

# Creative Futures The Irk Valley

Outcomes of a  
participatory  
planning process

Final Report  
November 2003



## Executive Summary

Between February and June of 2003, community members and other stakeholders were invited to participate in the early stages of creating a long-term vision for sustainability in the Irk Valley in North Manchester. This was a research project in partnership with the Mersey Basin Campaign, testing an innovative toolkit for enabling community and stakeholder participation in ecological planning. In the DesignWays process, participants use creative thinking tools to develop new options and ecological design to go 'beyond end-of-pipe thinking' to create alternative scenarios for sustainable development.

The envisioning was carried out with participants from NGOs, community groups, academia, public and private sector organisations, at two levels of scale. A total of 18 workshops and site visits allowed community members and partners to brainstorm new ideas, explore the assets which could be built on and enhanced, and explore how the area could be made more sustainable.

The workshops engaged active participation in planning at two levels of geographic scale. At the landscape level of scale, a framework was developed for future planning in the Irk Valley. At the site level of scale, a landscape plan was developed for a former landfill site, Moston Vale, working with members of the Moston Vale Residents' Association. This 22-hectare area of greenspace is within the management remit of the Irk Valley Project.

The framework developed for the Irk Valley, both as maps and as a database of existing assets and new ideas detailed with information about sustainability and local significance, will feed into ongoing consultation in North Manchester. The Moston Vale plan is seen as the basis for regenerating the site, as part of Phase One of the Newlands project.

This report describes the process and outcomes of the Irk Valley planning process. It begins with a description of the context, including the Irk Valley and the Irk Valley Project. The DesignWays toolkit is introduced, followed by a brief description of each stage and the outcomes of the workshops. Key aspects of the framework and plans are then described. A discussion of the limitations of this pilot is followed by a series of recommendations for further steps in the areas of further consultation, implementation, and links with regeneration in the area.

A project website has been created for further information. From this website you can download:

<b>Irk Valley</b>	<b>Moston Vale</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• This report (for printing or screen view)</li><li>• The two maps of outcomes (Landscape Visions and Ecological Design)</li><li>• Legend for the maps</li><li>• Full data base of ideas developed in workshops</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Report (for printing or screen view)</li><li>• Landscape Plan</li><li>• Supplementary notes on the plan</li><li>• Full data base of ideas developed in the workshops</li></ul>

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# 1 Introduction

*“I am amazed that we did actually get the results that we did in that time ... You can see what it will look like, and there is one of my ideas. It was fantastic, it surpassed my expectations in what was achieved in the time scale” (participant in Irk Planning process).*

Between February and June of 2003, community members and other stakeholders were invited to participate in the early stages of creating a long-term vision for sustainability in the Irk Valley in North Manchester<sup>1</sup>. The envisioning was carried out with participants from NGOs, community groups, academia, public and private sector organisations, at two levels of scale. The framework developed for the area covered by the Irk Valley Project is described in this report, and the landscape plan developed with community members for the 22-hectare former landfill site at Moston Vale is described in an accompanying report<sup>2</sup>.



**Figure 1 Stage in DesignWays process**

This report highlights the outcomes of the process. It accompanies the framework plans developed for the site<sup>3</sup>. Following a brief description of the context, the report describes the planning process for the Irk Valley with a brief summary of the outcomes from each stage.

<sup>1</sup> This process was undertaken in partnership with the Irk Valley Project, as part of Ph.D. research into participatory planning, based in the Centre for Urban and Regional Ecology, University of Manchester. The DesignWays process was tested, facilitated by its developer, Joanne Tippett. Zinnia Clark, also based in CURE, assisted with community mapping.

<sup>2</sup> The report for Moston Vale, and its accompanying plan can be downloaded from <http://www.holocene.net/irk.htm>.

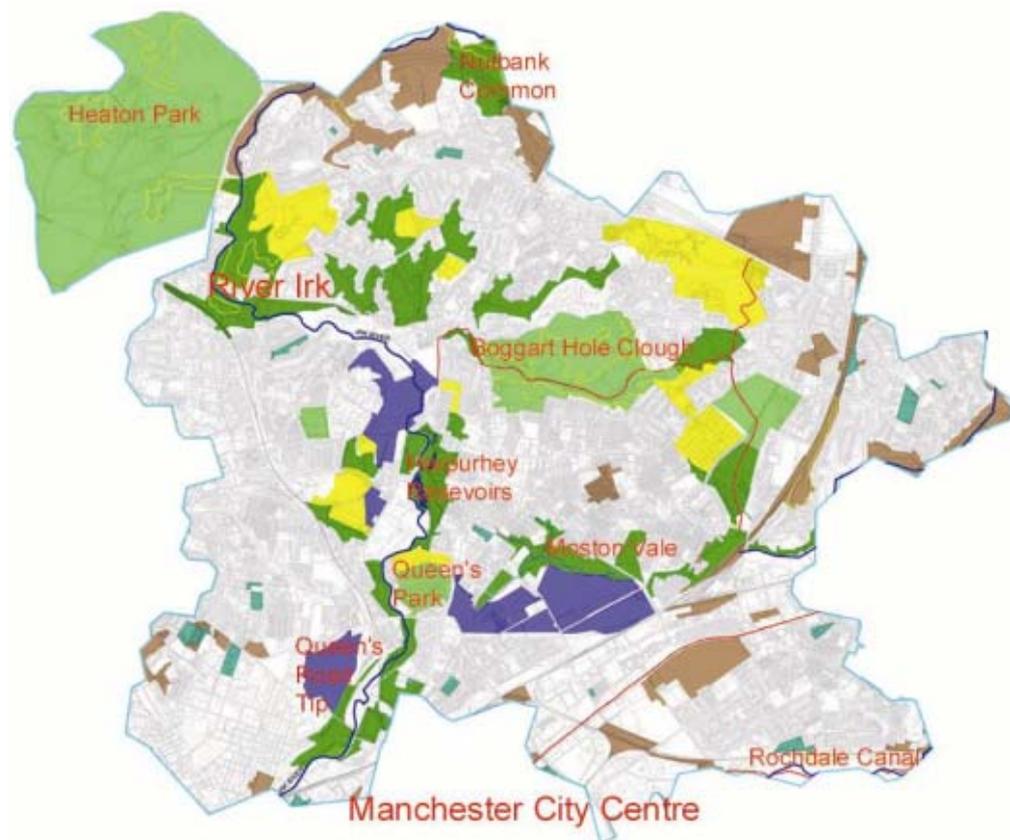
<sup>3</sup> Maps created: 'Creative Futures – the Irk Valley, Landscape Visions' and 'Creative Futures – the Irk Valley, Ecological Design'. The maps and their accompanying legend can be downloaded from <http://www.holocene.net/irk.htm>.

