

# **“Ask the people”**

## **Public consultation in land reclamation**

Mersey Vale Nature Park, Stockport.

**Date: 2004 to 2006**

**Background:**

**The Artery Project:**

In 2003 sixteen European partners joined forces to set a new benchmark in riverside regeneration. Over a period of three years, with a budget of 12.5 million euros, they set out to transform river landscapes across the five European regions: Ruhr Valley, Rhine-Neckar and Stuttgart-Neckar in Germany, Mersey Basin in England and the Hollandsche IJssel in the Netherlands.

Each European partner lead on a particular aspect of the regeneration process. In the Mersey Basin, the focus was on community consultation. The pilot project took place on two sites in the Mersey Basin, at Speke and Garston on Merseyside and Mersey Vale in Stockport.



Mersey Vale site before work began

The riverside area in Heaton Mersey, Stockport was the site of a derelict bleach works, refuse tip and railway sidings, all linked together by the Transpennine Trail. People felt unsafe on the site and were deterred from visiting because of the dereliction.



Mersey Vale site before work began

### **The objectives of the project were:**

- To regenerate derelict riverside sites along the Mersey
- To bring private sites into public ownership
- To remediate industrial contamination
- To create a riverside country park with diverse habitats
- To involve local communities

The team leading the project was a partnership between Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council and the Mersey Basin Campaign.

### **The project:**

#### **The consultation process**

- A stakeholder analysis was carried out, identifying 103 stakeholder groups. Research was then carried out to find out where these groups met, so that consultation could be organised in those places. All stakeholders were asked to share their opinions on what they would like to see happen to the site.
- A leaflet was delivered throughout the community containing information on the project and a brief consultation exercise.
- 23 consultation exercises were held on the site and in the surrounding community, where participatory appraisal techniques were used to identify issues and priorities of stakeholders.
- 18 stakeholder groups with an ongoing interest were invited to participate in a reference group. This included groups and individual residents. The group served as a forum for feedback from the consultation and also provided expertise for the project team.

## Participatory Appraisal

This process starts with non-guiding questions to determine the main issues at hand.

Participants are asked to write their answers to core questions on post-its and placed on a flip chart. Examples of the questions are:

1. Do you use this riverside land? Why? Why not? (answers were plotted on a line chart)
2. What are the top 3 things you want to see next to the river?

On their post-it remarks, participants attached a sticker key providing information on their age, gender, ethnicity, location of residence or work and dog ownership.

The plan for the park took into account these different and sometimes conflicting interests. The results of the consultation were taken to the reference group for comment.





### **Project costs and funding sources:**

#### **Mersey Vale, Stockport**

Over £1 million was raised from:

- Strategic Waterside Reclamation
- Interreg 111B ARTERY
- New Leaf (NWDA)
- English Nature
- Changing Spaces, Big Lottery
- Countryside Agency grant
- Environment Agency
- BBC Breathing Places grant
- Section 106 Commuted Sums
- Business contributions
- Council budgets

#### **Who was involved**

- Stockport Council
- Mersey Basin Campaign
- The Environment Agency
- Countryside Agency
- BTCV
- Probation and Youth Offending Teams

- Private companies
- European Partners

### **Future care**

Stockport MBC has adopted the site and employed a community parks officer to manage and develop the area.

### **Lessons Learned**

#### **Successes:**

- Many of the people living near to the park were involved in the consultation. A number of these continued their involvement beyond the consultation, becoming part of the reference group. This helped to increase local ownership of the nature park.
- The participatory appraisal methodology was very versatile, and could be applied to different ages and groups. It was also fun for people to take part.
- Creation and dedication of a 3km stretch of canoe trail on the Mersey, starting in Stockport as part of a 28km trail.
- Opportunity for Burnage Rugby club to develop a canoe hire facility.
- Design and fabrication of an entrance sculpture with Mersey Vale Primary School and artist Michael Johnson.
- Mersey Vale summer fun day events 2006 and 2007.
- Contribution towards a new footbridge across the Mersey to link communities on the south side of the river to the park.
- Employment of a community parks officer to patrol, manage and develop the park funded through the extension of Interreg funding until December 2007.

#### **Problems:**

- The consultation process was very time consuming to organise.
- Negotiations to bring the land into public ownership were lengthy.
- Local authority processes were not always compatible with the Interreg funding schedule.