

## Prudential Grass Roots

Supporting communities to improve their local environment



*"This project has given Levenshulme a new community facility that is popular with park users and local residents. It provides school children with the opportunity to enjoy healthy outdoor activities in a safe and friendly environment."*

ALEC COWAN, FRIENDS OF HIGHFIELD COUNTRY PARK

### CASE STUDY

## Highfield Country Park, Manchester

In just 12 months the Prudential Grass Roots project at Highfield Country Park transformed 70 acres of under-developed open space in south Manchester into a superb wildlife-rich variety of habitats with a network of footpaths and a picnic area.

Hundreds of local residents, school children, community groups and volunteers from the Manchester Arndale joined conservation charity BTCV in the year-long programme of activities to transform this area from restored landfill site into a safe and interesting place to visit, explore, picnic in and have fun.

The Highfield Country Park transformation was an integral part of the £150 million plan to redevelop and transform the Prudential-managed Arndale Centre in the heart of Manchester, to create the largest in-town shopping centre in the UK. This project was one of a number of community-based activities in Manchester that were undertaken during the life of the redevelopment.

Prudential Grass Roots was launched in 2001. It is run by BTCV, the UK's leading practical conservation charity, and funded by Prudential plc.

The programme is helping to drive regeneration for people and wildlife in communities around shopping centres and business parks throughout the UK, invested in by Prudential plc and managed by Prudential Property Investment Managers Ltd.



**PRUDENTIAL**

# Transformed from a place to avoid

## Highfield Country Park, Manchester

Highfield Country Park comprises 70 acres of public open space in Levenshulme that had been under-developed for decades. In the 1970s Manchester City Council designated the public open space a Country Park. Since then a Friends group of local residents had started to manage the area.

Manchester Arndale staff saw the potential for a significant transformation project on this site to bring a wide variety of benefits for local communities and wildlife.

BTCV and Prudential believe that long-term sustainable environmental benefits are best achieved when people take practical action to improve their own community spaces, and so community consultation started in July 2004 with the Friends of Highfield Country Park.

The transformation process:

- Enabled local people to learn new skills
- Provides a safe and accessible green space for people from other neighbourhoods who use the Fallowfield Loop to enjoy. The Fallowfield Loop, which goes through the Park, is a former railway line now used as a footpath, cycle route and bridleway
- Built a picnic area next to the Fallowfield Brook and close to the cycle route
- Gives children from four primary schools an outdoor classroom in which they can learn about wildlife and other topics linked to the National Curriculum
- Enables people with limited mobility and families with children in push-chairs to access ponds, woodland and meadows through the network of boardwalks and wide footpaths

## Taking practical action

BTCV provided the energetic co-ordination for the Prudential Grass Roots project, and organised a complex programme of activities involving groups of volunteers, schools and communities as well as Bovis Lend Lease (the main contractor at Manchester Arndale) and Manchester City Council.

The project's activities included:

- Launch event in October with children making bat boxes and willow sculptures, and guided walks
- Wildlife identification courses for less able and older people to take part in
- Activity days for hundreds of school children including making habitats for insects, pond-dipping and wildflower identification



## Key statistics

Manchester is the second most deprived district in England, and does not fall below fourth across all indices of deprivation.

The Gorton South ward, which is on the boundary of Highfield Country Park, is ranked 111 in the 1% of most deprived wards in England.

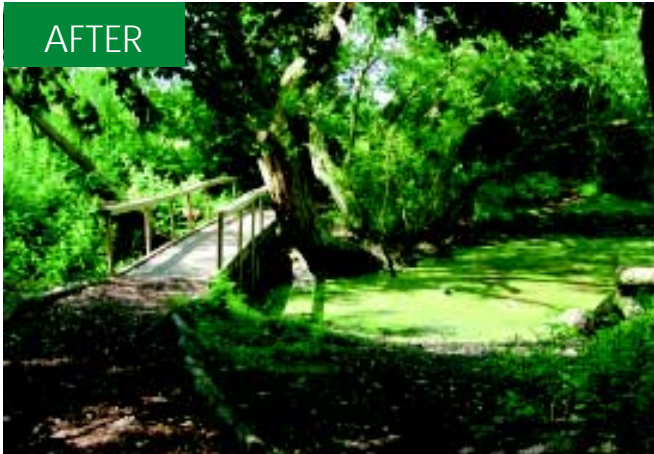
Parts of Levenshulme ward are in:

- the top 5% of most deprived areas in England
- the top 10% of income deprivation affecting children index
- the top 5% of income deprivation affecting older people index

Source: Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2004, produced by ODPM and published by Manchester City Council