## 1.1 The Irk Valley

*“The fetid, muddy waters, stained with a thousand colours by the factories they pass, of one of the streams I mentioned before (the Irk and Medlock), wander slowly round this refuge of poverty” (description in 1835 from De Tocqueville 1977).*

The corridor of the Irk could be seen as the Silicon Valley of the 18th Century. The landscape carries the legacy of centuries of industrial development, both in its historical features (especially from water mills and dye works) and in areas of derelict and contaminated land. Water quality is poor and the aquatic environment is degraded (Environment Agency 2001). Rapid development in the 19th century often led to building up to the banks of the river, as it became *“marginalised within the urban landscape and ruthlessly exploited by industry”* (Environment Agency 1998, pg. 66).

The River Irk is heavily channelised, with narrow, walled channels, giving few opportunities for meandering. Approximately 20% of the river is culverted (Environment Agency 1998), which reduces habitats and potential for wildlife. Urban development has occurred largely on the natural flood plain. Illegal tipping adds to the potential risk for flooding. The river is somewhat hidden and is largely unappreciated. The author has talked to many people in Manchester who had never heard of the river, and spent an hour looking for it on her first trip to the project area. There is some confusion over the source of the river, and it is hard to trace on current maps.



**Figure 2 Map of the Irk (for more detail see accompanying maps)**

## 1.2 Action Research - The Context

The Irk Valley Project (IVP) is a partnership between Manchester City Council, NGOs, residents' associations, and local businesses. It works to create sustainable and accessible green spaces in North Manchester. The project officer is on secondment from Manchester City Council to Groundwork Manchester, Salford & Trafford. The project began in May 2001 and covers 500 hectares of managed open space, within a 5000 hectare area. It contains seven miles of the River Irk, as well as several of its tributaries.

The IVP is seen as a mechanism for coordinating and clarifying management procedures for open space in the Irk Valley (Barlow 2002). An early task (ongoing at the time of writing) is to clarify the ownership and management arrangements. There is a fragmented ownership pattern across different departments of the City Council, and a fragmented management structure, with different sections of the council often managing different aspects of the same landscape.

By the time of the project, the IVP had spent two years developing contacts with local groups, building support for the idea of a linked series of regenerated open spaces. Meetings with local groups and participation in small-scale regeneration activities (e.g. environmental improvement projects, such as wildflower planting) were organised. The fact that the IVP is in its early stages meant that funding was not yet secured for major projects (or indeed the envisioning process).

The objective of the process was agreed to be 'to develop a framework for the regeneration of the open spaces of North Manchester, encouraging creativity and consideration of sustainability principles'.

The envisioning process for the Irk Valley Project area comprised a series of 8 workshops, to which a broad range of stakeholders was invited<sup>4</sup>. A landscape plan would also be developed for Moston Vale with members of the Moston Vale Residents' Association invited to attend 3 workshops. Moston Vale is a 22-hectare former landfill site, part of the Irk Valley Project. Local businesses were invited to attend the workshops and a workshop targeted at businesses was hosted by HMG Paints to allow for more business input into the process. All participants, along with local and regional stakeholders, were invited to a final presentation of results and discussion of the process.

The Newlands scheme for reclaiming derelict and under-used land (Forestry Commission) supported this envisioning process as a trial of participatory methods, which is a core principle of Newlands. Moston Vale is a key site for the project. This project feeds into the ongoing creative consultation in North Manchester, and was supported by North City Arts. The outcomes of the workshops have been made available to the strategic planning process for North Manchester and to groups working in partnership with the Irk Valley Project.

<sup>4</sup> Stakeholders were invited through local and regional networks, including the Irk Valley Project, Mersey Basin Campaign, Groundwork, North Manchester Partnerships, North Manchester Environment Forum, Red Rose Forest Community Network, Envirolink and Sustainability NorthWest. The IVP project officer contacted potential participants, and the author discussed the process with key players in the Forestry Commission, City Council and MVRA (Moston Vale Residents' Association).

### 1.3 Participating Stakeholders

Sector	Organisation
NGO/Partnership	Irk Valley Project
	Mersey Basin Campaign
	Red Rose Forest
	Groundwork Manchester, Salford & Trafford
	Mersey Valley Countryside Warden Service
	Ramblers Association
Community Groups and Residents' Associations	Moston Vale Residents' Association
	Boggart Hole Clough Community Action Trust
Public Sector	<b>Manchester City Council:</b> Manchester Housing Neighbourhood Renewal Environmental Services Manchester Leisure
	<b>North Manchester Partnerships:</b> North City Arts Enterprise and economic initiatives
	<b>Newlands:</b> Forestry Commission North West Development Agency
	Centre for Urban and Regional Ecology, University of Manchester
	Department of Psychology and Life Sciences, Bolton Institute
	Mersey Basin Campaign - Research Advisory Group
Private Sector	Countryside
	Milliken Industrials Ltd.
	HMG Paints

## 2 The DesignWays Process

*"I like the idea of 'putting the pens in the hands of the residents' because normally the way that we work is, the landscape architects make the plan and we take it back to the residents. With DesignWays the residents sat around the table with the leaves and the map and actually discussing amongst themselves where they think things should be placed on the map. I think it made a big difference in the final plan as well. I could see people looking at it and saying "Oh, that is what I suggested and I thought that should go there" and I thought that was really, really exciting. I enjoyed that" (participant).*

SUNstainable DesignWays<sup>TM5</sup> is a toolkit for enabling community and stakeholder participation in ecological planning. Large, colourful Mind Maps provide a transferable structure to coordinate the hands-on process. Participants use creative thinking tools to develop new options. The ecological design process helps participants go 'beyond end-of-pipe thinking' to create alternative scenarios for

<sup>5</sup> Holocene Design coined the term SUNstainability<sup>TM</sup> because the term 'Sustainability' is often used without reference to ecology and the vitality of the biosphere. SUNstainable implies the capacity to continue within the sun-driven cycle of ecology, without which there would be no economy or society.

sustainable development. It is built on a framework for understanding sustainability and combines aspects of several methodologies. The underlying 'systems thinking' approach helps 'make the whole greater than the sum of the parts'.

DesignWays offers an integrated approach to active involvement in designing plans and projects. Its colourful tools and creative methods deliver dialogue that is animated and engaging. The process helps participants take a holistic view that builds on local assets. The expected results are twofold:

- viable plans that reflect resident and stakeholder aspirations and the distinctive character of an area,
- and capacity building, such that participants learn skills of communication and ecological design.

