



Pavilion Gardens parkrun Case Story

By Pete Bailey, Co-Event Director – March 2023

After 4 months, and 13 events, some reflection on the Pavilion Gardens parkrun...

Early in 2022 I was approached by Caz Whittle (High Peak Borough Council) with a view to transforming the existing monthly Pavilion Gardens 5k into a Pavilion Gardens parkrun. Initially unsure at the level of time commitment and other resources this would involve, I nonetheless felt a flutter of excitement at the prospect that Buxton might finally join the parkrun family, and that our tried and tested monthly 5k might, after 10 years, be ready to mature into something which could have a much greater impact. The catalyst for change was most assuredly Caz, but she found willing accomplices within the Council (HPBC), at the Pavilion Gardens, in the local parkrun Ambassador (Karen Weir), and the Committee of Buxton AC. HPBC provided the bulk of the funding, and Buxton AC the remainder, but most significantly a wave of popular support began to grow. The course was inspected and approved, a local engagement event attracted an astonishing response, and before we knew it around 50 people had committed to volunteering to support the event. This was highly emotional for me – to have dozens of people I had never met or barely knew offering their services was testament to the power of parkrun. I had long seen both the benefits and drawbacks of how people perceive clubs, and here we were with the opportunity to be inclusive and develop opportunities for everyone to be more active, without feeling that they needed to be “good enough” to join in. Naturally, I have also seen that running clubs and other organisations, businesses etc. benefit when parkrun is present, and we are already seeing the fruits of this.

Crucially for me, a number of these volunteers expressed their intention to be Run Directors – it was so important to spread the load. Others offered to coordinate volunteers, focus on social media, assist with admin tasks, signage, storage and producing the equipment needed to make everything work smoothly. Significant assistance was provided by Andy Mellor and the team at Monsal Trail parkrun who gave so much of their time to mentor the Pavilion Gardens team and trusted us to “take over” their event prior to the launch of our own.

A practice event was held in October 2022 with the launch event on November 5th. Fireworks were expected, but nothing could prepare us for the crowds that came to the Gardens that day. Possibly Buxton’s worst kept secret, Event No 1 attracted 278 participants and approaching 30 volunteers. Event 3 had even greater numbers (281), although our average attendance this winter has now settled to around 200, still many more than I’d envisaged. The majority of these people have been tourists, often staying in local hotels and B & Bs, combining parkrun with other activities and making a day or weekend of the journey. Increasingly local people are noticing that parkrun has come to Buxton and that it’s not just for “athletes”. The increasing number of PBs bears testament to the benefits for local people of making parkrun part of their weekly routine. The new role of “parkwalker” has been embraced and encourages people to complete the 5k at their own pace, doing as much as they feel able at a pace they are comfortable with.

The Pavilion Gardens parkrun was deliberately launched in November to avoid peak tourist times and to give the Core Team a chance to embed the event gradually. We were hoping to avoid conflict with other Pavilion Gardens users, and I think we have achieved this. The Pavilion Gardens Café has benefitted from extra customers. We have been forced to cancel 3 events due to wintry conditions, but this doesn't seem to have affected interest. If anything, volunteers have benefitted from the breaks. As the weather improves, we expect attendances to increase. We also expect the demand for al fresco refreshment to grow, which will benefit the retail outlets within the Gardens and provide a better experience for participants, volunteers and supporters. The planned development of a Sunday morning Junior parkrun will spread these benefits over another day.

For me, parkrun is about people, relationships and conversations rather than times and attendance figures, although they can be a measure of success. The myriad of conversations (written, pictorial and spoken) I have had with people I have only met through the Pavilion Gardens parkrun have left me with a sense of satisfaction that sustains me from event to event. Far from dreading the responsibility as I thought I might, I cannot wait for Saturdays, and would prefer not to miss any events. The feedback from tourists is a continual delight and the kind words of locals an affirmation that we are building something good for Buxton. The support of our volunteers and the Core Team is humbling and inspirational. Everyone has their own reasons for participating in parkrun, and all are equally valid and valued. I am thankful to have had the opportunity to be part of the process and hope to be for many years to come.