

Gateshead's Chase Park secures National Lottery windfall of just under £1million

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Friends of Chase Park celebrate the news of just under £1million National Lottery investment

Today, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and Big Lottery Fund awarded just under £1million (£922,900) to local community group Friends of Chase Park (FoCP) and Gateshead Council to progress plans that will see them work together on the restoration and improvement of Chase Park in Whickham.

The master plan, which focuses on the conservation of many of the heritage features within the park, as well as improvements to its leisure facilities and events programme, was drawn up in consultation with local award-winning landscape architects Southern Green.

Established in 2009, resident-led voluntary group Friends of Chase Park have worked closely with Gateshead council over the last two years to develop the bid for funding from the HLF. The application highlighted the need to protect the park's heritage for future generations to enjoy and bring in new facilities that will benefit the whole community.

Chair of Friends of Chase Park, Alan Scott, said: "We are absolutely thrilled to have been awarded this HLF and Big Lottery Fund grant and look forward to working with Gateshead Council and Southern Green to see the plans for the renaissance of our beloved Chase Park come to fruition.

Returning the park to its former glory will be something the whole community can be proud of for many years to come.

“So many people have worked hard to get us where we are today and I give huge thanks to everyone involved for the effort and contributions made. Who would have dreamed we would be in this position as we set out on our journey all those years ago.”

Councillor Linda Green, Heritage Champion for Gateshead Council, said: “The council worked in partnership with the Friends of Chase Park to develop the bid for funding and I’m delighted that we have been successful. Some areas of the park have deteriorated and gradually become underused over the years and we’re keen to get this park back to how it should be and encourage more people to come and use this fantastic outdoor space for years to come.”

“Government funding cuts to the council means that our ability to resource our parks has reduced dramatically. Parks play an important role in the health and wellbeing of our residents and working in partnership to develop bids such as this is one way we’re working to preserve for the future the heritage assets in the borough.”

Friends of Chase Park and Gateshead Council will now work together with Southern Green on construction works to deliver the activity plan within the park over a three year period.

The plans for the park include:

- Restoration to the listed windmill, entrance gates, paths and ornamental gardens
- Remodelling and enhancement of the existing toddler play area
- Resurfacing of tennis courts
- New facilities to include improved teenage play and skateboard area
- Outdoor gym/trim trail
- Development of community garden and orchard
- New street furniture, signs and interpretations/artworks of heritage points of interest

HLF’s Chair Sir Peter Luff, said, on behalf of HLF and the Big Lottery Fund: “We all benefit from spending time outside in the fresh air, so it’s vital that we look after our green spaces, particularly in dense urban areas. National Lottery players’ money will give a boost to Chase Park, helping make sure it has a great future.”

The funding comes from the [Parks for People programme](#) which uses Lottery funds to support the regeneration, conservation and increased enjoyment of public parks. The programme aims to improve the local environment and puts parks firmly back at the heart of the community life. With this in mind the plans also include the recruitment of a part-time community liaison officer, to be based in the park, who will engage with the local community and develop a programme of activities and events.

For more information about Friends of Chase Park or to view the full plans visit [The Friends of Chase Park website](#). The group are always interested in hearing from others who would like to get involved.

History - The park was formerly the private estate of Whickham House, one of several fine Georgian mansions built for prominent families around Whickham's village green. The earliest evidence of people living at Whickham House is noted as 1714. Prominent families residing at the house included the Rawling and Wilkinson families. Mr J Wilkinson was a mineral water producer who sold the site to Gateshead Council in 1937. Although the house was demolished in 1960, the stable block remains as well as the ornamental gardens containing mature trees, shrubs and lawns.

Other historic landscape features within the park include the Grade II listed windmill, described as new in 1720, the high sandstone retaining walls which form the western and northern boundaries of the park and the entrance gates from Rectory Lane and Broom Lane.

The park was developed for recreation in the 1930s as part of the King George's Fields Foundation initiative. King George's Fields are public open spaces dedicated to the memory of King George V (3 June 1865 – 20 January 1936). When the King George's Fields Foundation was dissolved in 1965, there were 471 King George Fields, all over the UK. Two stone crests are built into walls either side of the Broom Lane entrance.

Further information

Gateshead Council Communications Team, Lee Hansom, on 01914 332 025.

Friends of Chase Park, Alan Scott or Kathryn Malone on 07500 683 485 / 07771 843 247.

HLF press office, Tom Williams on 02075 916 056 / 07973 613 820.

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