This capacity building enables participants to better contribute to 'planning for sustainability'. DesignWays provides a bridge for productive dialogue between local and professional participants. This helps to integrate bottom-up and strategic planning. DesignWays, with its transferable tools, has been successfully applied linking site and river catchment levels of scale.

Following the successful piloting of the design process in Southern Africa, DesignWays has been used in project planning in both academic and practitioner contexts, e.g. for teaching environmental science at Dominican University in California and in workshops with companies such as Hewlett Packard and Mondavi Vineyards. It has been developed into an Open College Network accredited course.

### 3 Outcomes and Stages of the Process

DesignWays process is a 12-stage process, including review and revision. Key ideas that emerged from each stage of the process are explored below. The order of the steps is important, but they are given different emphases to suit the context and time available. The basic process takes 30 hrs, and can be held in a series of short workshops, all day workshops, or some combination of the above. Several of the workshops also work as 'stand alone' events. They provide opportunities to engage participation from more stakeholders.

#### 3.1 Creativity

Human creativity represents a vast and often under-utilised resource. In endeavouring to improve quality of life, one of the most powerful tools lies in encouraging people to engage their own inventiveness. DesignWays encourages participants to ask - 'what is it we are really trying to do, and how can we design a better way to do it?' Several creative thinking techniques are taught and practised throughout the workshops. As one stakeholder said, "*it is great to see a community planning tool that is very creative but has very real results*".

In the first workshop, participants were introduced to the E.A.S.E.L.<sup>TM6</sup>, a colourful, simple tool based on Mind Maps. A Mind Map is a graphic technique for representing ideas, using words, images, symbols and colour (Buzan and Buzan 1993).

<sup>6</sup> The E.A.S.E.L.<sup>TM</sup> is framework for organizing design information, created as a Mind Map with moveable branches under the headings: Economics, Activities, Social Capital, Elements and Settlements, Landscapes. Each heading can be expanded to a more detailed Mind Map with sub-headings, which act as DesignWays' architecture for organising participants' ideas.



**Figure 3 The E.A.S.E.L. and 'green leaves' for new ideas**

Participants wrote their ideas on colour coded 'leaves'<sup>7</sup>. The process is designed to allow all participants to contribute, to feel that *"they have got a space to speak"*, as one participant described it. As another commented, *"A lot of people are like me and they are not good at speaking if there are more than 2 or 3 people around, but they have things to say. It's like a classroom at school, you get the people who say things but that doesn't mean to say that everyone else doesn't want to say things but they can't, because they know that they are not the cleverest and they might get laughed at or so they don't really participate. So this is magnificent at getting people to participate and very important"*.

In this workshop, participants were asked to brainstorm ideas for the Irk Valley, the first stage in envisioning the future. These were then synthesised into one large Mind Map. Active participation in the planning process was seen as important in building a sense of ownership, which will be important in implementing and maintaining any long term changes. As one participant commented, *"people get into certain patterns of thought and that is the way to do it or but if you can't actually see connections and realise that they are actually part of it and that they are part of the solution. I thought about the way I go about things. I think people can make a difference"*.

<sup>7</sup> Colour coding for the leaves:

- Green leaves = future possibilities
- Brown leaves = existing asset
- Grey boxes = problems and limits
- Yellow leaves = goals



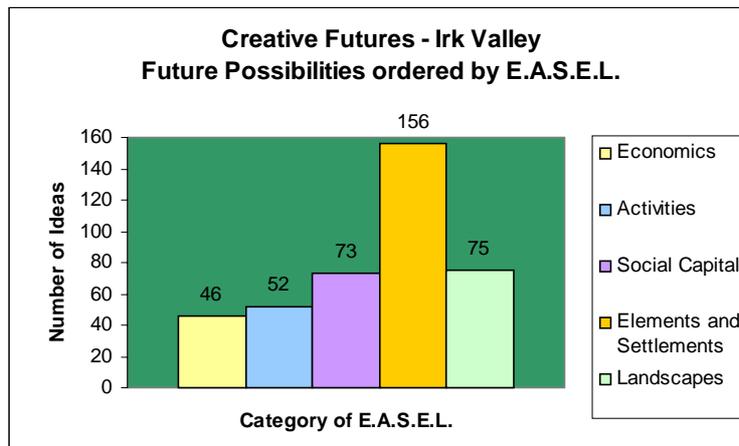
**Figure 4 Participants using simple E.A.S.E.L.**

120 ideas for 'future possibilities' were developed in the first two workshops. These ranged from 'building materials exchange depot' to 'Queen Road's tip - eco- retail redevelopment and fair trade café' to 'small wind turbines on tower blocks'.



**Figure 5 Impression of eco- retail redevelopment**

Later in the process, creative thinking techniques were used to develop ideas to help make connections between different aspects of the plan, such as 'create a green over or underpass to link woodland on both sides of Rochdale Road' and 'integrated Pest Management on golf courses'. 402 new ideas were developed in total during the workshops looking at Irk Valley.



**Figure 6 Summary of 'future possibilities' - ideas developed in workshop**

More ideas were developed under the category of 'Elements and Settlements' (the built environment), followed by ideas for 'Landscapes'. Given that the starting point of these workshops was a landscape area, the emphasis on the built environment might seem surprising. What it may reflect is that in a heavily urbanised area participants see the open spaces as intimately linked to the urban fabric.

### 3.2 Context

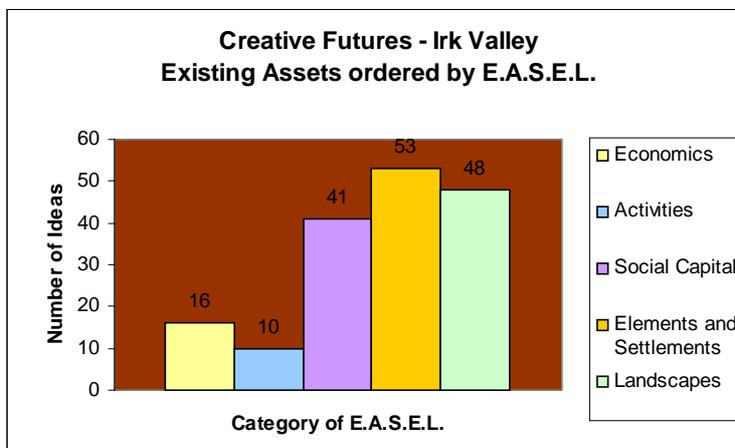
*"The local people there are absolutely the key and I think the local people, in most cases, don't see themselves as experts and they don't like to contribute to this. But they always contribute more than the experts, to some degree, because they are local experts" (participant in Irk Valley process).*

Participants were asked early in the process to develop a picture of the existing assets and resources, and to analyse how to maximize their value. This is important to encourage positive dialogue about the possibilities for an area, as opposed to a focus on the problems and limits. An emphasis on sustainability suggests the need to build on local assets, in order to protect and enhance areas of ecological value, and to maximise the social benefits of economic activity. This is particularly important in areas of 'regeneration'. Regeneration can tend to focus on reducing problems, which might cause a loss of the assets and features that make a community unique.



