

# Get Dirty at Birch Green, Skelmersdale, Lancashire

## Date:

June 2007

## Background:

This clean-up was organised to help maintain the small watercourse flowing through Westheads Clough, Birch Green, Skelmersdale. The clough has great potential as a wildlife haven and quiet walkway for local residents. However, the watercourse suffers from fly-tipping and litter, which causes the channel to become blocked and prevent the flow of water as well as making it look untidy and dirty.

Abandoned supermarket trolleys were a particular problem in Skelmersdale. The new town is set out with a network of footpaths to take pedestrians away from the roads (which do not have pavements). The social housing areas have a relatively low rate of car-ownership, so consequently people use the trolleys to transport their weekly shopping home. Over the years several methods to prevent the removal of trolleys from the supermarkets have been tried including wheel-locking mechanisms.

As well as cleaning up the area, one of the main aims of this clean-up was to reinstate lost communications with both Lancashire Constabulary and the local community. It was also an opportunity for Action Douglas and Yarrow to help create a project that could be a good case study to be rolled out in other areas of Skelmersdale. Lancashire Constabulary, West Lancashire District Council, Action Douglas and Yarrow and Birch Green Estate Management Board made up the core working group who organised the clean-up on the weekend of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2007.

## The project:

The two day clean-up was advertised on the estate and around Skelmersdale, in the local press, schools and on the council and Mersey Basin Campaign websites. Action Douglas and Yarrow coordinated the clean-up and was responsible for the health and safety and risk assessment. Lancashire Constabulary provided staff for the weekend and funding for 'Get dirty at Birch Green' t-shirts. Birch Green Estate Management Board provided funding for lunchtime refreshments.

The clean-up resulted in 10 tonnes of rubbish and obstructions being removed from the brook. West Lancashire District Council's Street Scene Team provided manpower and two skips on each day to help remove and transport large items from the brook. A total of 36 different volunteers attended both days, totalling 56 over the weekend. A team of local residents including members of the Birch Green Estate Management Board and Birch Green Residents Association worked tirelessly to remove blockages and provide refreshments. The Mayor and Mayoress gave up their morning to help us litter pick and a local councillor also helped to support the clean-up over the weekend.

The event was advertised to local schoolchildren and pupils from four local primary and secondary schools came to help. Each child received a prize for taking part. Six children attended both days and special prizes were given to the hardest working children. MacDonalds and KFC provided food vouchers as prizes.

## Project value and funding sources:

Total value: £2,359

Lancashire Constabulary (staff time, 50 t-shirts)

West Lancashire District Council (staff time, skips, equipment)

Birch Green Estate Management Board (volunteer hours, refreshments)

Birch Green Residents Association (volunteer time, use of community centre)

Local school pupils and teachers (volunteer time)  
Birch Green and Ashurst residents (volunteer time)  
Environment Agency (cash funding)  
KFC & McDonalds (food vouchers)  
Asda (staff time, tea and coffee)

### **Who was involved:**

Action Douglas and Yarrow  
Lancashire Constabulary  
West Lancashire District Council (Street Scene and housing)  
Birch Green Estate Management Board  
Birch Green Residents Association.

### **Future care:**

Following the event, there was interest in organising further clean-ups to keep on top of the litter in Westheads Clough. Another site, Elmers Clough in Ashurst was suggested for a clean-up. Lancashire Constabulary remain in full support of future clean-up events.

Elmers Clough was a site identified by a local resident who was keen to get involved following the successful clean-up weekend at Westheads Clough. The same partners got together to organise another 2 day clean-up, this time enlisting the help of the Skelmersdale Sea Cadets and more local residents.

Elmers Clough, another hidden beauty spot with mature woodland was blighted by fly tipping. The stream was clogged with many different household items from televisions and mattresses to bikes and hamster cages. Not put off by this grim sight, volunteers pulled together to litter pick, remove blockages from the stream, and improve vandalised foot bridges.

Soup, sandwiches and cakes were prepared by local residents who were unable to take part in physical activity, showing that everyone can play an important role to make a community project successful.

An estimated 20 tonnes of rubbish was removed from Elmers Clough, a total made possible by West Lancashire District Council's workmen being able to winch large items from the stream and banks. Steep banks and limited access made some items unreachable by volunteers, so this help was invaluable.

Two years later residents' associations are organising clean-ups on a regular basis on several of the cloughs and the estates adjacent to them with the support of the council, Groundwork and community police officers.

### **Lessons Learned:**

- **Team Effort** – The success of these clean up initiatives was thanks to many different people coming together as a group. Each partner from the residents associations to the Lancashire Constabulary all had something to contribute to bring the project together.
- **Don't give up** – The persistence of the fly tipping problems in Skelmersdale can bring people down 'why do we bother, it'll be a mess again in two weeks'. Showing willing to carry on and drumming up support has resulted in more clean ups being organised across skelmersdale.
- **Publicity is important** – Don't underestimate the power of publicity. By putting regular articles in the Skelmersdale Advertiser, the project gained some momentum resulting in other estates wanting to get involved. Another plus was that a serial tyre fly tipper was caught following an article that reached the front page of the local newspaper.

- **A cure is needed** – The Get Dirty clean ups have been a great success but only provide temporary improvement to the cloughs in Skelmersdale. Carrying on these clean ups is not enough and a cure to the fly tipping problem needs to be found. The partners involved with the project realise this and as the project gains more and more momentum there is the opportunity to explore how the fly tipping can be stopped.