



Ministry of Housing,  
Communities &  
Local Government

## Pocket Parks Plus

Meadowbrook Park Refurbishment  
Dartington, Devon.

#pocketparks

## The Headlines

- Transformation of a neglected park into a shared community space
- Removal of rundown units and a defunct splash pool
- Installation of new accessible equipment selected by the local community
- Raising the potential of the space as a community hub for sport and recreation

*"The changes to the park are absolutely incredible, it makes such a difference to have some new play equipment. I see so many more people in the park especially older children enjoying the big basket swing and families on the you and me swing. Its lovely to see parents and children playing together. It is also a huge relief to have the broken splash pool gone and replaced with a boules court used by the older community and a table tennis table that proved popular all summer. It has completely transformed the space and it is beginning to feel more like the community hub it has the potential to be Dartington Recreation Association".*

*"I now spend so much more time in the park along with friends and family because it is a much nicer place to be and the children play happily!" Resident.*

*I am looking forward to more games of table tennis this year, I didn't have anywhere else to play so it is a great resource to have especially with the bats and balls provided" Resident.*

*"Wow what a difference it as made! It looked so old and neglected before and didn't offer anything for local people and now there are games to play, new swings and I don't need to worry about that large pool of dirty water!" Resident.*

## The background to our new pocket park or refurbished park.

In 1963 the Dartington Recreation Association (DRA) was given land on a long lease to provide sport, recreation and educational opportunities for all residents in Dartington parish. Over time the association struggled to maintain the facilities and allowed the premises to deteriorate dreadfully and in so doing alienated many in the village. In 2016 the association was re-launched as a registered charity with an enthusiastic new committee of volunteers full of energy to re-vitalise the facilities and bring the park back into regular use.

The community of Dartington includes 750 school aged children (Dartington Primary School, South West Learning Academy (a unit for children unable to attend mainstream school) and Bidwell Special School) and 200 children at Humpty Dumpty Nursery, all in the immediate vicinity of the park. The village is expanding rapidly, particularly with two newly built housing estates; home to 80 families all within 5 minute walk, and more developments planned, but the DRA remains the main provider of play activities.

The old play area had a small number of rundown units and a defunct splash pool, totally inadequate for a community of this size. The community is becoming fragmented and the park offers the potential to provide a central point to re-connect local residents. The neighbourhood plan and Open Space strategy as well as DRA consultation has identified Meadowbrook as the obvious space within the area to

develop as a community hub for sport and recreation. It offers beautiful natural space and a great location on the doorstep of three local schools. The critical first step in this plan was identified as “replacing dated, broken equipment and providing equipment for older children”. In this way the space will become safer and more usable by all across the community.

## The main outcomes we are trying to achieve through our new pocket park or refurbished park

Outcome	Indicator	Method
Improving the physical appearance of the park/ green space	Opinions of local residents, school children, school council, parents, Dartington facebook community.	Survey
	Physical changes- transformation of the park space	Photos
Increasing the use of park	Measures of people using the park more regularly or staying longer	Survey
	An increased range of reasons that people to visit the park.	Survey
Increased satisfaction with the park	Number of people who are rate the amenities positively including new boules, table tennis, swings and slide surfacing.	Survey
Increased wellbeing and social connections	Number of people who agree the park is a more of a community hub.	Survey
Increase the use of the park by more people from different backgrounds	Age of visitors and activity undertaken.	Observations

## The main partners in our Pocket Parks Plus project

The idea for the project came as the result of consultation with the local community. They have been the voice behind every idea and the driver behind this project. Dartington Recreation Association, DRA has been under new governance for four years; it is run by local people for local people. The hard work of the DRA trustees produced detailed plans for the park that under-went extensive consultation and were approved for planning permission. A volunteer gained the funding and with the DRA managed the project. The DRA also secured the support of South Hams District Council in term of 50% match funding and the support of the landowner; Dartington Hall Trust where needed.

Community support was widespread coming from the three adjacent schools, SUB Aqua club, Outdoor Swimming Pool, youth group, community building and local councillors. In all cases there was ongoing widespread support in terms of; choosing the equipment for the park, promotion of planned changes in the park, raising awareness of closure to the site for the actual improvements to take place, access to facilities including toilets, parking and lockable space during the upgrade works and project

evaluation. Petanque England also offered their on-going advice and support in the creation of the court and establishing a regular group.