**Figure 7 Using an aerial photograph to locate assets with Moston Vale residents**

As some of the participants did not know the Irk Valley very well, residents and local project officers used the toolkit to describe the area, which helped them to clarify their knowledge of the assets at the same time as educating other participants. In the first session dedicated to looking at existing assets, 84 were identified. Over the whole process, 168 were identified. Similar to the planning process for the Moston Vale site, participants commented that they were surprised at how many assets there were in the area, which had been uncovered by this process.



**Figure 8 Summary of 'existing assets' - ideas developed in workshops**

In this workshop, the full (more detailed) E.A.S.E.L.s were introduced. This allowed participants to broaden their understanding of the categories, and to deepen their overview of the Irk by focusing on some aspects in more detail. The use of Mind Maps in this tool helped participants to develop clusters of ideas, and to see patterns in the information. As part of this process, participants were asked to draw simple maps of their perceptions of the Irk, using the major categories of the E.A.S.E.L. as their starting points. This process (in particular the dialogue generated during the drawing) helped participants to realise more of the assets of the area, and stimulated useful discussion about the differences in perception of the area.



**Figure 9 Community map showing perception of social capital**

Three of the main assets discussed in this workshop were: the river itself, the large area of largely under-used open spaces and the wealth of historical heritage. These were seen as largely under-appreciated assets, which led to a discussion about how to bring them into better use. One of the main ideas that emerged from this discussion was about the possible characteristics of a path running along the Irk, linking the open spaces all the way to Heaton Park. Good sign posting and interpretation of landscape and historical features was considered key to its success.

The need to preserve historical buildings where possible was discussed. Out-of-use historical buildings were seen as a potential resource for regeneration, to provide community facilities at the same time as preserving the character of the built fabric.



**Figure 10 Viaduct over the Irk**

Discussion of potential regeneration in the area centred on the need to maximise its value for local residents, including skills training to help residents benefit from new economic opportunities. The fact that there are several adult education colleges in the area, including Abraham Moss and City College, was seen as important for achieving many of the ideas. The importance of tying historical and educational programmes to local schools was highlighted.

### 3.3 Sustainability

In this stage of the design process, a framework for understanding sustainability was introduced. Education about sustainability is an important starting point for dialogue. Tools are introduced to help participants make strategic decisions. Ideas are tested against a model of sustainability, using The Natural Step™ framework. As one participant said, “*it is almost a set of rules that guide you... a tool that you can use and apply*”. Participants were asked to develop ideas to increase sustainability in the project and the area, using creative thinking tools.

This workshop was promoted as a good ‘stand alone’ workshop for people who were interested in attending some of the design process, but could not commit to the whole time. 19 people attended this workshop (including the core group of 10 participants). An extra workshop was run for businesses in the area. This proved to be a valuable way to both inform them about the envisioning process and to start a dialogue about sustainability in business in the area. Use of the E.A.S.E.L. as a framework for brainstorming in this workshops elicited a dialogue about the root causes of non-sustainability, which was considered to lie in economics. Participants went on to discuss ways of solving this problem, leading to the insight that many of the solutions lay in building social capital and in working on the social aspects of sustainability.



**Figure 11 Tour of award winning landscape regeneration at HMG paints during business workshop**

Participants were asked to think of flows of resources through the whole of the Irk Valley and elements within it, e.g. schools, community gardens. This tool, 'Analysis of Flows', helped participants to understand more about the relationships between production and environmental problems, as well as looking for effective ways of attempting to design more sustainable systems.

Ideas emerged from the discussion about how to enhance sustainability in the Irk Valley in each of the categories of the E.A.S.E.L. and included:

### **Economics**

- Financial incentives to promote sustainable businesses
- Promote and market locally produced goods and materials
- Affordable local food for local people
- Farmers' Market

### **Activities**

- Outreach and promotion about area's businesses
- Give design awards and promote good design through ceremonies
- Community conservation events
- Promoting community forestry, agriculture and composting

### **Social Capital**

- Establishing trusts for maintenance of rehabilitated land
- Encourage the use of local currencies
- Improve community networks and facilities

### **Elements and Settlements**

- Encourage state of the art design for new buildings and housing
- New developments should demonstrate a high level of ecological awareness in design
- Ecological design education and incentives for contractors, developers, designers
- Develop local waste/energy management systems and facilities
- Community structure that can be used for multiple purposes, such as Farmers' Markets

### **Landscapes**

- Demonstration gardens linked to agricultural and horticultural training
- Community education about consumption patterns, ecology and local history
- Enhance and develop Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (S.U.D.S.)
- Increase access to open space by creating pocket parks and greenway links between open space, use these to create networks of wildlife habitats



**Figure 12 Impression of Community Pavilion and Farmers' Market**

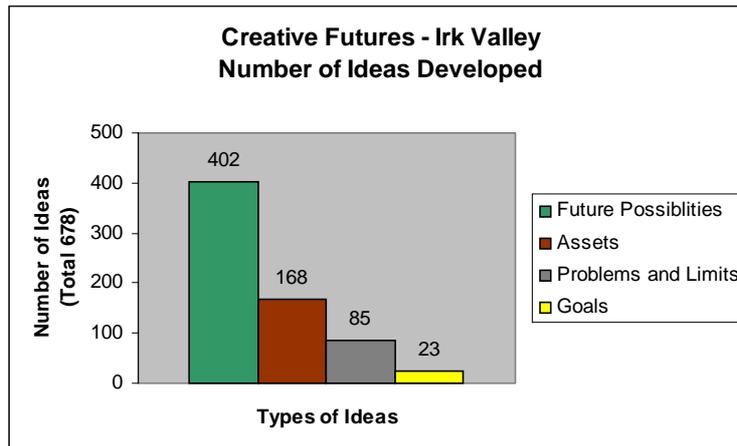
The process of regeneration of the surrounding area and its potential for enhancing sustainability was emphasised. The housing in the areas slated for regeneration area is typically very high density 'pavement tenements'. Whilst some of the houses are neglected and some are boarded up, much of the basic building stock is sound. With sensitive renovation of the housing stock, it would be possible to retain the historic character of the area, develop a wider range of housing types and improve the environmental performance of the buildings. Much of the housing stock consists of two bedroom houses. Remodelling should be able to create three and four bedroom houses by combining terrace houses, as well as creating more diversity in the housing stock through developing flats from some of the existing houses. Discussions during the planning process suggested that new developments should demonstrate a high level of ecological awareness in design, both in terms of materials used and energy efficiency. Participants felt it was important to make sure that new buildings were of a high quality and enhanced the existing character of the area.

