

The Dearne Valley Green Heart Partnership – reducing flood risk, sustainable travel, green infrastructure, partnership working

- **Local authority area:** Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), Old Moor, Barnsley
- **Stakeholders:** RSPB, Environment Agency, Natural England, latterly Barnsley MBC

Summary

The purpose of the Dearne Valley Green Heart (DVGH) partnership is to achieve the common goals of wanting a better quality of life for people and wildlife through improved access to a clean, diverse environment.

Key learning points

- For a partnership project like this, the breadth of the partnership is very important, to ensure that different interests are represented and different skills are brought in.
- Good local knowledge can make a real difference to projects, for example in this case, the RSPB's knowledge of the marshes in the Dearne Valley has enabled a deeper understanding of the potential for flood risk management.
- Regular contact between partners is important, to ensure everyone is up-to-date and ideas can be shared.

Background

- The RSPB Old Moor centre now has over 100,000 visitors per year, which makes it a viable business, enabling the charity to be involved in other projects in the area.
- The DVGH is centred on the Dearne Valley from Cudworth to Adwick. It includes the communities of Darfield, Wombwell, Brampton, Wath, Thurnscoe, Goldthorpe and Bolton-on-Deerne.
- This area contains a number of former colliery sites, which are being remediated for a variety of uses.
- The DVGH project believes that the 'hidden' green assets of the valley should be now developed for the benefit of people and wildlife. An important part of this vision is managing, and where possible reducing, flood risk.

- This can have economic benefits, as a quality natural environment is attractive to investors, and outdoor leisure activities can generate income for local businesses.
- The overall DVGH project comprises a number of individual projects within the Dearne Valley. To help identify opportunities, an Interpretation Study has been undertaken. This brings together a number of options for projects, including creating a cycling network to provide leisure opportunities and promoting sustainable transport.
- The involvement of local communities in the projects is important for a number of reasons:
 - To ensure that local people take an active role in management, regeneration and future of the Dearne Valley.
 - Greater appreciation of the Dearne Valley facilitates a greater awareness of global environmental issues (e.g. flood control, climate change).
 - To ensure that local people are reconnected to the natural environment of the Dearne Valley, and feel confident and safe to enjoy the green assets of the area.

Adwick Washland project

- Adwick Washland in the Dearne Valley is owned by the Environment Agency (EA), but the RSPB is leasing it to create a nature reserve. This work is being funded by a grant from Natural England.
- The EA have stipulated that the project should not decrease flood storage, but the RSPB want to increase flood storage on the site to alleviate flooding issues in the valley.
- Planning permission was required for the creation of the nature reserve, and this took around six months to secure.
- A Flood Risk Assessment had to be submitted with the planning application, and this proved challenging to agree with the EA due to potential for changes to the flood capacity of the washland arising from excavations required to regrade the site and the resulting spoil. The spoil will ultimately be retained on site, but it is sometimes possible to find alternative uses for it. At the RSPB's Bolton Ings nature reserve, spoil was taken from the site and used to raise land at a nearby housing site to enable development there.
- Another issue encountered during the application process was that following completion of the habitat plan for the site, the EA amended the flood zone map, meaning the plan needed to be amended.
- To ensure the planning process ran smoothly, the RSPB tendered for an external agent to handle it and compile all the evidence. The agent chosen was JBA Consulting.

Result - Key outcomes and impact

- The key outcome is the delivery of a number of environmental (and other) projects in the Dearne Valley to manage flood risk and create a better environment for people and wildlife.

Key contact

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