

St James Park Southampton

Client:
Southampton City
Council

Spaceshaper delivers the evidence for a successful £1.5million funding bid for a neighbourhood park

St James Park is a green oasis within a deprived urban area in Southampton. Well used and valued by local people, its friends group boasts a membership of more than 400.

A refurbishment programme has been initiated, aimed at improving the space to meet the needs of today's local communities. Work is due to be completed in 2011, the centenary of the park's opening.

Workshop aim

As part of a wider consultation process, Spaceshaper was regarded as an opportunity to re-evaluate the site before proposed improvements were progressed. By targeting young and elderly people, as well as dog walkers, the event would also balance views already obtained from other activities.

What happened at the workshop and what were the results?

Two simultaneous sessions were held, one for adults and the other a pilot version of Spaceshaper 9-14 for younger people.

As well as visiting the site, adult participants completed questionnaires before discussing the results. "You can look at the scores but you don't really get to the bottom of things unless you have a discussion. Spaceshaper is a good prompt for debate," says Southampton City Council head of neighbourhood services Jon Dyer-Slade.

Analysis of the results highlighted the important role the park plays within the local area, as well as its 24-hour accessibility. However, participants generally viewed it as a comfortless place with a perception of poor safety due to inadequate lighting.

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What happened next?

Information from the workshop was used to support a successful £1.5 million Heritage Lottery Fund application. "Spaceshaper provides good evidence. It shows what a range of people think," says Jon. By using an external facilitator "there's a degree of independence to the process as well."

Plans were already well advanced by the time of the Spaceshaper workshop. "But it helped us to refine our thoughts on what we were planning to do," Jon explains. "It's a useful tool with real opportunities to deliver changes."

The council aims to repeat the workshop once the refurbishment works are complete, allowing people's perceptions of the park to be tracked over time.

