

River Medlock Restoration

“This flagship river restoration project has transformed one of the most neglected and sterile stretches of river in the UK..” *Olly Southgate, Environment Agency Project Manager.*

Background

Almost 150 years ago the River Medlock was a source of power and an outlet for ever-increasing levels of industrial waste. Following what was referred to as 'The Great Flood' of 1872 (where bodies washed downstream from Bradford Cemetery), the decision was made to canalise the river channel in an attempt to control the flow of the river and reduce the impact of future flooding, restraining and constraining natural processes. Unfortunately, the 'Red River's' transformation into a channel absent of vegetation and wildlife only served to accelerate flood waters and actually increased Manchester's risk of flooding. In 2014, as part of the European Water Framework Directive (WFD) a 300m stretch of the river was restored to its former, natural self through working with natural processes to increase its resilience to flooding, enhance biodiversity and provide opportunities for people to reconnect with the river.



Project

This pilot project was one of the most complex transformational projects undertaken on the Medlock in over 100 years. It was coordinated through a partnership between the Irwell Rivers Trust, Manchester City Council, the Environment Agency, Groundwork and the Friends of Clayton Vale, with funding of approximately £400,000. A range of innovative engagement activities and techniques were employed, working with local schools and community groups to gauge opinion and get people involved.

The project saw the removal of thousands of Accrington bricks which were recycled. The project helps the river to flow more naturally through the valley, encouraging the return of wildlife. Weir removal on site took away a major blockage to fish migration and reconnected the river. This also acts as a powerful metaphor for the breaking down of social and environmental barriers and reconnects people with their local river.

Clayton Vale, MANCHESTER

BENEFITS



*Reducing
Flood Risk*



*Quality
of place*



*Land and
biodiversity*

COST



TIMESCALE



Outcomes

This project has transformed a stretch of river, previously devoid of life, into a space that is of both ecological and social importance. The project has received national recognition. In 2014 the project:

- Won the National Wild Trout Trust Conservation Award,
- Was nominated for the Construction Industry Research and Information Association's (CIRIA) Big Challenge Award.

"Weir Removal - breaking down barriers, making the connection"



Learning

This project identifies that although there is no 'one size fits all' approach to complex environmental challenges such as this, it is replicable. In its broadest terms; if the 'Red River' can be restored, there is hope for other heavily modified watercourses. The Medlock holds significant heritage value and this should be celebrated and sensitively referenced as part of the river's history. Innovative and extensive consultation provides a platform for activity. Capitalising on the project as unique and different helps to raise its profile; global interest has led to visits from delegations from as far afield as Kuala Lumpur and Japan. The site has been the focus of university study visits, as well as receiving acknowledgement from the Society of Ecological Restoration (SER) whose Global Conference in 2015 used the Medlock for a field visit. Finally, the project is a real life practical example of deploying nature based solutions in an urban setting and can be used as an example of good practice.

Future

The pilot is 'phase 1', and highlights the potential that the lower Medlock Valley has for increased restoration and naturalisation. Further detailed preliminary investigations and ongoing monitoring of the restored section may provide the backdrop for further funding bids.

For further information

<http://www.groundwork.org.uk/Sites/msst/news/restoring-the-river-medlock-msst>

<http://www.medlockvalley.org.uk/MedlockValley/>

<http://www.ecrr.org/Portals/27/River%20Quaggy%20Makes%20a%20Comeback.pdf>