# ...into a place to be

## Highfield Country Park, Manchester



*"Prudential Grass Roots has been a very positive experience. We helped train volunteers and community members in new conservation skills while improving the environment for people and wildlife. Introducing city children to this 70 acre urban oasis has been a great success!"*

KATIE LOWRY, BTCV SOUTH MANCHESTER PROJECT OFFICER

*"This really opened our eyes to a wonderful urban oasis only a few miles from the centre. Especially rewarding was the way that community groups played an active part in the park's regeneration."*

GLEN BARKWORTH, GENERAL MANAGER, MANCHESTER ARNDALE

The Highfield Country Park transformation project generated enormous levels of interest among local residents in Levenshulme and neighbouring areas. BTCV co-ordinated this with a programme of activities that culminated in the grand opening of the picnic area on 8 July 2005 by the Lord Mayor of Manchester, Councillor Mohammed Afzal Khan, Manchester Arndale General Manager, Glen Barkworth, and Alec Cowan, Chairman of Friends of Highfield Country Park.

BTCV built sustainability into this project by involving more than 400 volunteers, many of them visiting Highfield Country Park for the first time. Experienced BTCV volunteers joined them to pass on their skills and expertise.

## Positive experiences

From October 2004 to July 2005, BTCV co-ordinated tasks every week including:

- Community consultation processes, which will help the Friends of Highfield Country Park build on the interest shown by locals to continue developing the facilities
- Building a stone footpath, with help from Bovis Lend Lease, through the wildflower meadow in preparation for planting. Bovis also provided equipment to put up bat boxes in the autumn, and expert help with the design and development of the picnic area in the spring
- Tree management during Islam Awareness Week with a group of local Muslims including children, teenagers and older people. Many of them returned to take part in other work, especially the tree-felling with hand tools
- Nature trail signpost work with environmental conservation students from City College Manchester

People discovered Highfield Country Park for the first time:

- Community volunteers on a pond management and flora and fauna identification course found Great Crested Newts
- Fifty members of staff from Chapel Street Primary Schools visited the Park to see how they could use the resources as an outdoor classroom. They also helped to resurface the footpaths using chippings from tree-felling, cleared out a pond and tested the way-marking of the nature trails
- Hundreds of primary school children regularly visited the site to learn orienteering skills, go pond-dipping, take part in wildflower planting, and write poems and stories about the wildlife and their experiences during their visits

# Future growth

## Highfield Country Park, Manchester

The Prudential Grass Roots project at Highfield Country Park looks set to grow in the future.

- Manchester City Council has ear-marked funds to help support the continuing work to open up footpaths and improve biodiversity
- Local primary schools developed lessons in the outdoor classroom
- Plans are being developed to involve children at risk of exclusion in regular maintenance tasks
- A community-based management plan will enable work started by the Prudential Grass Roots project to be developed for future generations.

The Friends of Highfield Country Park have been strengthened through the skills volunteers have learnt by working alongside BTCV, and will be able to take forward new projects.

### Project costs

- Prudential Grass Roots funding contributed £30,000 towards capital costs, staff and labour, community engagement and purchases for the Friends of Highfield Country Park
- BTCV People's Places contributed £10,000 from the Big Lottery Fund's Green Spaces and Sustainable Communities programme
- Manchester City Council provided labour and equipment
- Bovis Lend Lease and sub contractors provided equipment and expertise to the value of £7,600

### Project partners

BTCV • Prudential plc • Manchester Arndale • Friends of Highfield Country Park • Bovis Lend Lease • Manchester City Council • Local community residents

### Achievements

- £23,750 worth of volunteer days, including 14 training days
- 70 volunteers received training certificates
- 475 people took part in BTCV training days, events, school visits and walks
- 25 practical conservation days were held with five different groups
- 50 new volunteers joined BTCV
- Manchester City Council gave labour and equipment to the project resulting in stronger links between the organisation and BTCV
- Friends of Highfield Country Park is stronger with more members
- 2 large-scale public events: one to launch the project in October and the second to open the picnic area in July. Other events included wildflower planting day, Islamic days and training days
- 100s of posters promoting the events in local communities
- A variety of articles in the South Manchester Reporter, the Manchester Evening News and Third Sector magazine, meant that 472,600 people had the opportunity to read about the project; press coverage equivalent to £17,621 in advertising value
- People involved in the projects gave interviews on two community radio stations ALL FM, and Wythenshaw FM, and local radio BBC GMR
- The project featured on the Manchester Arndale website and in the Centre's magazine

### Contact us

Prudential Property Investment Managers Ltd: 020 7548 6729  
www.prupim.com  
BTCV: 01302 572244 www.btcv.org  
BTCV South Manchester: 0161 608 0498  
Manchester Arndale: 0161 833 9851

MANCHESTER  
ARNDALE