

The Green Flag Award Scheme

Raising standards in parks and green spaces.

Sarah Egerton, Press officer for the Civic Trust guides us through the current scheme and gives a real example.

Background

The Green Flag Award Scheme, launched in 1996, is managed by the Civic Trust on behalf of the Government's Communities and Local Government Department and the Green Flag Advisory Board, comprising founders of the scheme, sponsors, winners and judges.

The Scheme is funded by Communities and Local Government, with support from English Heritage, Natural England, Countryside Council for Wales and the Welsh Assembly.

There are currently 423 Green Flag Award winning sites across England and Wales with the award firmly established as the national standard for parks and green spaces.

2006 saw the 10th anniversary of the Green Flag Award Scheme and marked a decade of substantial improvement to our parks and green spaces.

What makes a Green Flag Award winner?

The criteria for winning a Green Flag Award take into account the varied role a green space plays within its community. They embrace diversity and distinctiveness, recognising the importance of individual green spaces and their value to people.

An award is given to a particular site, not the organization which manages it. Any freely accessible public space can apply and application must be made annually if Green Flag status is to be retained. This ensures that high standards are maintained. There are two stages to the judging process. The application and management plan are reviewed in detail and then judges visit the site. The process, based on eight clear criteria, presents considerable opportunity to highlight local issues. The criteria are:

- A Welcoming Place
- Healthy, Safe and Secure
- Clean and Well Maintained
- Sustainability
- Conservation and Heritage
- Community Involvement
- Marketing
- Management

Park managers, rangers, friends and other members of the local community are sought out by judges to provide a complete picture of the dynamics of a green space. Judges meet representatives of local community groups to ensure they have been involved in developing the park management plan.

There are over 400 Green Flag Award judges and all generously volunteer their time. The process enables judges to learn from other green space professionals. They take new ideas and solutions home to improve their own parks and green spaces. This helps those sites not currently meeting the criteria to gain a Green Flag Award in the future. Many local authorities have embraced the scheme by encouraging their green space managers to get involved.

Become a Green Flag Award judge

As the number of applications continues to increase, the scheme is always recruiting new judges. Anyone with a background in environmental management can become a judge. Many are active in park management, horticulture and arboriculture but judges also come from wider backgrounds including community engagement in green spaces. In addition to sharing best practice, judges also benefit from training, personal development, networking and becoming a member of the Judges' Association, with access to an online forum.

For further details, please contact Paul Todd on: 0151 231 6904 or email: ptodd@civictrust.org.uk

The benefits of flying a Green Flag

Attaining Green Flag Award status brings a range of benefits: it –

- demonstrates commitment to raising standards in maintenance and management of green spaces.
- brings an enhanced tourist profile, provides opportunities for additional funding and regeneration, creates an attractive neighbourhood.
- establishes a sense of pride in a green space, which reduces vandalism and anti-social behaviour.

Rangers and friends groups have often been reticent to shout about their fantastic achievements in providing and looking after quality green spaces. As the scheme grows more and more people are becoming aware of what it means to have a Green Flag Award in their neighbourhood. The scheme's website at www.greenflagaward.org.uk comprises a vibrant 'What's On Guide' featuring hundreds of events taking place at award winning sites throughout the year.

Community involvement is a crucial factor in any Green Flag Award and the hard work of thousands of volunteers who give their time freely is celebrated at a special awards ceremony in July each year. This year's event will be held in Leeds on 28th July, recognising the efforts of all who have helped to raise the standards of our parks and green spaces.

If you would like your park(s) to join the existing 423 winners and be recognised as attaining the national standard, then raise the Green Flag Scheme at your next management meeting. To invite the Green Flag Award team along to discuss any scheme please contact them on: 0151 231 6904.

For further information, visit www.greenflagaward.org.uk or email ptodd@civictrust.org.uk

Case Study – Albert Park

Background

Albert Park is a 30 hectare urban park in central Middlesbrough. For many people the Park is their only access to high quality green space.

Despite being popular for recreation, the site lacked wildlife and the resources to attract it. Feedback from Green Flag Award judges in 2004 highlighted Albert Park's weak biodiversity.

The Tees Valley Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) had a very brief mention for Albert Park under amenity grassland and referred to parks as sometimes 'little more than green deserts'.

"This seemed out of step with a recent restoration programme and efforts we had made following our previous Green Flag Award feedback," says Community Park Ranger Francine Marshall. "There had been changes, not only in the physical layout of Albert Park but also how it was being managed."

Action Stations!

Contact was made with Tees Valley Wildlife Trust and in 2005 a series of training workshops were arranged that were open to the Park and other council staff.

The outcomes were diverse. Initially staff began to identify 'wilder' areas. A programme was developed to put up bird boxes around the site and wildflower plugs were planted in the meadow. Other areas were left to spontaneously regenerate.

Events and activities were also developed to help the public explore the biodiversity of the park and explain what was hoped to be achieved. A successful application was made for a Nuffield Science Bursary student to carry out detailed work and birds and butterflies are now regularly monitored and recorded by park rangers.

In addition, a BAP specifically for Albert Park has now been written supported by the Industry Nature Conservation Association.

Francine explains: "It is often the case that when someone leaves, things don't get picked up again. We wanted a comprehensive document with clear instructions and suggestions, for example, species to look out for, times when birds are nesting, so work could be planned around this."

"The Park BAP contains instructions and information so that anyone can see what we are trying to do and the projects we are trying to develop. And of course it demonstrates to the Green Flag Award scheme that we are putting things into practice!"

Francine added: "The Green Flag Award is great for us as well as our park users. It helps us to focus on our work and provides us with a benchmark to measure our progress."

For further information contact Francine Marshall on: 01642 230919 or email: francinemarshall@middlesbrough.gov.uk