Work starts on Walker Park redevelopment

Scrub clearing by Walker Park entrance

The 36-week scheme is being delivered thanks to a £1.8million grant received from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and investment by Newcastle City Council.

Local contractors Brambledown Landscape Services have been appointed as the contractor to carry out the main onsite works.

The park will remain open during the extensive renovation but there will be minimal disturbance, mainly to the paved areas and entrance closures.

When first opened in 1891, Walker Park provided a social and recreational relief for the working population of shipbuilders and miners in the area – which was a heavily industrialised part of the city. The park has seen some changes over the years with many of the original features including the lake, bandstand and pavilion all being removed. The park remains one of the few surviving features of Walker's industrial period.

The restoration will allow for the improvement of key park facilities including the park centre, play area, amphitheatre, and improvements to current infrastructure such as the re-surfacing of footpaths and the installation of new street furniture.

The Robert Burns statue will also be returning to the park, which was last seen in situ in 1975. The park has been the setting for such events like the Walker Community Festival, East End Fireworks, and ‘World in Walker’ and other social activities including Sunday league football and bowling club.

At this significant stage in the life of Walker Park, it is the perfect time to look back and find out what the park means to people in the area. A project is being devised to record people’s stories, memories and photographs. These might include stories from spending childhood moments in the park, or participating in the ‘World in Walker’ event.

The items might be from yesterday or 100 years ago; and by collecting people’s stories and photographs of the park – the organisers can create an archive for future generations to enjoy. A public event will be arranged for when the renovation work is complete; and once a substantial amount of material has been collected.

Cabinet member for Communities and Facilities at Newcastle City Council, Cllr David Stockdale, said: “Green spaces located in any major cultural city should be treasured and protected; with the forthcoming works taking place at Walker Park being essential for the development and longevity of the site.

“I love the prospect of a project collecting people’s memories and photographs of Walker Park; culminating with an exhibition with those findings. The heritage project will give older generations the chance to reflect and future generations the opportunity to learn. Walker Park is just one of many impressive facilities that we are lucky to have in Newcastle; and this renovation work will hopefully see it restored to its former glory and provide an essential resource for everyone to enjoy."

Ivor Crowther, Head of HLF North East, said: “We’re delighted to support this project which will celebrate the fascinating history of Walker Park and secure a bright future for it at the heart of the community life. Our parks are incredibly important as a place for play, wellbeing and as a connection to our natural heritage, and thanks to money raised by National Lottery players we’ve been able to invest in the future of more than 80 parks across the North East.”

Neville Clay, Director, Brambledown Landscape Services, said: “Brambledown are delighted to have been awarded the contract for the restoration of Walker Park; and are looking forward to working with Newcastle City Council and TGP architects to help bring the park back to how it looked in its heyday and regenerate it to its former glory. As a company we were fortunate enough to have carried out the last major refurbishment works in 1987/8 when the park celebrated its centenary. Several of our employees who were involved in that refurbishment are still with the company today and will be directly involved in this programme of work.

“We will also be working closely with local residents and park users to keep the park open with minimum disruption during the nine month programme and we look forward to handing over a completed and fully functional park in the summer of 2016.”

This is also a great time to become involved in the park’s future, by becoming a park volunteer or getting involved with ‘The Friends of Walker Park’. The group acts as a voice for park users and are hoping to become involved in a number of projects and events.

The renovation work should be complete in the summer of 2016.

Getting involved

If people have any stories or photographs of Walker Park or would like to become a park volunteer or be involved with the Friends of Walker Park group - please get in touch with the park ranger by e-mailing Katherine Knox or by calling on: 0191 281 2082.

For further information about Walker Park in Newcastle please visit the "Parks and Countryside" section of the Council's website or follow the Council's Twitter account @NewcastleCC

Further information

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