

Putting the heart back into Wigan's Countryside 

wigan's greenheart

The Greenheart Regional Park Project Proposal

An outline prospectus issued
by the partners to the
Greenheart Regional Park
Project

Location and description

The Greenheart Regional Park Project is an exciting and sustainable environmental improvement and economic development opportunity to transform an area of approximately 15 square kilometres at the heart of Wigan's former coalfield, into a regional park of enormous significance for sports, leisure, nature and people. It sits in the centre of the North West, close to its main centres of population and economic activity. The core area is bounded by the former mining townships of Wigan, Ashton, Golborne, Leigh and Hindley, with the deprived communities of Platt Bridge and Abram at its centre. It is traversed by the Leeds & Liverpool Canal, of which the Leigh Branch joins the Bridgewater Canal towards Salford and Manchester.

Greenheart is based on the former Wigan Coalfield Area, the Makerfield Basin, identified in the Red Rose Forest Plan as a 'core area' centred on the nationally important wetlands of the Wigan Flashes, Hey Brook Corridor and Pennington Flash. Although the countryside around the Wigan wetlands is degraded in parts, it nevertheless offers tremendous potential for active and passive recreation pursuits, virtually on the doorstep of half of Wigan's 300,000 residents.

Rationale for the Greenheart Regional Park Project.

Within the Red Rose Community Forest, covering parts of Wigan, Salford, Trafford, Bolton, Bury and Manchester Councils, and adjoining the Mersey Forest, the concept fits well with the existing community forest strategy, linking canal and recreational corridors, countryside and historic urban areas with exciting new forest initiatives. This strategic approach combines regeneration, environmental, economic, cultural and community priorities in a sustainable countryside setting. Within the Greenheart area, a significant proportion of land is in the public realm, although there are still some tracts of derelict, underused and neglected land. The evolving concept of Greenheart is to create a national demonstration project of how a former coal mining area can become a haven for wildlife, a leisure and recreation resource for local people and a sustainable economic springboard into the 21st century.

The Greenheart Project area has been shaped by the industrial revolution and post-war regeneration efforts. This legacy is both a problem and an asset. While derelict land and degraded environments remain, the area also contains important natural and built heritage sites associated with canals, mining, textiles and other commerce. Moreover, through land reclamation programmes and initiatives such as the Red Rose Forest, The Forestry Commission's Capital Modernisation Fund, and the NWDA funded Newlands and New Leaf programmes, post-industrial landscapes are being transformed into valuable natural habitats and community recreation facilities.

The Greenheart area is a countryside/urban fringe area which has been shaped by coal mining and more recently by post-war environmental regeneration and protection. It is one of those few areas that can genuinely claim to have been one of the cradles of the Industrial Revolution, with numerous relics remaining in its canals, mineworkings and buildings. Some of these, such as Wigan Pier and Trencherfield Mill, have already been turned into tourist attractions whilst others remain to be developed and interpreted.

Wigan is now adjusting to a new economic role, far removed from coal mining, engineering and textiles. A number of significant gateway schemes are underway or being developed including Leigh Sports Village, Wigan Pier Quarter, Bickershaw Colliery and Westwood.

The damaging effects of the Industrial revolution have left their mark in large areas of derelict neglected and underused land. However, even these aspects of the area's heritage provide opportunities, such as the mining subsidence flashes of Wigan and Leigh which now provide exceptional habitats for migratory birds and other wildlife. Moreover, some derelict areas which were only partly or not wholly successfully reclaimed in the past are now providing opportunities for community woodlands as part of the Red Rose Forest or for large scale leisure uses.

Prompted by the guiding principles set out in the NWDA's Regional Parks Interim Policy Statement and the Partial

Review of RPG13, Greenheart offers a comprehensive and effective strategic focus for bringing together a wide range of disparate environmental initiatives, intended to encourage economic prosperity for the people of Wigan, in an environmentally sustainable context.

Policy background

The proposed Greenheart Regional Park Project lies within 'Mersey Belt' between Liverpool and Manchester, one of the NWDA's priority areas for regeneration. Much of the regional park is within or adjacent to urban priority neighbourhoods involving regeneration and Neighbourhood Renewal initiatives and eligible for ERDF support. In Wigan, it coincides with Coalfield and Assisted Area status.

The Project features in the NWDA's draft Regional Economic Strategy. The concept is also included as Policy C1G 'Regional Park' in Wigan Council's Replacement Unitary Development Plan.

