



CASE STUDY

# GREENLINK

**Social regeneration through woodland activities, conservation, learning and improved skills.**



**LOCATION** The project runs from Motherwell to Strathclyde Country Park, near Hamilton.

**SITE DESCRIPTION** The Greelink is a 7km cycle path linking Strathclyde Country Park to Motherwell. The adjacent 43 hectare woodlands are managed by Central Scotland Forest Trust. The main landowner is North Lanarkshire Council.



The Greenlink project was established in 2005. 10,000 people live in the core area. Over half are severely income deprived, with low life expectancy and poor mental health. 17% are on health benefits, childhood obesity and coronary heart disease are common, and 29% of those of working age are on benefits.\*

The project has focused on social regeneration of the area through activities which have helped improve the health, mental well-being and skills of the local people.

\* Social Return on Investment Analysis of the Greenlink – Greenspace Scotland 2009

## BEFORE WIAT

During the 19th and 20th century, Motherwell was the steel production capital of Scotland, nicknamed Steelpolis. In the 1990s, steel-making ground to a halt, and the Ravenscraig steelworks plant closed down. As a result of this, Motherwell – like many towns in this industrial region – suffered high unemployment and social and economic deprivation.

The woodland had some paths but they were blocked by abandoned cars, littered with debris, suffered from a lack of maintenance and attracted high levels of anti-social behaviour. Local perceptions were poor and the pre-construction consultation highlighted the level of apathy towards the area – only a handful of people attended three events. There was a general view expressed by locals to the Greenlink team when this project started that “you’re wasting your time”.

## WIAT ACHIEVEMENTS

The partnership project is led by Central Scotland Forest Trust, with support from key partners including Forestry Commission Scotland and North Lanarkshire Council. Activity has focused on managing the woodlands and engaging with the community.

- Building 7km of cycletrack, 3km of footpath and a mountain bike skills area to help provide opportunities for people to take part in healthy exercise. Interpretation has been installed along the cycle and walkway;
- Establishing management contracts for the woodland to clear rubbish and maintain the woodland. Training for the community is also included as part of the management work being undertaken; and
- Delivering an events programme within the surrounding communities of North Motherwell, Orbiston, Forgewood and Daisy Park, including weekly conservation activities, bi-weekly health walks, Seed to Greenlink and summer sports.

“ I get great satisfaction from volunteering for the project and feel that our work improves the environment for the local people to enjoy. ”

Brendan McGhee, Greenlink volunteer



## WIAT WORKS

Today the project has transformed the area into one that local people use and value.

The woodlands are now well managed and welcoming. A network of new paths has meant that walking groups have sprung up throughout the area to utilise the new paths and a new play area has been built for younger children.

The Greenlink project has established links with 17 local schools from Nursery to High Schools. The ‘Seed to Greenlink’ programme provides pupils with the opportunity to grow wildflower plants from seed and plant them on the Greenlink site. The on site activities also include a range of educational activities such as mini-beast hunts and pond dipping. This encourages the children not only to learn new skills, but to re-establish a link with the outdoors and feel a sense of ownership of the area.

A Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis has been carried out to find out the benefit of the conservation and volunteering activities.

Looking at the benefits of increased exercise, a safer, greener community, and the opportunity to learn new skills, the SROI analysis gave a social return of £7 for every £1 invested.

## ON-GOING COMMUNITY ACTIVITY

- Several groups have been set up – including the Greenlink Community Development Group, Greenlink Allotment Group and the Greenlink Mountain Bike Club – to encourage local people to engage with the project, learn new skills and take part in exercise or activities;
- Weekly conservation sessions are led by Greenlink Staff. Volunteers regularly take part in tree planting, bulb and wildflower planting, litter removal and basic woodland management;
- A fortnightly health walk programme with trained volunteer health walk leaders helps to improve the health and mental well-being of the residents, as well as providing social opportunities;
- The Greenlink Mountain Bike Club has utilised other Forestry Commission Scotland sites with visits to Carron Valley, Glentress and further afield;
- Over 2199 hours of volunteering took place in 2009/10 with over 10,000 bulbs planted, vegetation cut back from paths, fly-tipping removed and many fire sites cleared; and
- An Allotment Committee has been set up to provide an area within the woodlands to grow fresh fruit and vegetables, and a site where local residents, schools and community groups can share, learn and enjoy the experience of growing their own produce.



### TIMELINE

#### 2005

FCS invested around £300,000 to support path contract and woodland management.

Links with 17 schools in the area were established.

#### 2006

Clearing of fly-tipping and rubbish removed 91 tonnes of general waste, 87 shopping trolleys, 28 burnt out cars and 8 fridges.

The Greenlink Community Development Group was created to provide local people with a team to develop new opportunities.

#### 2008

Allotment Committee established.

#### 2009

Research revealed that on average: 26 people attended fortnightly health walks; and 14 people volunteered per week.

A Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis was carried out, giving a social return of £7 for every £1 invested.

#### 2010

WIAT funding of £60,000 for a mountain bike trail was provided and £40,000 through the Central Scotland Green Network Development fund.



## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

“ I enjoy taking part in the weekly conservation projects as I find I have gained very good experience. I also help out by leading health walks on the Greenlink, as well as leading health walks with Paths to Health in Coatbridge, where I was first trained as a volunteer health walk leader. ”

John Pilkington, Volunteer.

The Greenlink survey of 2008/09 revealed how much local perception of the area has changed: 99% of respondents said they used the area more, or a lot more; 97% said the Greenlink was making a positive difference to the community; 92% felt a positive personal benefit; and **100% felt it had improved the area.**

The Greenlink strapline put together by the community is: 'Takes you where you want to go'. The project will seek to remain relevant to local people through the new developments that are taking place and the vision is:

### MOUNTAIN BIKE SKILLS ZONE

This facility is used by local people with the Greenlink MTB Club. Use of the facility is also embedded in the curriculum for the local school.

### GREENLINK ALLOTMENT SITE

Plans will be implemented by the end of March 2012, with growing starting that summer. The Allotment Group will be fully responsible for the maintenance of the site in two years time having been initially assisted by project staff. A food co-op is set up in three years supplying local people. An orchard is established on adjacent ground.

Within three years, far more of the decision making for the day-to-day activities on site will be taken by local people involving all the local interest groups and key support officers from partner organisations.

If you would like to find out more about forestry in Scotland, please call 0131 334 0303 or email [fcscotland@forestry.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:fcscotland@forestry.gsi.gov.uk)

[www.forestry.gov.uk/wiat](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/wiat)

