

## Salford Flood Alleviation Improvements Project Castle Irwell Playing Fields, Salford – Greater Manchester

Environment Agency

BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award category: Community Engagement

### Project overview

The existing flood defences at Salford in Greater Manchester provide protection against a 1 in 75 year flood event.

This project was to construct a flood storage basin to protect against a 1 in 100 year flood event. 1,900 homes and businesses benefit from an improved standard of protection. The cost of the scheme is approximately £10 million.

Appraisal and design work started in January 2013 with construction beginning in March 2015. The flood basin will be fully operational by September 2016 with a maximum capacity of 650,000m<sup>3</sup>

The site is set in a meander loop on the River Irwell as it flows through the urban area of Lower Kersal on its way towards Manchester city centre. As the former site of Manchester Racecourse it is an oasis of green in a largely urban area but it was underused by and even unknown to much of the local community.

### What were the biodiversity conditions on site, prior to the enhancement?

The southern half of the site was managed sports pitches. The northern half was abandoned, unmanaged sports pitches. These had developed into rough grassland with poor biodiversity and extensive invasive plant infestation. The fringe of the site had a mix of native and non-native trees in unmanaged woodland.

### Were there any specific conditions that led to you carrying out this work?

The overall project was in response to ongoing flood risk and difficulty in regenerating a largely deprived urban area. The existing sports pitches had to be reinstated, limiting the extent of wetland which could be created. WFD mitigation was achieved by reconnecting adjacent areas of floodplain.



*The Community Steering Group on a site visit during construction – here, visiting the archaeological dig around old buildings on site*

The decision to include a wetland area within the flood storage basin was in response to a request from the local community and in line with Environment Agency's aims and objectives for flood risk management projects. In order to guide the development of the wetland a community steering group was set up.

### What were the biodiversity measures taken?

We have delivered a local community ambition to have a wetland in this area. The project team engaged with key representatives from a number of community groups to establish a Community Steering Group for the project. This group meets monthly to provide input on the project and shape the design of the wetland.

The wetland design itself has been undertaken by the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust (WWT) with input from the local community and our own Biodiversity specialists. This site has been designed to maximise the potential for Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) habitat and to encourage ground-nesting and over-wintering birds.

The site has been designed with a low maintenance ethos and the WWT have produced a management plan as part of the design. The site will be owned and managed by Salford City Council who are planning to work with a local initiative called Garden Needs to help with the maintenance.

Through the Community Steering Group and their existing contacts, we have been able to link in with several local schools, engaging the children and teaching them about biodiversity.

The schools each have a pond within the site that they will use for outdoor education and the children are caring for trees and plants which they will plant on site. Start Creative, a local community project supporting vulnerable people, supplied frames for interpretation boards and benches using site-won timber.



*The wetland area and "Harry's Hill" as it nears completion*

Considerable time has been spent with the Community Steering Group, keeping them involved in decision making and progress. The benefit of this has been realised through positive responses to the project from the wider community. We listened to local people, we looked for opportunities to match their ambitions with our own and we developed the project together. Anyone can do what we did. We have learned to trust each other.

### How would you best describe the project?

An enhancement.

### Further information

This approach to community involvement is the blueprint for future projects. Instead of an external agency swooping in and doing something 'to' the community, we have tried to work with them. We have forged links which go beyond this project.

In December 2015, whilst the flood basin was still being constructed, nearly 800 properties were flooded from the River Irwell. Had it been complete, the basin would have protected many or all of them. People were understandably upset but the backlash was less that it would have been had it not been for the relationship of trust that has been developed through this project.

**We didn't get things right from the start, it took time to gain trust – on both sides.**

The community's ownership has extended to renaming the landscape knoll, "Harry's Hill" in honour of one of the group who is currently battling serious illness. We have also jointly commissioned kELzO, a local street artist, to paint the telemetry kiosks and outlet structure.

This level of community involvement is vital to ensure the long-term acceptance and use of the site. This in turn will result in it being a true community asset for many years to come.

To borrow a saying from one of our Community Steering Group members, "This isn't rocket science; it isn't even environmental science, it's just common sense."



*One of kELzO's painted kiosks – commissioned jointly by the EA and the local community groups*

### What was your personal motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

We have a vision to deliver better and more integrated outcomes for people and wildlife, doing more for people and the environment with every pound of public money whilst seeking and embracing opportunities to work with others. This opportunity was too good to miss.