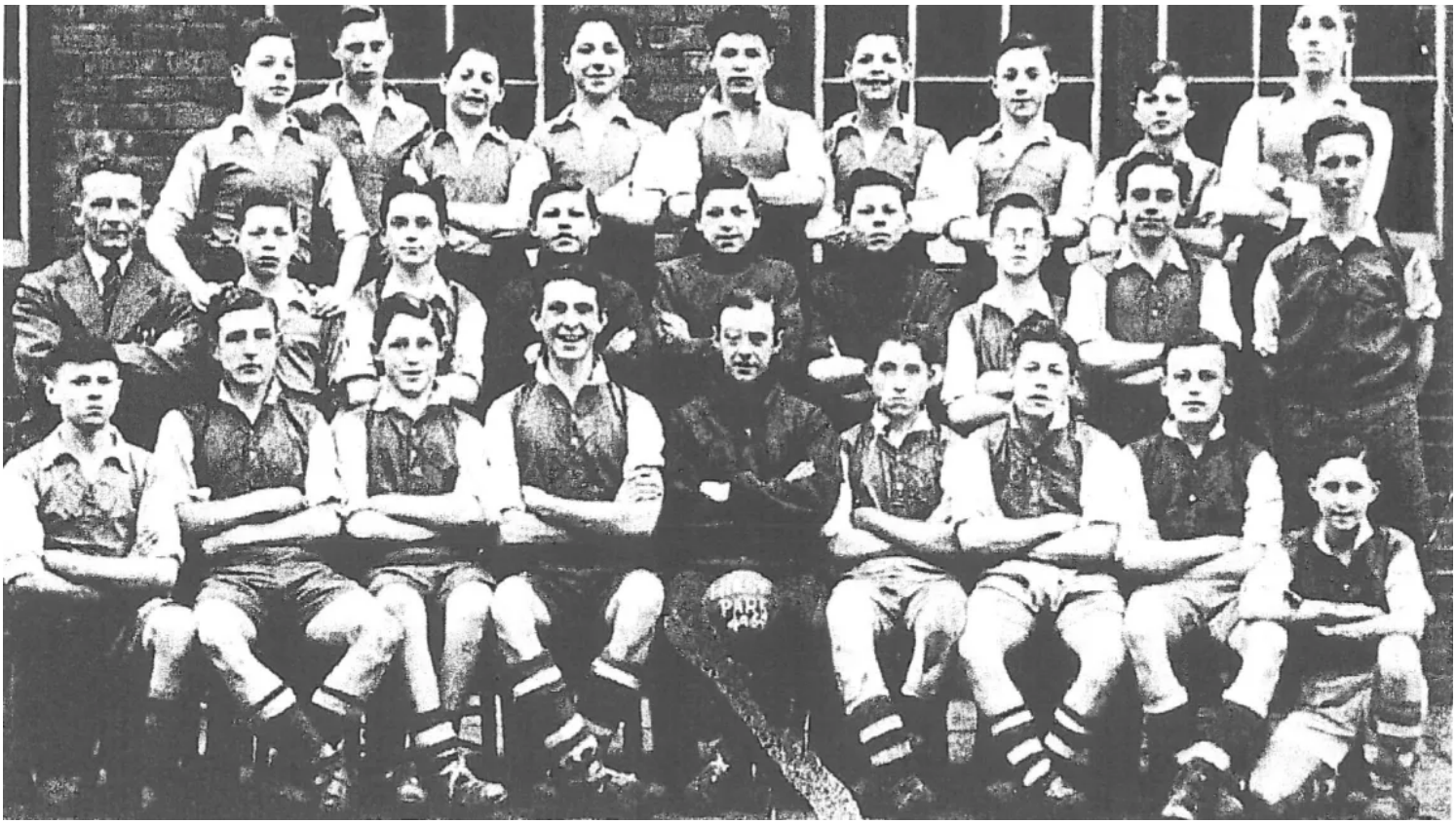


Jack Charlton was scouted by Leeds United at Hirst Park

The Hirst Park Revival project at Hirst Park, Ashington, where the Charlton brothers and Jackie Milburn played as youngsters has been awarded a first-round Parks for People grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and Big Lottery Fund (BIG).

The project is working towards revitalising the park and proposed works include rejuvenating the Flower Park and landscaping, and restoring greenhouses and buildings to provide enhanced spaces and new training facilities for the community.

Play facilities will be enhanced with water play features being reintroduced, and the colourful floral displays that the park is so fondly remembered for will be revived. Work on the development phase will start in the next few weeks with a view to a full application being submitted in autumn 2016. If successful, the major improvements and activities will begin in 2017.

England football star Jack Charlton OBE was spotted playing at Hirst by scouts from Leeds United. He said: “The football pitches where we played were created on the ash tip from the colliery and these were our first training grounds – our very own Wembley.

“The park was a precious place where me and Bobby learned our craft, training and playing for fun, before going on to join Leeds and Manchester United and then playing in the world-cup winning England side in 1966. Hirst Park made it

all possible for us and we would play all day if we could… and we often did."

Development funding of £139,300 has been awarded by HLF, BIG, Northumberland County Council and Ashington Town Council who are contributing £12,400.

Councillor Ian Swithenbank, cabinet member for local services at Northumberland County Council, said: "This project will protect the park and its heritage for the community for another century and enable generations to play, learn and relax in a wonderful space."

The coal mining heritage of the park and local area will play a big part in the long term project with events, activities and interpretation resources being developed to explore and tell its story.

Ivor Crowther, Head of HLF North East, said: "Our parks are where we play some of our first games, where we make some of our first discoveries and where some of us take our first steps to stardom. Thanks to money raised by National Lottery players we are delighted to support plans to renew and restore Hirst Park so it can continue to play an important role in Ashington and community life, as it has for over a century."

Some of the great things the Hirst Revival project plans to deliver:

- The lost garden of Hirst will be recreated and links between the recreation ground and Flower Park will be opened up
- Horticultural training including courses to help families grow their own vegetables
- Research activities and events to engage local people to help us discover more about the heritage of the park, people and the area
- A play zone, including a water play feature and wildlife areas
- The former site of the Woodhorn monument will be developed into a community performance and interpretation space, telling the mining heritage story of the area

Notes to editors

To date, more than £776million of money raised by National Lottery players has been invested in parks since 1996.

Parks for People applications are assessed in two rounds. A first-round pass is given when HLF has endorsed outline proposals and earmarked funding. A first-round pass may also include an immediate award to fund the development of the project. Detailed proposals are then considered by HLF at second-round and as long as plans have progressed satisfactorily and according to the original proposal, an award for the project is confirmed.

About Hirst Park

The park is a much loved focal point for the Hirst area and celebrated its 100th birthday in 2015. Over the years it has been the site of an encampment of evicted miners and their families during the miner's strike of 1926 and it was the original location of the memorial to the 1916 Woodhorn Colliery Disaster. The southern part, known as The Flower Park, is home to the Hirst Park Bowling Club. The floral displays and park keepers of the Flower Park are fondly remembered. Hirst Park House building is currently used by over 60 community groups.

About Active Northumberland

Active Northumberland: is a charitable leisure and cultural trust that manages leisure facilities and services, libraries, supports culture, helps to develop tourism, and promotes healthy lifestyles.

Further information

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