The regeneration of the open spaces, including Moston Vale, is an important part of regenerating the area. Well sign-posted trails and interpretive materials can enhance links between the open space sites. Where houses were to be demolished to create open spaces, it was seen as important that these be used to create green links between the larger open space areas. These sites should also be used to enhance the sustainable management of urban rain run-off.

Education and information provision was seen as important to encourage such change. The importance of changes in legislation, e.g. building regulations, to reflect sustainability requirements was emphasised.

### 3.4 Limits and Solutions

In participatory planning it is generally not very difficult to prevent an exclusive focus on problems. In the DesignWays process thinking about problems is deliberately kept until later in the process. It is then introduced along with tools to help to maximize the value of thinking of the problems in terms of finding solutions to them. One participant commented *“it’s a good technique for giving people a voice about their concerns but not letting them dominate and then other people feeling they are unable to say anything positive”*.



**Figure 13 Summary of the types of ideas emerging from the process**

As can be seen from the chart above, many more assets were identified than problems. This is not necessarily a reflection of a lack of problems in the area. Indeed, there is high unemployment, with many social and environmental problems. One resident said *“To be honest go back 10 years and I thought there was no future around here”*. Rather, the high proportion of assets reflects DesignWays ability to encourage participants to draw out the positive aspects of the area. At the same time, the problems were considered in depth. As one participant stated, *“It certainly identified all the main problems and we’ve tried to find solutions for them in the time we have. To my mind there is nothing that we missed”*.

This stage of the process involves an opportunity to develop the ideas on the E.A.S.E.L.s in more in depth. The use of ‘problem tree analysis’ as a tool for analysing problems was introduced. In this process, some problems that had been added to the E.A.S.E.L. by the groups were put in the centre of a sheet of paper on which a tree is outlined. An attempt is made to trace the root causes of the problem. The aim of this process is to gain a better understanding of the dynamics and interconnections of problems and their effects. Once the causes of the problem have been discussed, creative thinking techniques (based on tools developed by de Bono 1990) are applied to brainstorm possible solutions.

Teaching participants to look for the root causes of problems and apply problem-solving techniques to those causes, instead of symptoms of the problem, reinforces learning about sustainability. The Natural Step model is an attempt to understand the root causes of un-sustainability, enabling the development of more effective strategies for moving towards a sustainable system. By including teaching about skills of creative thinking in the session on problem analysis, DesignWays aims to encourage thinking about developing solutions. ‘Green leaves’ for new ideas were available for brainstorming solutions to the problems. Through using the tool of problem tree analysis, solutions that are more likely to work towards minimising the actual cause of the problem are developed.

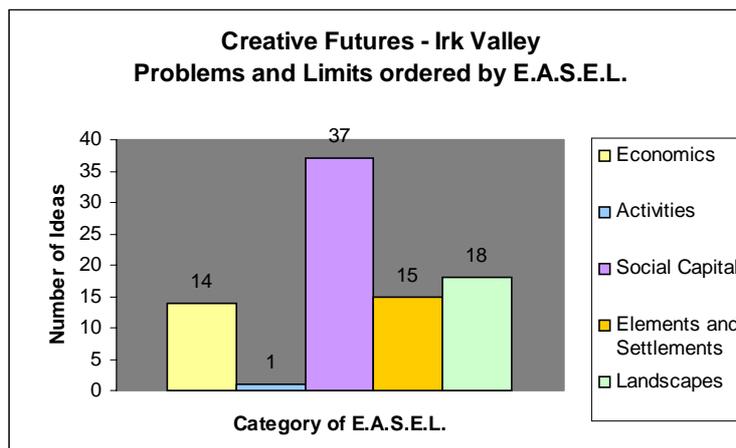
Significant problems and limits for the Irk included:

## Social

- Lack of mobilisation of skills
- Lack of access to local government
- The need to fit with funding timelines and project deadlines can make meaningful participation very hard
- Sense of being a 'degraded area'
- Social exclusion
- Apathy

## Environmental

- Heavily channelised and culverted nature of the river and its tributaries
- Contaminated land
- Rainwater drained off and perceived as useless instead of being used in the landscape



**Figure 14 Summary of 'problems and limits' - ideas developed in workshops**

A greater number of problems emerged from the planning process under the 'Social Capital' category. This may be due to the focus on *causes* of problems in the workshop, and the fact that many possible solutions emerged from the discussion of these causes, which were then added to the E.A.S.E.L., to be available in the planning process. Discussion of causes of problems tended to focus on the social aspects, as people's behaviour was seen as the ultimate cause of economic and environmental problems.

### 3.5 Values and Goals

In this stage of the design process participants synthesize goals from the plethora of ideas developed in the previous workshops. Developing such goals is an important task in assessing the significance and relative importance of the ideas brainstormed in earlier sessions. Participants started by placing small icons with red exclamation marks by ideas on the E.A.S.E.L. that they considered to be important. Having thus reviewed the ideas developed, the participants were split into small groups to brainstorm goals. The goals were compared and discussed, and were analysed against the system

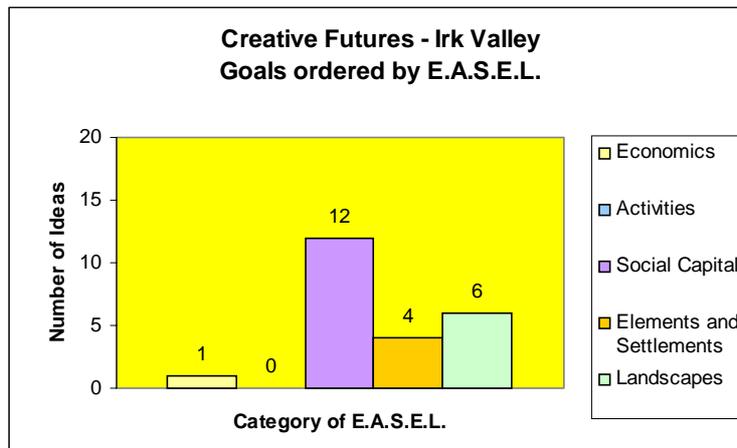
of human needs developed by Max-Neef (1991). The aim of this analysis was to stimulate discussion about whether or not the goals were moving towards sustainability, and whether or not they were likely to improve quality of life in the area. This stage of synthesising goals is important in developing an overview of the direction of the plans, and well as providing principles against which future possibilities can be tested.



