

Plymouth University Community Innovation Drake's Place Community Space

About the project

Summary

Our vision was to sensitively and sustainably regenerate the historically significant Drake's Place Reservoir and Gardens, a dilapidated site at the heart of the most diverse and transient community in Plymouth, where many people have little or no access to green space and nature, and life expectancy is one of the lowest in the city. Reinstating Drake's Place as a thriving green community space has engendered local pride, enhanced well-being, and helped ensure that the site's heritage is conserved for future generations.

Project partners

Plymouth City Council – land owners from whom the space is rented on a 99 year lease

Friends of Drake's Place and Friends of Devonport Park

Cornwall Environmental Consultants (CEC) – lead consultants and landscape architects

Ryearch – principal contractor; Randall Simmonds – contract management and chartered quantity surveying

Hydrock – restored the fountains, cascade, promenade and heritage railings

J+D – consultancy, design and management (CDM) coordination

Le Page Architects – overseeing the restoration

Treseder Nurseries – planting advice to ensure authenticity

The results

The approach

Extensive consultation both internally with Plymouth University staff and students and externally with local residents, community groups and local organisations, some of whom had an existing relationship with the University and others who were not making use of Drake's Place, meant the Project Team could thoroughly explore the potential of this space. As a result Drake's Place is recognised for its historical significance and valued as a welcoming green space enjoyed for its heritage as well as for education, leisure and recreation. The results of the public consultation significantly informed the restoration and are still influencing the activities and events that are making this community space buzz with activity.

Our goals

To undertake a restoration project that would create a community space enjoyed and valued by people of all ages and backgrounds.

**TRANSFORMING
LIVES
WITH
PLYMOUTH
UNIVERSITY**

Profile

- Plymouth University
- 27,000 students (includes those studying with partner colleges)
- 3,000 staff
- First university in the world to receive the Social Enterprise Mark

Category supported by



To ultimately increase audience engagement with Drake's Place, growing the total number of users and proactively diversifying the user base, sustainably attracting under-represented audiences to enjoy the benefits of the gardens and reservoir.

Obstacles and solutions

Lack of funding to restore Drake's Place as a community space managed within University campus operations	Secured Heritage Lottery (HLF) and Big Lottery Funding, along with University investment; gained an HLF adviser to guide the restoration project and activity plan delivery; embedded Drake's Place within the Campus Management Framework with a Parks and Reservoir Forum (which also helped secure Green Flag accreditation)
Community cynicism or lack of awareness about the restoration and potential community use of the space	Ensured public consultation was easy to engage with, taking it out to the community as well as across the University, creating a shared vision; appointed a Community Engagement Officer for 5 years to deliver activities and engage community in using the space, working within the External Relations team with access to stakeholder engagement, marketing and communications professionals – having a dedicated web presence www.plymouth.ac.uk/drakesplace and embracing social media; created and grew the Friends of Drake's Place as a channel for community voices to be heard and to foster joint working with local people and organisations
Drake's Place was largely inaccessible to people with disabilities	Level access was created to the space from both the city and the campus side of Drake's Place, with clear and attractive signage
Local community feeling that the space is exclusive to the University, being 'on campus'	Targeting specific audiences to engage them in Drake's Place (and wider University) events and activities, and enabling them to use the space for their own purposes free of charge (eg. community festivals, multi faith city tours; school visits)
Establishing a largely forgotten but historically important space as a sustainable community asset	Ensuring Drake's Place is embedded within city events such as Lord Mayor's Day, Fishing Feast (celebrating the source of the city's water from Dartmoor) and Ping! freely accessible outdoor table tennis; timely evaluation of activities and events in Drake's Place and monitoring usage to inform future event/activity delivery; ensuring the Friends' Volunteer Group are involved in a meaningful and sustained way with Drake's Place

Performance and results

37 formal visitor counts and 5 visitor surveys have been completed post restoration, showing a marked increase in both user numbers and range of visitors, and visitor satisfaction. The Reservoir Café has seen a significant increase in turnover and profit since the restoration, over 150% increase in turnover since the restoration was completed in 2014.

6 significant community events with city partners have been held in Drake's Place along with many student and staff events and activities – even a teddy bear's picnic for local nursery and primary school children!

Drake's Place won two awards in the city's 2014 Abercrombie Awards: Best Public Space and the People of Plymouth Award (voted for by the public).

In 2015, the space received Green Flag accreditation by environmental charity Keep Britain Tidy in recognition of its good maintenance, sustainability and community involvement.

The future

Lessons learned

Communication – we have learnt that there can never be too much communication with our staff, students, local community groups, Friends and the wider public. This is helping us embed Drake's Place into the heart of the local community and make sure that it remains an integral part of community life.

Community engagement in the life of Plymouth University – there are many ways in which our local community can engage with campus activities from attending public lectures, art exhibitions and theatre performances to having free eyecare with our optometry students or participating in academic research, but this is not widely known. Our successful engagement of the local community in Drake's Place has led to the recent development of a University wide 'Come On In' campaign to showcase what other opportunities exist, entwined with this wonderful community space www.plymouth.ac.uk/comeonin

Sharing your project

Drake's Place has a growing social media presence with almost 750 friends on Facebook and over 400 followers on Twitter. The Drake's Place web pages feature past and upcoming events, general updates and photos of activities and events held in the space, volunteering opportunities, and a space booking and feedback/suggestion facility. As many events in Drake's Place are delivered with our community and city partners, access to this community space is further shared across their promotional channels.

What has it meant to your institution to be a Green Gown Award finalist?

New life has been breathed into Drake's Place and being a Green Gown finalist is fantastic national endorsement of our achievements. It reflects the commitment and hard work that has gone into restoring and maintaining this special community space, for the staff, students, contractors and community friends who have all invested so much into its success and continue to do so. Plymouth University's reputation for sustainability is already very strong and being a finalist for Drake's Place enables us to build on this even more.

Further information

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www.plymouth.ac.uk/drakesplace

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