

regenerating rivers

The social benefits of river restoration

We helped open up and restore a stretch of the Quaggy River in South London - making an urban park a more natural and welcoming place.

Until recently the river in Chinbrook meadows was in an ugly concrete channel that was screened by a dense, evergreen hedge. In 2002 we worked with local groups to restore it. We removed the concrete and created a natural-looking river that meanders through a wildflower meadow.

In 2005, we went back and interviewed 80 local residents to find out what they thought the river restoration had brought to the local community.

People are using the park more

'Now people come and stay in the area rather than walking through it.'

Before you couldn't see the river - now it's a major feature. People explore it and play in it.

- Three quarters of local residents surveyed said the river restoration had encouraged more people to use the park.
- Nearly a third of visitors say they now visit more often, with 38 per cent staying longer in the park.



It's helped to reduce antisocial behaviour

'Now it's a friendly park.'

Many people told us they liked how the park was open in its layout. They had also noticed that antisocial behaviour had gone down.

- 56 per cent of people said there was less litter in the park.
- 43 per cent of people said the amount of graffiti in the park had reduced.
- 20 per cent had fewer personal safety concerns after the river restoration.

The park regeneration included installing new gates and lighting.

People are learning about nature

'The park's now more interesting for children and adults... it's improved our knowledge of nature and wildlife.'

We involved two local schools in the project. We created an outdoor classroom in the park and a pond dipping area. Now there is better access to the river and signs about the history and wildlife in the park.

- Many of the people surveyed mentioned the educational benefits of the site.



A healthier place

'It's somewhere nice to escape to.'

We found that most people visited the park to play sports or to go walking.

- Of the people we talked to 10 per cent said they liked the peace and quiet - getting out into open green spaces helped them to relax and de-stress.

Since the river restoration the sports facilities at the park have been renovated. The park also forms part of the Green Chain Walk.

A nicer place for the community

'People have realised the park's there for their benefit.'

We involved the Borough of Lewisham, local schools, residents and community groups. We also worked with the Quaggy Waterways Action Group and The Friends of Chinbrook Meadows. After restoring the river, wildlife such as birds, dragonflies and fish have made the park their home.

- Nearly 90 per cent of people said they thought the river restoration had improved the park.
- When asked what they liked the most they said: the natural appearance of the park, the increase in wildlife, and the feeling of space.
- Many people talked about how it has encouraged more people to use the park, particularly families and young people.

'You just wouldn't have seen wildlife here before.'