**Figure 15** Participants discussing goals

This stage of the planning process requires several iterations, and offers an important opportunity to stimulate discussion amongst stakeholders and decision makers. Further workshops with key stakeholders would be required in order to develop these ideas into measurable targets. Goals developed during Irk planning process included:

- Restore the river and streams to become connected, dynamic ecosystems
- Create a good place for people and wildlife, with increased biodiversity
- Develop high quality, well-managed, locally owned and accessible countryside, with clean, open water and rivers
- To create a pleasant, healthy and safe place to live, work and play for all generations
- To create opportunity for self determination and control over life
- To actively promote and celebrate diversity in the community
- Civic pride - a vibrant and healthy society
- Continuous, democratic and meaningful consultation
- A large variety of meaningful employment opportunities for all
- Positive and sustainable land use patterns
- Good, sustainable transport system
- Legislation raises quality standards and supports holistic goals
- Pursuit of quality in executing regeneration and plans



**Figure 16 Summary of 'values and goals' - ideas developed in workshops**

The relatively high number of goals under the category 'Social Capital' could stem from the previous discussion about the root causes of many of the problems in the area. As well as offering the basis of discussion of priorities for the area with key decision makers, these goals would provide a fruitful starting point for further workshops at the local level of scale, such as at Moston Vale, with a two-way flow of feedback. The goals could then inform discussion about priorities for the local area, whilst developing goals for the local areas could inform planning in the larger Valley.

### 3.6 Filtering Ideas

In this stage of the process, the information gathered in the previous steps, such as looking at areas of un-sustainability, problems and goals, was used to start the process of filtering out the important ideas from the large number of ideas that had been generated. These ideas are 'tested' against the long-term goals and criteria of sustainability. Moveable icons are used in an effort to make this process visible, enhance transparency and stimulate dialogue.

Four considerations are taken into account:

- Does this advance the groups' goals and values? How important is it to these goals?
- Is this moving towards sustainability?
- Is this likely or possible given the limiting factors and problems in this context?
- How does this fit in with a strategic plan for advancing goals and moving towards targets (e.g. economic feasibility, cost-effectiveness)?

The information from these icons was recorded in the database developed from the ideas put forward in the workshops by participants (using Excel)<sup>8</sup>. Thus ideas can be 'sorted' by perceived importance and ability to meet goals.

<sup>8</sup>Databases for both the Irk and Moston processes can be downloaded from <http://www.holocene.net/irk.htm>.



**Figure 17 Full set of E.A.S.E.L. Mind Maps with leaves and icons**

### 3.7 Ecological Design

The future possibilities that were considered by the participants to be important for advancing the goals of the project were elaborated and developed through the application of ecological design principles. The aim is to design systems that are suited to their context, minimising negative social and environmental consequences, whilst maximising beneficial synergies. This process is one of making connections, searching for beneficial relationships between elements, and understanding the dynamic effects of elements on the environment. Participants used the information developed in the previous workshop on sustainability in the 'Analysis of Flow' charts to look at possibilities for reuse, also cyclical, as opposed to linear, flows of resources.



**Figure 18 Different layers of 'Nodes and Networks' charts**

Discussion about flows and sources of energy, water, biological nutrients (e.g. materials that come from natural sources and can be composted at the end of use), technical nutrients (materials that cannot be composted at the end of use, such as minerals, metals and synthetic compounds) provided

important information that would be used in determining possible clusters of elements and structures in the later stage, Design Synthesis. Some key ideas to emerge from this process include:

- Waste water collection to supply irrigation for urban agriculture
- Creation of a timber station to process products from community forestry, including a mobile charcoal kiln
- Use of forest products from community forests in small enterprises in the area
- A link between community composting and schools, information and educational link to composting/ children learn about the environment
- Moston Vale site providing crafts materials, e.g. reeds, for local artists
- Central Park (formerly known as North Manchester Business Park) to show-case sustainability, including Sustainable Urban Drainage, energy efficient building and composting facilities
- Developing links between local nurseries and urban demonstration gardens, educating people about integrated pest management and providing plant 'starter kits' for wildlife gardening



**Figure 19 Ecological design links - gardens, nurseries, education**

The ideas from the Moston Vale workshops were further refined and discussed in this workshop, where they acted as an example of the framework being developed.

### 3.8 Landscape Analysis

This stage of the process involved analysis of landscape ecology and historical information. Important landscape features for both the community and wildlife were mapped on overlays, synthesised from several sources: the Monuments and Sites Record, from the Archaeology Department of the University of Manchester, the 1849 Ordinance Survey map of the area and the Phase One Habitat Survey for Manchester. Participants' additional knowledge of the area was noted on overlays.

Key points of interest were identified, and later used to develop ideas for historic features, areas for interpretation, and trails. The potential for linking adjoining areas of woodland using green corridors, such as with street trees and tree-lined bicycle paths, was noted. Using information from the 'Nodes and Networks' exercise the possibility of integrating water recycling into the landscape was discussed, (e.g. through household water recycling; and the use of constructed wetlands and swales to help filter run-off from potentially polluted sites).

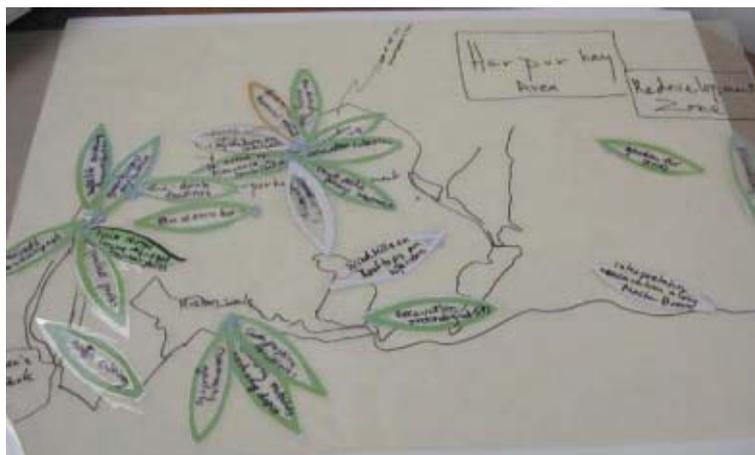
The potential for re-naturalisation of streams and rivers was discussed. The Environment Agency recommends using redevelopment to open up the river and increase access, noting for the Irk, if *"rivers walls are lowered and landscaped with attractive terraces, river habitat enhancements and public access is created"* (Environment Agency 1998, pg. 52). Creating networks of cycle and pedestrian paths, especially along waterways, was seen as important. The river would be more valued if people could see and use it.