All community organisations are united in their wish to have a thriving community space with accessible facilities for all that is a hub for the village. They will continue to support the DRA in their efforts to achieve this in any way possible.

*“It’s great to have a better playground right outside the school, the children love playing there after school and it’s such a beautiful place” Head Teacher, Dartington Primary School.*

*It looks fabulous-well done. It’s just what is needed, Dartington Hall Trust.*

*It’s great, ultimately it will bring more people to the park and hopefully our cafe, Meadowbrook Social Club.*

*It’s great that the needs of our children are being considered, Bidwell Brook School.*

*It looks so much better and we all just want more down here for the kids to do, Dartington Swimming Pool.*

## The main costs /resources associated with the project

Resource	Number of people	Cost £
Staff who ran managed the project	0	0
Staff who delivered the project	0	0
Contractors who delivered the project	5	0
Consultants who helped during the planning/design stage	0	0
Volunteers who delivered the project (you may not need to include costs, if people were not offered any incentives)	15	0
Capital costs for fixtures/fittings in the park		60000.00
Other costs, please specify		
Totals		60000.00

## What has been the impact so far?

### The physical changes to the park/green space

The park was very neglected, the splash pool broke years ago and remained a pool of stagnant water for most of the year. The swings were very old and in need of replacing and the slide surfacing has been worn away. This is the only community park space of any size in the area and it offered very little as well as giving the entire space a look of being run down and neglected.





The grant enabled the DRA to break up the old splash pool and resurface a large area with grass giving the children a larger area to run around in. It also allowed the installation of a petanque court as requested by local residents. The court has a path surrounding it which is wheelchair friendly and there is an entrance onto the court so it is accessible to all. Adjacent to this area there is also now a fixed outdoor table tennis table and bats and balls can be borrowed from Dartington Swimming Pool and Meadowbrook Social Club. The two end of life swing units have been removed and replaced with larger wooden units including a basket swing and adult and child swing. As the only park in the area and having 3 schools surrounding it there are lots of children so more facilities are in demand. The fitting of natural wooden units suits the surrounding natural environment which includes trees, streams and meadows. It is also more environmentally friendly which is considered important by the local community and the DRA. The whole swing and swing and slide area has been surfaced in recycled forest green tyre rubber bond which is resilient and will not have ongoing associated costs or require regular volunteer upkeep.



Consultation was carried out using an online survey, visit to the school council, parent and child school survey, park survey and door knocking. Of the 60 families asked all 60 felt that the change had improved the park.

Feedback includes:

“I love it, I want to go everyday afterschool”

“My favourite is the big swing, we can all fit on that together”

“I like the swing for my mum and me”

“It looks so much nicer than before and it doesn’t get as muddy because of the stuff on the ground”

“We take the River Dart Academy school children over there all the time, it is great to burn some energy”

“I like the table tennis, it’s fun. We played when the pool got to cold and you can shelter under it in the rain!”

“Isn’t it good to get rid of that rubbish puddle”

“I’m so glad I don’t have to bring a change of clothes every time we come to the park now the paddling pool has gone”

“I’d like to start a table tennis championship, it has been a real asset”

“There are more swings now, that’s good because before you had to wait for a swing”

“It is nice to have more grass to let them run around in the sun”

“I’m glad it is wood not brightly coloured plastic”

“It makes a lovely community area”

## Use of the park

The park is visibly busier than before especially on weekends, before and after school. Dartington Swimming Pool and Meadowbrook Social Club immediately border the park and both have said there is an increase in people in the park since the improvements were made. Swimming pool volunteers said the “table tennis was really popular, and it worked well with us supplying the bats and balls”.

Of the 60 families asked, 59 said they visited more regularly or stayed longer since the improvements were made. When asked why people came to the park 16 said for children over 5; 19 said for children under 5; 15 said for nature; 2 came to play table tennis and 4 came to relax.

The facilities on the park are now used during school hours to support children from The River Dart Academy; a school for students whose school placements have broken down and Bidwell Brook; a school for children with additional needs. Staff from The Academy said “it’s great for them especially the big basket swing as the older ones pile on to it, whereas before there wasn’t anything they could really go on, it gives us all a break really being outside”.

## Satisfaction with the park/green space

Of people asked 3 thought the refurbishments were above average and 57 thought they were excellent. The community had been hugely supportive of the upgrade and there is a general positive feeling around the potential of the space. Previous consultation has demonstrated the high demand within the community for this to become a truly magnificent space for all the community to enjoy.

