



walking the walk

Where?

Clayton Vale, East Manchester.

What?

This former landfill site became a strict no-go area when East Manchester gangs plagued the area during the late nineties. These days it's a beautifully restored river valley that has just been awarded the status of a local nature reserve.

Benefits

Clayton Vale has become a place where local people can enjoy access to green space. The park is mainly used by residents in the more deprived area to its south but a third of the people we spoke to feel that it brings all of the local communities together. Since the improvements almost half now do more exercise than before. And many local GPs refer patients to the weekly exercise-on-prescription 'Stepping Out' health walks, giving many often isolated people the opportunity to make friends and improve their fitness.

walking the walk

Situated in the River Medlock Valley in East Manchester, Clayton Vale sits snugly between two large housing estates, on 56 hectares of what was previously brownfield land.

Once a peaceful river valley, the industrial revolution heralded some major changes to the area. The Vale became a landfill site for all of the ash from East Manchester's Power Station, as well as domestic rubbish – turning it into what looked like a giant open-cast coal mine.

Twenty years ago the Vale was given a new, albeit brief, lease of life when it was covered in soil and trees were planted. But not long afterwards gang fights and anti-social behaviour – including off-road motorbiking and fly-tipping – became commonplace and people stayed away. Clayton is the 13th most deprived ward in the country.



“The more positive use we can get here the less space there is for negative use. We’ve addressed basic things like cutting the grass and emptying the bins. And people are noticing the difference.”

Jo Fraser
Medlock Valley Project Development
Officer, Manchester Groundwork



“I think it’s really wonderful. I really enjoy coming here. I haven’t seen much trouble. I think it’s fantastic what’s been achieved here.”

Diane Spottiswood
Local resident



What did we do?

We had identified East Manchester for improvements in 2001 following a study of the area. The 2002 Manchester Commonwealth Games then gave us the opportunity to join forces with the Mersey Basin Campaign, Manchester Groundwork and Manchester City Council to carry out some much needed regeneration work here.

Initially, local people were very negative about the proposed changes. Many who cared about the Vale had been trying to get things done for a long time and, as far as they could see, nothing much was happening. Many others thought the changes would be a waste of money.

We began by providing £100,000 in funding, which we used to build new pathways, landscape the area and clear the overgrown ponds – a job we still do occasionally. We put large boulders in the river to get the water moving and create some much-needed oxygen. The biggest cost was for building a bridge, which put the finishing touches to the nice circular walk. We also improved angling accessibility with new steps and fishing platforms, we created a fishing-dipping pond for schoolchildren and, finally, we put in picnic tables with disabled access.

Our expertise also allowed us to provide advice and support on biodiversity and contaminated land.

Who did we work with?

The Mersey Basin Campaign and Manchester Groundwork were responsible for leading the project. They also carried out consultations with the local community and are responsible for looking after the park today. Manchester City Council encouraged the ‘Friends of Clayton Vale’ to form following the consultations and this got local people interested and wanting to get involved.



“It’s 10 times better than it’s ever been now. I come down here with my little girl and have a walk around. It’s ideal for that. You see a lot more people about.”

Patrick Mooney
Local resident

What’s it like now?

Sitting snugly amid its urban surroundings, the park is a breath of fresh air for the people who come here to visit the woodland, meadowland and river valley. It’s popular with both local residents and visitors from further afield who come here to walk, run, fish and enjoy the tranquil surroundings.

Two thirds of the people we spoke to said that they have got psychological health benefits from using the park and 80 per cent said they have benefited from access to such an open space, using the park as a place to enjoy with friends and family. Crime has also dropped considerably here. The park is now perceived as a safer place, with over half of people saying that they feel safe walking here in the day. More women and old people also use the park now. And this has had a positive effect on nearby house prices, which are on the increase.

The local wildlife population is also flourishing – so much so that Clayton Vale was designated a local nature reserve in 2006. Herons are often seen perching on the riverbank and the return of the kingfisher shows that fish-stocks are healthy. One local resident even caught a trout!

What do local people think?

Patrick Mooney comes running here five times a week. “All the paths are cleared and you can run along them without getting covered in nettles,” he says. “It’s all been cut back now and it’s great.”

Diane Spottiswood moved back here two years ago after living abroad for 20 years. “Some people I know from church were involved in the Stepping Out walks and I came along,” she says. “I got to meet a lot of people walking. I made quite a lot of friends.”

For the full report on what local people and partners think of the improvements at Clayton Vale see <http://publications.environment-agency.gov.uk/epages/eapublications.storefront>



“Women on their own walk their dogs because they feel safe now. They never felt safe before. Even the elderly feel safe walking their dogs here.”

Anne Scrase
External Relations Officer,
Environment Agency



Better places tells the story of how we work with others to improve deprived communities and what this work means for local people.

For more information about Clayton Vale, contact Anne Scrase 01925 543344
To find out more about Better Places, contact Mark Funnell 01454 205707

We would like to thank the Mersey Basin Campaign and Manchester Groundwork for all their help with this project.



Environment first

This publication is printed on 100 per cent previously used waste. By-products from making the pulp and paper are used for composting and fertiliser, for making cement and for generating energy.

Would you like to find out more about the Environment Agency, or about our environment?

Call us 08708 506 506
email enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk
visit our website www.environment-agency.gov.uk
incident hotline 0800 80 70 60
floodline 0845 988 1188