### 3.9 Integrated Decision Making

Decision making in this process is designed to help deal with potentially conflicting aims and to increase the likelihood of developing sustainable solutions. This stage of the process involved returning to the icons used in 'filtering ideas', and checking to see if the ideas that were being discussed in the landscape design were still considered to be the most important, and to be advancing the goals of the group. Areas where problems with sustainability could be seen from the red triangles showing violations of the TNS system condition were revisited in the light of information gained during the ecological design phase. This was used to help decide which elements to work with in the final design stage.

### 3.10 Design Synthesis

This stage of the design process involved synthesising the landscape information with the future possibilities and the ecological design ideas. Participants worked on maps and overlays at both levels of scale, developing a framework for planning for the Irk Valley and Moston Vale. Overlays of ecological design ideas were used to help build a master plan for the project, over an OS base map. Design elements such as community gardens, planting schemes, sustainable housing and wind farms were written onto 'leaves' which were then moved around on the overlays of maps. Different clusters of elements and their relationship to the underlying landscapes were discussed.



**Figure 20** Use of leaves to discuss clusters and positions on the landscape

Ecological design principles were used to help position the 'leaves', and once the group had discussed the possible benefits and synergies from the locations of the clusters and agreed on a final location,

these overlays formed a 'draft plan' for the Irk Valley. This draft plan was discussed further in terms of creating more connections and links from the ideas. From this draft, a framework was developed for future planning in the Irk Valley project area.

### 3.11 Action Planning

The plans for Moston Vale and the landscape framework for the Irk Valley were presented for discussion to the Moston Vale Residents' Association, the steering group of the Irk Valley Project, staff in the Mersey Basin Campaign and to a workshop attended by over 50 regional and local stakeholders. Attendees were able to see the results of the planning process. They learned about DesignWays in hands-on workshops looking at priorities and means of achieving the plans, facilitated by participants of the DesignWays workshops for the Irk Valley. The action planning stage requires further workshops with key players and bodies who could implement the plans. Plans should be reviewed and revised later, after some of the ideas have been implemented.

## 4 Key Aspects of the Irk Valley Framework

Two maps were produced for the Irk Valley Project area<sup>9</sup>. These are part of the award winning global Green Map System (see [www.greenmap.org](http://www.greenmap.org)). The map 'Creative Futures - The Irk Valley, Landscape Visions' shows ideas mainly focused on the open space areas, but there are some links throughout the built up areas. In addition to the ideas discussed above, several key ideas developed in this map include:

- The need to open up access to the river, capitalising on the industrial and historical heritage in any trails that are developed
- New developments should allow living room for the river, and where possible be used to open up waterways, also a key objective of the Environment Agency in the area
- Where possible, derelict, historical buildings should be restored and returned to use to preserve the historical character of the area
- In flood plains, new developments should take into account need to adapt to extreme climatic conditions and climate change
- Community planting schemes from ancient woodlands nursery to extend the coverage of native species in the area
- Developing zones of islands of habitat for natural predators as part of a city-wide Integrated Pest Management schemes. This would be part of an Environmental Management System for open space land management, from parks to golf courses, looking at replacing the use of pesticides and herbicides. This should include sites on golf courses, in parks, in community orchards and in urban demonstration gardens. There are opportunities to create local employment in plant nurseries providing the plants for Integrated Pest Management.

<sup>9</sup> The maps were produced and designed by:

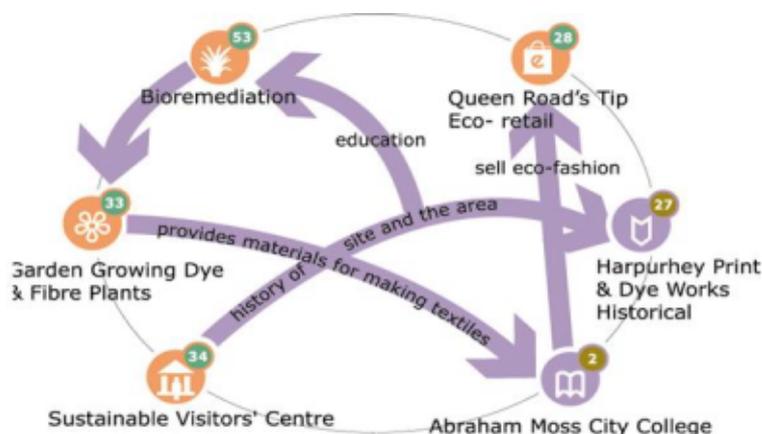
- Joanne Tippett (CURE)
- Zinnia Clark (CURE)
- Matt Brown (Countryside)
- Drew Anderson (Groundwork)
- Nuala Murphy (CURE)

- There is an opportunity to trial innovative bioremediation techniques in the polluted waterways and on contaminated land, and to develop scientific research into practical tools for remediation. This could be tied into school science programmes in the area, building on work in bio-monitoring that already occurs.
- There are many opportunities for enhancing wetlands and developing bioremediation wetlands in the area, building on the positive changes seen at Harpurhey Reservoirs, where wetlands seem to be increasing water capacity.



**Figure 21 Proposed Bioremediation Raft on Harpurhey Reservoirs**

- Creating links between arts gardens, adult skills training and retail in the area, to promote local industries and market locally produced goods.



**Figure 22 Design links - bioremediation, arts gardens, eco-retail and Harpurhey Reservoirs**

A further map, subtitled Ecological Design, focuses on the built up areas and the infrastructure required to create more integrated, cyclic resource flows in the area. There is a concentration in areas of upcoming regeneration and renewal, as these areas were seen to offer more opportunities for change in the short term.

The discussions about ecological design in the area focused on the potential for regeneration and new developments to showcase sustainable design, and thus are clustered in regeneration areas on the maps. The open spaces were seen as an important catalyst for ecologically informed design, especially for managing urban rain run-off, growing food, forestry and composting. The creation of pocket parks was seen as important for developing links between the large open areas, and as sites for small scale water management in the hardscape of the urban landscape.

