Football returns to World Cup legends Bobby and



Jack Charlton returns to Hirst Park, Northumberland

The local park where the footballing legends Sir Bobby Charlton and Jack Charlton OBE began their illustrious careers to become 1966 World Cup Champions has received a £2.3m cash boost from the National Lottery.

Hirst Park sits at the heart of the Charlton brothers' hometown, the former coalmining district of Ashington, Northumberland. It is where they first began to play and train as youngsters - as did their cousin and fellow footballer Jackie Milburn - before going on to play for Manchester United, Leeds United and England's national team.

Sadly, during the decades that followed their success, the park fell into decline. Now, thanks to £2.3m from the National Lottery it will be given a new lease of life. Its currently under-used football pitches are being restored and this grant will help revive its footballing heritage. The funding will also establish an annual Charlton and Milburn Cup tournament for local youth groups to follow in their footsteps.

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."

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 therapeutic gardening will provide valuable wellbeing activities and contribute to the long-term maintenance of the park.

The National Lottery money has been awarded jointly by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and Big Lottery Fund England, through the Parks for People programme. Alongside Hirst Park, a total of 13 parks and cemeteries across the UK are today receiving grants totalling £40m to regenerate and revitalise these vital community spaces. The money will help sustain these important spaces for the future by restoring historic features and planting; creating new facilities including play areas, cafes and toilets; and improving habitats for wildlife.

HLF's Chair Sir Peter Luff, said, on behalf of HLF and Big Lottery Fund: "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 Northumberland to Poole to carry out vital regeneration and create some wonderful opportunities for communities and wildlife."

The 13 parks and cemeteries are:

Heritage Lottery Fund and Big Lottery Fund joint grants in England

- Victoria Park and Watercress Fields, Ashford - £3.2million (Initial support*)
- Boston Manor Park, London - £3.9million (Initial support*)
- Poole Park, Poole - £2.9million
- West Smethwick Park, Sandwell - £4.8million
- Hirst Park, Ashington, Northumberland - £2.3million
- Victoria Park, Stafford - £1.9million
- Staunton Park, Hampshire - £2.9million
- Rectory Lane Cemetery, Berkhamsted - £981,200
- Springfield Park, London - £3.3million
- Marble Hill, London - £4.3million
- Canons Park, London - £4.7million
- Pearson Park, Hull - £3.1million

HLF only funded grants in Wales

Bishop's Park, Abergwili - £1.4million

Notes to editors

To date, more than £900million of money raised by National Lottery players has been invested in parks since 1996.

Big Lottery Fund

The Big Lottery Fund is the largest funder of community activity in the UK. We put people in the lead to improve their lives and communities, often through small, local projects. We are responsible for giving out 40% of the money raised by National Lottery players for good causes. Last year we awarded £583 million and supported around 12,000 projects across the UK for health, education, environment and charitable purposes. Since June 2004 we have awarded over £8 billion to projects that change the lives of millions of people.

State of the UK Parks

In September 2016, HLF published State of UK Public Parks 2016, a follow-up to its 2014 report.

This second report revealed there is a growing deficit between the rising use of parks and the declining resources that are available to manage them. Without urgent action the continuing downward trend in the condition of many of our most treasured parks and green spaces is set to continue.

Whilst new ways of working and generating income are showing potential, more support, shared learning and collaboration is needed to support those that manage public parks. Therefore, this research calls for collaborative action to deliver new ways of funding and managing public parks to avert a crisis.

CLG Select Committee – Public parks inquiry

HLF submitted evidence to the Communities and Local Government Select Committee Inquiry in to the future of public parks. The Committee's recommendations published in early 2017.

Further information

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