It’s coming home! Football returns to Charlton



Hirst Park is where the three Ashington youngsters - Bobby and Jack Charlton and Jackie Milburn - began their journey to footballing legend

The park where three Ashington youngsters began their journey to footballing legend has received a major National Lottery boost.

Hirst Park is at the heart of Sir Bobby Charlton, Jack Charlton OBE and Jackie Milburn’s hometown, where they first began to play and train. The park has gained support from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and Big Lottery Fund (BIG) for a £2.3m project which will see its currently under-used football pitches restored and its footballing heritage revived. The funding will also establish an annual Charlton and Milburn Cup tournament for local youth groups to follow in their footsteps.

[quote=Sir Bobby Charlton]"Hirst Park is as necessary and valuable to the youth of today as it was for me."[/quote]

Sir Bobby Charlton welcomed the news, saying: “Hirst Park is as necessary and valuable to the youth of today as it was for me. Thanks to the generosity of the National Lottery may it continue to flourish for the benefit of the community.”

Jack Charlton, OBE, was spotted playing at Hirst Park 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."

As experienced by the Charltons, parks provide the freedom and space to get active and nurture talent. National Lottery investment in parks is ensuring today's generation has the chance to also make the journey from their local park to Wembley and Rio's Maracanã.

Hirst Park was built in 1915 to provide much-needed green space for a rapidly expanding mining population. Now the project led by Northumberland County Council will enable it to continue its 100-year role at the heart of the community. As well as inspiring the next generation of footballers, people will benefit from a new horticultural training centre, water splash zone and facility for charities. A growing zone including beekeeping and therapeutic gardening will provide valuable wellbeing activities and contribute to the long-term maintenance of the park.

Among the parks and cemeteries receiving funding today are two of London's Magnificent Seven cemeteries, including Brompton Cemetery where Emmeline Pankhurst is buried; the historic Grade II* Sheffield General Cemetery; and the spectacular hillside public park of Rivington Terraced Gardens in Lancashire, the former home of Lord Leverhulme which has views over north Wales and the Lake District. These projects will conserve fragile historic buildings and monuments, enhance wildlife habitats and help people to make the most of these historic landscapes.

HLF Chair Sir Peter Luff, on behalf of HLF and BIG, 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. However we use them, parks are an important part of life, which is why we're delighted to be investing National Lottery players' money in parks and cemeteries from Bristol to Helensburgh to carry out vital regeneration and create some wonderful opportunities for communities and wildlife."

Sports and Heritage Minister Tracey Crouch said: "Having outdoor space to explore and play sport in is vital to every community. The investment from HLF and BIG in Hirst Park and others across the country will restore them for local people to enjoy, and make a real difference by helping nurture our future sports stars."

Making a difference – today's announcement by numbers:

- 388 acres of public land will be restored and improved for communities and wildlife
- 22 structures on English Heritage's At Risk register will undergo much-needed repairs
- 1,589 volunteers will take part in a huge range of project activities, from horticulture to social media
- 2,180 trainees will gain practical experience and qualifications
- The equivalent of 26 full-time jobs will be created
- Parks and cemeteries receiving funding today have an average age of nearly 150 years, proving that parks have been at the heart of communities for a very long time

Grant summary (total of £32m)

HLF and BIG joint grants in England

Initial support*

- Hirst Park, Ashington - £2,389,200, including development grant of £139,300
- Rectory Lane Cemetery, Berkhamsted - £952,200, including development grant of £73,600
- Sheffield General Cemetery Park, Sheffield - £3,528,000, including development grant of £429,600
- South Metropolitan (West Norwood) Cemetery, London - £4,845,800, including development grant of £241,000
- Staunton Country Park, Havant - £2,972,700, including development grant of £122,700

Confirmed grants

- Brompton Cemetery, London - £3,934,400
- Page Park, South Gloucestershire - £1,627,200
- Pump Room Gardens, Leamington Spa - £995,600
- Rhyddings Park, Oswaldtwistle - £1,389,300
- Rivington Terraced Gardens, Chorley - £3,414,100

HLF-only funded grants in Scotland

- Hermitage Park, Helensburgh - £2,333,300
- Saughton Park, Edinburgh - £3,799,100

Notes to editors

More than £776m 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.

Further information

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