Cluster of ideas around Moston Vale and in Harpurhey reflect outcomes of planning for the Moston Vale site, which informed the overall planning process. There is scope for further work to integrate the ecological design ideas developed in this process into the regeneration plans for these neighbourhoods. This planning process could be improved by further site level planning (as for Moston Vale) in different areas of the Irk.

## 5 Limitations of the Study and Further Research

This study was undertaken as a pilot, testing the DesignWays process as part of Ph.D. research sponsored by the Mersey Basin Campaign. The project ran from February to June of 2003. Participants were interviewed before and after the process. Findings from this Ph.D. research will be posted on [www.holocene.net](http://www.holocene.net). Early results suggest that this is an effective tool for enabling meaningful participation. Several gaps have also been identified, along with recommendations for improvement.

The short project lead in time, dictated by the nature of the research process, meant that there were gaps of representation on the planning team (e.g. from the health and economic sectors). For the Moston Vale plan, a lack of resources for outreach meant it was not possible to target hard-to-reach sectors of the population, such as youth groups. The following recommendations provide a summary of possible further steps both to help fill some of these gaps and to maximise the value of the plans.

## 6 Further Steps and Recommendations

This section includes several recommendations for further steps to refine and utilise the framework created in this process.

### 6.1 Further Consultation

- Further workshops to refine goals and priority actions should be held with key decision makers.
- The plans that were developed could be used as the basis for further consultation and discussion in the area.
- In order to maximize the value of plans for IVP sites for different user groups, outreach to community groups and different sectors of the population, in particular youth groups, children, parents and older people, needs to be carried out. This could both help to refine the overall plan and placement of activities, providing valuable input into the detailed design of areas.

- Carry out similar workshops to the Moston Vale workshops, engaging participation from residents and local businesses, and looking at ecological design aspects for key areas identified in plans. Training project officers and community leaders in DesignWays' techniques would help to make this process more self-sustaining. These workshops should include sites of regeneration and rebuild, where there is the potential catalyst of a project (such as Moston Vale and Harpurhey Reservoirs) and where there are clusters of businesses.

Areas that show great potential for further work, given the concentration of icons and ideas from the initial planning process for the Irk include:

- Harpurhey Reservoirs;
- Queen's Tip Retail park,
- new developments in the Zeneca land;
- a gateway site to the area at Nutbank common, linking in with a focus on more sustainable land use in the areas of Derelict and Underused land along the northern stretches of the Irk within the project area.
- Organise field trips for local people and planning officers to sites of best practice for inspiration, e.g. The Earth Centre, near Doncaster (<http://www.earthcentre.org.uk/>) and Centre for Alternative Technology in Machynlleth, Wales (<http://www.cat.org.uk/>).

## 6.2 Implementation

- Develop Land Trusts or 'Friends of Groups to assist with managing sites and provide support and training for these groups. Support networking between such groups in the Irk Valley area.
- Link with arts and cultural programmes in developing interpretation and artistic materials in open spaces.
- Develop links with historical and archaeological programmes to develop more information about the area, possibly with local schools to gather oral histories and develop interpretation materials.
- Develop a programme of engagement and activities on the open sites with local wardens. These can include managing community composting facilities, for the ecological treatment of waste from the open spaces and the surrounding communities and helping to develop and manage arts gardens, both to produce materials for local artists and as sites for artistic activities.
- Encourage community events to implement aspects of the plans. Events that involve planting and artistic activities are particularly suitable. Pride and a sense of ownership is likely to be much enhanced by involvement in both detailed design and implementation.
- Involve young children and youth groups in the design *and* construction of play and activity areas.
- Emphasise use of local resources in construction and management of the site, e.g. local industry, buying plants from local nurseries, using local graphic artists to develop signage and local manufacturing of landscape features.
- Emphasise use of recycled materials in construction, e.g. recycled bricks for landscape features from demolition in area.

### 6.3 Links with Regeneration in the Area

- Hold workshops with project officers working in regeneration in the area to go over the resources in the database and maps and to gain further input into ideas for the area.
- Capitalise on the broader social and environmental information that emerged from this process to add value to other projects and programmes in the area. Develop the social and economic connections, to encourage new spin off partnerships and benefits from landscape improvements.
- Identify relevant groups to take ideas forward, putting them in contact with organisations that can help to provide the linking concepts.
- Work with planning officials to put in place mechanisms for encouraging sustainable new housing in regeneration areas.
- Outreach programmes for developers and communities to develop ideas of ecologically sound regeneration. These should include education about sustainability and the benefits of ecologically sound development.
- Involve local business in creating long-term plans for the area.
- Work with designers of new industrial estates and involved businesses in workshops to develop more ecologically sound plans for development. Explore possibilities for eco-industrial parks.
- Coordinate with ongoing programmes to both gain more data and maps and to feed into their participation and planning processes (e.g. Water Framework Directive). Promote outreach to bodies that could implement ideas from the planning process.
- Develop a Geographic Information System (GIS), possibly through a local college, to allow for updating of information and coordination of bio-monitoring and restoration activities in one central data source. This should be linked to the area's Local Strategic Partnerships.

## 7 Outcomes

The Moston Vale plan is seen as the basis for regenerating the site, as part of Phase One of the Newlands project. The framework developed for the Irk Valley, both as maps and as a database of existing assets and new ideas detailed with information about sustainability and local significance, will feed into ongoing consultation in North Manchester. The Moston Vale plan acts as an example of how this framework can be applied in practice. As one participant said, *“one of the benefits of it is that you get an agreed consensus on the local level and on the larger level about the best way to move forward”*. At the same time, Moston Vale residents saw the fact that the planning process for Moston Vale was part of this broader envisioning process as valuable. It helped them to see how the site fits into the broader picture, and helped to engage participation from a range of local and regional stakeholders in the Moston site. Organisations including North Manchester Partnerships, the Forestry Commission and the Irk Valley Project see the Irk Valley framework as a valuable source of information for strategic planning.



**Figure 23 Community members viewing Moston Vale plan at MVRA meeting**

These reports are summarised from the author’s Ph.D. research. Early results from the trial of this innovative planning process have been positive. Participant responses included *“all the participants are proud about it”*, *“the outcomes seemed magnificent”* and *“I was surprised about the energy and enthusiasm generated”*.

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To download copies of this report or its accompanying maps, see: [www.holocene.net/irk.htm](http://www.holocene.net/irk.htm)