

The value of public parks

THE HISTORY OF PUBLIC PARKS

The first public park in England was Derby Arboretum which was created in 1840 by Joseph Strutt as a haven for his textile workers. He wanted to give people a place to exercise and relax while broadening their minds. The botanist and landscape gardener John Claudius Loudon designed the green space which has become a home for tree specimens from around the world.



Strutt hoped it would be good for workers and their families: ‘bring about social improvement, develop their moral conduct, teach them about botany and also enhance their industriousness’. It was the first time that workers had a place to go on a Sunday afternoon to get away from the mills and their homes. Other parks in this era (such as the Pleasure Gardens that now form the east side of Pittville Park) were open only to paid subscribers.

Birkenhead Park in Merseyside was opened in 1847 and was the first publically funded civic park in the world. It was designed by Joseph Paxton and was an inspiration for Central Park in New York, USA.

Pittville Park was formally opened to the public on April 25th 1894 and consisted of the east side of the park and part of the west side and included the Agg-Gardner Recreation Grounds. (for more detail see the sheet *History of Pittville Park*).

ENVIRONMENTAL VALUE

A public park in an urban environment can provide cooling air and the absorption of atmospheric pollutants. Vegetation allows people to be 'close to nature' with the associated benefits in mental health together with the pleasures of seeing the trees, flowers, and animals in the urban situation.

SOCIAL VALUE

Public parks are open to all, regardless of ethnic origin, age, gender or physical ability. When properly designed and cared for they bring communities together, provide meeting places and foster social ties. People can play sport and participate in other physical activities for enjoyment and to improve their health. They are part of the identity of an area and provide a sense of space for local communities.

ECONOMIC VALUE

A high quality public environment can have a significant impact on the economic life of a town. As towns compete with each other attractive parks help attract customers, employees and services. They also help sell houses as house-buyers want to be near green spaces. (For more information see the Cabi Space report *The Value of Public Space*.)

WHAT CAN HARM A PUBLIC PARK?

- Vandalism and bad behaviour.
- Lack of funding to maintain the park.
- Selling off the park or part of it for development.

When visiting Pittville Park:

1. Make a list of all the things you can do in the park (have a look at a *Welcome* board).
2. Make a list of the things you can do to help to look after our public parks.
3. What would you like to see in a public park – have a go at designing your own ideal public park.