

Chatsworth the adventure playground

Life



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Chatsworth House, the home of the 12th Duke and Duchess of Devonshire, is one of the finest and most palatial houses in the UK, set in over 1000 acres of parkland in the Peak England. The original house was built over 400 years ago and rebuilt starting in the seventeenth century. The house is vast, with 175 rooms lit by over 2000 light bulbs, and with a roof that covers 1.3 acres. Chatsworth's many rooms are full of treasure including famous works of art by painters such as Rembrandt, and tapestries, sculpture. Valuable furniture, musical instruments and even 63 antique clocks which need winding every day.

The gardens cover over 105 acres with more than five miles of footpaths that guide visitors past fountains, small and large (the largest is 28 meters high), cascades, streams and ponds, all of which are fed by gravity from four large man-made lakes on the moors above the grounds. The gardens are a mix of formal and informal areas. There are sculptures, statues, rock gardens, mazes and garden views that constantly change with the seasons, all managed and maintained by a small team of 20 gardeners. Both the house and gardens are open from March to December and are just two of the experiences available to visitors. Others include an orangery, gift shop, restaurant and farm shop, which are open all year round, and the surrounding parkland which is open to visitors for walking, picnics and swimming in the river. The whole estate is owned and managed by an independent charity. Close to the house and gardens .

, with a separate admission charge, is the farmyard and adventure playground. The farmyard is a popular attraction for families and provides close encounters with a variety of livestock including pigs, sheep, cows,

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chickens and fish. The staff provides daily milking demonstrations and animal-handling sessions. The woodland adventure playground is accessed through the farmyard and is one of the largest in the country with a range of frames, bridges, high-level walkways, swing, chutes and slides. Simon Seligman is the Promotion and Education Manager at Chatsworth house. As head marketing he is closely involved in the design and development of new services and facilities. He explained the way they do this at Chatsworth.

“ It is pretty abstract and organic process. Looking back over the last 25 years we either take occasional great leaps forward or make frequent little shuffles. The little shuffles tend to be organic changes usually in response to visitors feedback. The great leaps forward have been the few major changes that we decided we wanted to bring about. ” One those great leaps forward was the decision to replace the children’s adventure playground attached to the farmyard, Simon explained. The existing adventure playground was clearly coming to the end of its life and it was time to make a decision about what to do with it. It was costing us about 18, 000 each winter to maintain it and these costs were increasing year on year.

We believed we could get a better one for around 100, 000. The trustees asked me, the deputy estate manager with line responsibility for the farmyard and the farmyard manager to form a group and put forward a report to the trustees setting out all the options. We asked ourselves several detailed questions and some fundamental ones too, such as why are we replacing it and should we replace it at all? We came up with four options: remove it, do nothing, replace with similar, replace with substantially better. It was felt that removing the playground altogether was a realistic option. The Duke

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and Duchess had view that Chatsworth should be true to its roots and traditions. Whereas one could make an argument for farmyard being part of a country estate, an adventure playground was considered to fit less well. The down-side would be that the lack of adventure playground, which is a big attraction for families with young children, could have an impact on visitor numbers.

However, there would be saving in terms of site maintenance. The “do nothing” option would entail patching up the playground each year and absorbing the increasing maintenance cost. This could be a low-impact option, in the short term at least. However, it was felt that this option would simply delay the replace/remove decision by five years at most. The current playground was no longer meeting international safety standards so this could be a good opportunity to replace the playground with something similar. It was estimated that a like-for-like replacement would cost around 100, 000. Replacing the playground with a substantially better one would entail a much greater cost but could have an impact on visitor numbers.

Simon and his team keep close eye on their competitors and visit them whenever they can. They reported that several other attractions had first rate adventure playground or to go for great leap forward. The trustees asked us to bear in mind the “remove” option and take a closer look at the “substantially better” option. Three companies were asked to visit the site, propose a new adventure playground and develop a site plan and initial design to a budget of 150, 000. All three companies provided some outline proposals for such a figure but they all added that for 200, 000 they could provide something really quite special. Furthermore, the team realized that <https://assignbuster.com/chatsworth-the-adventure-plyaground/>

they would have to spend some additional money putting in a new ramp and lift into the farmyard at an estimated 50, 000. It was starting to look like a very expensive project.

Simon takes up the story. “ One of the companies came along with a complete idea for the site based water which is a recurring theme in the garden at Chatsworth. They had noticed the stream running through the playground and thought it could make a wonderful feature. They told us they were reluctant to put up a single solution but wanted to work with us, really engage with us, to explore what would really work for us to visit their German partner who made all the major pieces of equipment. So, over the next few months, together, we worked up a complete proposal for a state-of-the-art adventure playground, including the structural changes in the farmyard. The budget was 250, 000. To be honest, it was impossible to know what effect this would have on visitor numbers so in the end we put in a very conservative estimate that suggested that would make the investment back in seven years.

Over the next few years we reckon the playground led to an increase in visitor numbers of 85, 000 per year and so we recouped our investment in just three years. **RECOMMENDATION:**