

Prudential Grass Roots

Supporting communities to improve their local environment



CASE STUDY

Bourne Valley Enhancement Project, Colchester

The Bourne Valley is a predominantly wetland site sandwiched between residential areas on the Mersea Road in the Old Heath area, just a mile south of the Prudential-owned Culver Square Shopping Centre in Colchester. The River Colne, via a mill-brook, supplied water to the ponds of Bourne Mill now owned by the National Trust.

"I used to drive past Bourne Valley every day, and I was horrified at the amount of debris and rubbish there. This has been a small project, but the Prudential Grass Roots programme has made a big difference. I'd now be happy to take my grand daughter there to feed the ducks"

DEREK ASHBEE, CULVER SQUARE SHOPPING CENTRE MANAGER

BTCV and Prudential, working closely with Colchester Borough Council's Countryside Team and local residents, developed a Grass Roots programme to clear up the neglected and vandalised area, lay down boardwalks, improve footpaths for push-chairs and wheelchairs, and clear scrub and invasive plants to encourage re-colonisation by insects, birds and small mammals.

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

Working in deprived areas

Bourne Valley Enhancement Project, Colchester

Bourne Valley is a mile south of the Culver Square shopping centre in Colchester. Once part of the historic waterway to Bourne Mill, the valley had become a boggy eyesore with shopping trolleys, traffic cones, and household and garden waste littering the area.

Situated between Mersea Road and Old Heath Road, locals thought Bourne Valley had the potential to be an attractive area through which people could walk to work, children could play safely, and wildlife could re-colonise the wetland, woods and meadow areas.

BTCV and Prudential believe that long-term sustainable environmental benefits are best achieved when local people take practical action to improve their own community spaces. The Bourne Valley Enhancement Project shows that people working together for their community can create cleaner, safer and greener places.

The Bourne Valley Enhancement Project has:

- Created a safe network of informal paths as part of Colchester's network of cycle and pedestrian Greenlink routes
- Enabled people with limited mobility and families with children in push-chairs to access the woods and areas around ponds
- Improved access to the historic Bourne Mill, a National Trust property
- Encouraged people to walk to work in an attractive and safe environment
- Reduced fly-tipping
- Improved the biodiversity of the area

Key statistics

Essex contains 40 Lower Layer Super Output Areas[†] in the most deprived 20% in England. Five of these are in Colchester, which contains 104 small areas of serious deprivation.

Bourne Valley is in the New Town Ward which, with 4,840 people per sq km, is the second most densely populated area in Colchester. The majority of homes are rented from housing associations or social landlords.

[†] Groups of approx. 500 households classified by post code and using data derived from the 2001 census. It is this data and classification system from which Indices of Deprivation are derived.

Source: Indices of Deprivation 2004, ODPM (revised) Essex results, published by Essex County Council, October 2004.



Taking practical action

Before the Prudential Grass Roots project started in 2004, Colchester Borough Council's Countryside Team, BTCV volunteers and local residents had already improved access by putting down a boardwalk along the wettest areas. This revealed how much work would be needed to really transform the eyesore into a beauty spot.

Working with local residents, the Grass Roots project organised activities including:

- Extensive community consultation
- Clearing fly-tipped rubbish
- Practical conservation tasks such as clearing invasive weeds from the ponds and woodland
- Clearing scrub and widening footpaths to improve visibility
- Laying paths to improve access to the site
- Installing barriers to discourage the use of cycles and motorbikes on the site

Gaining skills for community benefit

Bourne Valley Enhancement Project, Colchester



“ This project is a wonderful example of the voluntary sector, private sector and the council working together. It couldn't have happened without the help of the committed local volunteers who worked incredibly hard to make such significant improvements to this wonderful area of woodland and meadow.”

BOB RUSSELL, LOCAL MP (PICTURED RIGHT)

Listening to local residents to find out what they want for their community is vital for the sustainability of green spaces. Each Prudential Grass Roots project includes a community-based management plan. This provides a framework for local people to work within, and gives them the confidence to continue to maintain their newly-created green spaces themselves.

As a result of the extensive residents' survey and a 'meet the ranger' walk, local community members know that their comments and concerns are listened to and acted upon. This helped to improve community spirit, and encouraged visitors to stop using the area as a rubbish tip.

Today Bourne Valley is a safe and enjoyable area for people to walk through on their way to work, children to use as a safe route to school, and families to enjoy feeding the birds. For the first time wheelchair users and families with pushchairs can get into the woodland area and be close to Bourne Pond to watch swallows and house martins. The all-weather footpaths enable people to avoid the muddiest places, while access barriers keep out motorbikes and bicycles.

More birds, less litter

Wildlife habitats have been improved by the creation of special wildlife paths through wooded and meadow areas, together with clearing overgrown ponds. People can expect to hear and see birds such as song thrush, willow warbler, blackcap and whitethroat, and small mammals including pipistrelle bats.

With more people walking through the Bourne Valley there is less litter and no fly-tipping.



Volunteers from the Colchester Borough Council's 'Monday Group' worked alongside local residents and BTCV volunteers taking part in the restoration of Bourne Valley. Teams of young offenders joined in as part of their community service. They all benefited from opportunities to learn new skills such as building boardwalks, installing a wooden fence and gate, and improved their knowledge of wildlife conservation including wetland and grassland management and coppicing.

Long-term benefits

Bourne Valley Enhancement Project, Colchester

The Bourne Valley Enhancement Project not only opened up the site so that more people can safely use the network of footpaths, it also improved the biodiversity of the area, which is close to the centre of Colchester.

BTCV continues to work with Colchester Borough Council's Countryside Team to create opportunities for local people to learn about wildlife conservation when they visit the site to carry out practical tasks such as tree planting and scrub clearance.

Achievements

- 335 volunteer days worth £16,750
- 52 local residents took part in the project, either through the survey or the practical conservation tasks
- Improved community spirit by organising four all-day 'tidy-up' events
- Bourne Valley is now used by people as a safe and enjoyable area to walk through
- Reduced fly-tipping
- Colchester Borough Council's Countryside Team benefited from public consultation and local residents survey at no cost to the council.
- Footpaths were improved, barriers repaired and new ones installed, site signage installed at no cost to the council
- Young offenders in the care of Essex County Council Youth Offending Team were introduced to practical environmental conservation activities
- Improved working relationships between other parties involved with improvements to Bourne Valley including: the local community, the National Trust (owners of Bourne Mill), Colchester Countryside Team, BTCV, local media, and Bob Russell MP
- Positive press coverage equivalent to £2,751 in advertising value

"The project has meant a real improvement to accessing the Bourne Valley. The clear-ups improved the area and made it a welcoming and pleasant place to visit. It provides an essential part of Colchester's network of Greenlinks for people to use."

RICHARD SMITH, HEAD RANGER, COUNTRYSIDE TEAM, COLCHESTER BOROUGH COUNCIL

Project costs

- The Prudential Grass Roots funding contributed £10,000 to the Bourne Valley Enhancement Project.
- The SEED (Social Economic and Environmental Development) Programme contributed to the salary of the North East Essex Local Environmental Action Plan manager who project managed the Bourne Valley project for BTCV, and £2,684 for a hard surface footpath.

Project partners

BTCV • Prudential plc • Culver Square Shopping Centre • SEED Programme, a Big Lottery Fund, Green Spaces and Sustainable Communities initiative run by the Royal Society for Nature Conservation and Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts • Colchester Borough Council - provided resources, materials and Countryside Team officer's time • Local community residents

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