

River Ravensbourne, Ladywell Fields (QUERCUS)

Techniques: Re-meandering, backwater & pond construction

Project location: Lewisham, South East London

River: Ravensbourne

County: London

Project end date: September 2008

Length: 200m

Cost: £400,000

Upstream grid reference: TQ372737

Site background

The river Ravensbourne at Ladywell Fields formerly ran along the edge of the park, had been artificially widened and its banks toe-boarded, whilst the river was also hidden behind railings and dense vegetation. As a result it had become largely unnoticed by most park users and had little ecological value. The park itself lacked features and facilities and was under-used, and only 44% users felt safe there.

Works were proposed as part of QUERCUS (Quality Urban Environments for River Corridor Users and Stakeholders), a partnership between the London Borough of Lewisham, Chester City Council and 's-Hertogenbosch part-funded through the EU's LIFE Environment Programme which aimed to enhance river corridors and establish them as attractive features of urban environments.

Objectives

To re-meander the river through the centre of the park, creating a well used public open space which would be seen as an important local resource; increase park usage in order to create a busy and potentially self policing place; increase the profile of the river within the park and improve the quality of habitats for wildlife.

Design

A series of works were designed in conjunction with Lewisham Council, Building Design Partnership and the Environment Agency, with Fergal Contracting undertaking the physical works:

- A new meandering V-shaped channel was excavated through the centre of the park, diverting around half of the Ravensbourne's flow, whilst railings adjacent to the original channel were removed;
- Numerous landscape improvements for example the re-use of excavated earth material to create terraces;
- New footpaths, a footbridge and entrance were constructed to improve accessibility for members of the public;
- A backwater was created immediately downstream of the new footbridge, whilst further upstream an offline ephemeral pond was excavated. This was later connected to the river via a narrow side channel dug by members of the public.

Subsequent performance – RRC's views (2009)

Ladywell Fields has been transformed from its previously characterless and formless landscape into a diverse, popular and accessible public open space, with surveys indicating that the public's perception of the park in terms of recreational value and safety has improved. Now 78% visitors feel safe, and use of the park has increased over 2 and a half times. The creation of a new gravel-bedded river channel through the centre of the park has also brought about significant improvements in biodiversity, with survey results indicating a near 100% increase in the number of species present in the park (in particular fishing birds), which are benefiting from the greater range of habitat types now present following the restoration works.



Ladywell fields prior to restoration



New backwater (top) and V-shaped meandering channel (bottom)



Re-landscaped park with new meandering river channel through centre



the River Restoration Centre Case Study Series

This site was last visited by RRC staff on 23rd September 2008

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