The children said they are happier because there are more swings and a variety of swings. Parents commented that the wooden equipment and stone paths made the space more attractive. The new surfacing across the slide and both swing sets also means that parents can sit close to their children playing, put their bags down without everything getting muddy. The Academy also noted that the surfacing meant that they could still come when it has been heavily raining. Families with different age children appreciated the basket swing for older ones and toddler seats for younger children. There was also a sense that it is well liked as an afterschool play space and a meeting space for the wider community.

### **Voluntary support for the park**

There have been 31 volunteers involved in the park upgrades. Without volunteers the project would not have happened. Volunteers did the community consultation; planned the design, tendered the project, sought planning permission, secured funding, oversaw construction, solved problems and evaluated the project. Volunteers from the pool assisted with deliveries of materials and equipment. They also managed the table tennis during opening hours.

The on-site Meadowbrook Social Club was able to act as the eyes and ears of the project to update us on progress. Volunteers from Bidwell Brook School and Sub Aqua were also able to support contractors getting on and off site and offer parking.

The park is maintained by Dartington Recreation Association's 6 trustees and 15 volunteers. This includes weekly equipment inspections and annual RoSPA inspections. Litter is also collected regularly, grass cut and surfacing topped up when needed. Behind the scenes there is a great deal of day to day work undertaken in terms of managing budgets, meeting legal requirements and coordinating the running of the DRA.

### **Biodiversity and environmental changes**

Materials used in the new park equipment were as environmental as possible, using wooden swings and recycled tyres for surfacing, local stone for pathways and the boules court. All swings and metal removed from the site were recycled. Local contractors were used to undertake the works to reduce the impact of travel.

There is now a larger expanse of grass that was previously tarmac. Daffodils were planted along the fence line where a trench had to be dug creating a border of early nectar producing flowers for the insects to feed on.

### **Social mixing**

The park design is inclusive and has involved extensive consultation to ensure that the whole communities needs are being met. When asked if families considered the park a more social place 47 agreed it was now.

Comments include:

"It's a great place to get together"

"I've met so many more parents in the park and now feel much more part of the community"

"It's so nice to see my children playing with all their school friends"



## What made these changes possible?

1. Energy and enthusiasm of the DRA trustees and wider network of volunteers.
2. Good partnership working between the DRA, community organisations and other land users.
3. Section 106 and pocket parks funding focusing on really run-down parks.
4. Initial work already in place; designing park, tendering and securing contractors, seeking planning permission which allowed a quick project initiation and completion.
5. Wide community support for the project.

## What has been learnt so far

As a volunteer run organisation the DRA has really recognised the importance of having a good team of volunteers supporting the project and willing to work quickly and flexibly to make dreams become reality. There was a lot of preparation work and actual project management needed during the construction phase.

Whilst the DRA did its best to plan costs at the tender stage during construction extra costs arose in response to unforeseen circumstances e.g. the slope of the land. Fortunately, the DRA secured additional funds to cover costs.

The planning stage of the project took approx. a year including planning permission discussions. Much of this work had been done by the time funding was secured, this was essential to meet the funding timeline requirements.

The volume of work was high and the DRA really appreciate how this project was made possible by volunteers hard work. The more volunteers the better able to respond to things as and when they arise that the DRA are. Through sharing ownership of the project amongst many volunteers the DRA widened the community that were involved in the project and expanded their network of supporters.

Good communication between site users and organisations is essential. In turn contractors using sub-contractors was at times challenging in terms of communication.

Attention to detail is essential and requires constant monitoring in terms of colours of equipment, precise location of kit, materials used in equipment to ensure that where there is a choice, the right decisions were made. There were some difficulties building the Petanque Court as the contractor had no experience building them, the specifications provided, and materials sourced didn't result in a quality playing surface. This required additional research and on-going discussions with the contractors. Again, having a flexible volunteer team proved invaluable.

Doing the construction in stages rather than shutting the whole park ie one piece of equipment at a time as well as avoiding the busy summer heat minimised the impact on park users.

Community recognition of the need for the project and positive feedback has been very encouraging for all. Equally, there are always ways that things can be done better and not everything will suit everybody. In future works it would be good to include costs of insurance increases, new signage required and RoSPA training to assist with weekly checks.

The park upgrade has been a huge success and is much loved across the community. This success also raised hopes of the DRA and others in terms of making other upgrades to the run-down facilities and boosted the respect amongst the community for the DRA.



## Contact details

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