The partnership

A large and diverse coalition of partners is forming to take the regional park concept forward. This is based on existing, strong local partnerships, which have been developing a number of complementary initiatives. The proposed 'Greenheart' project brings together a confederation of a very wide range of public, private and voluntary partners who are collaborating in various combinations on projects within the area. These include the Red Rose Forest, Forestry Commission, Groundwork Wigan and Chorley, the Countryside Agency, RSPB, Lancashire wildlife Trust, British Waterways and Wigan Council among others. Wigan Council, together with British Waterways have joined together to promote canal restoration, particularly around Wigan's Pier Quarter, whilst the Red Rose Forest itself has an impressive track record of achievement through partnership working. The North West Development Agency is, perhaps, the key partner, being both a catalyst and provider of resources.

Environmental issues touch all of our lives and as the stewardship of the environment is accepted as being a

collective responsibility, so it is only through working in partnership that we can effect lasting change.

Accessibility

The area has excellent existing and potential links to centres of population, being surrounded by a number of former coalfield communities, including Wigan, Ashton, Golborne, Hindley and Leigh. With nearly half of Wigan's 300,000 within 10 minutes walk of the Regional Park Project good access is feasible by public transport, cycle or foot. Greenheart represents a concept of bringing the countryside to the doorstep of nearly half the Borough's residents.

Accessibility to and within Greenheart, with its close proximity to the Manchester and Salford conurbation, is good. For visitors from slightly further afield, or to facilitate round trips, Greenheart is served by a range of public transport:

- There are two railway stations on the edge of Greenheart, at Bryn and Hindley, and both Wigan's main railway stations are just over 1km away.
- Quality Bus Corridors (including the proposed Leigh – Manchester Guided Busway).

There are also convenient motorway links, with the potential to link into park and ride services.

British Waterways' Leeds – Liverpool Canal (Leigh branch) and its eastwards continuation, the Bridgewater Canal, forms a major transport spine through Greenheart. British Waterways regards this canal as a crucial link in the waterway network of the region. NWDA is funding a BW study into the potential of the Leeds – Liverpool Canal.

To date, over 10km of the Borough's 23km of canals have been improved with a hard surface, with 1km being lit and 2 new bridges constructed.

The National Cycle Network, being promoted by SUS-TRANS, will link into the regional park from the Wigan – Chorley and Trans-Pennine routes. It is intended that the whole of the regional park will be highly accessible by bicycle and on foot and that horse riders will also enjoy an extensive network.

Aims

- The creation of a Regional Park Project for the Makerfield Basin bringing the countryside to the doorstep of Wigan's residents and a gateway to the countryside from the regional capital, Manchester.
- The creation of a Regional Park Project which combines canals, woodlands, wetlands, industrial heritage, sporting leisure and commercial attractions, in a countryside setting, to create a 'day visitor' destination of regional significance for local people and tourists.
- The development of a Regional Park Project that will regenerate the economy, benefit local communities and radically change the image of the sub-region.
- To provide local communities with a diverse range of opportunities through the 'Getting Wigan Active' programme to improve their overall health and well being.

Objectives

Greenheart is intended to fulfil a broad range of objectives:

Recreation

To provide a range of indoor, outdoor, formal and informal recreational and sporting opportunities.

Nature conservation

To protect and enhance the area's bio-diversity.

Accessibility

To make the park's facilities as accessible as possible to the people of the sub region and to encourage travel to and movement within the park by the most sustainable means – ie on foot, bicycle, boat, horse and public transport.

Restore the environmental deficit

To reclaim all derelict land within the park, improve the environment and manage it to a high standard.

Heritage conservation and interpretation

To conserve the built and industrial heritage, enhance its setting, interpret its significance and market it to the public.

Support wider regeneration

To contribute to the physical, economic and community regeneration of the sub region by spreading

benefits such as jobs, community development, education and access to a high quality environment and facilities to surrounding communities.

Improve regional and local image

To create an excellent attraction and to effectively market it to a local, national and international audience as part of the wider image-building process for the region.

The Partners

- Wigan MBC
- Red Rose Forest
- Forestry Commission
- Groundwork Trusts
- Forestry Commission
- BTCV
- Mersey Basin Campaign
- NWDA
- British Waterways
- British Waterways
- United Utilities
- Woodland Trust
- the Wildlife Trust
- RSPB
- Environment Agency
- Sustrans
- Leigh Sports Partnership

Next Steps

The Greenheart Regional Park Project Partnership needs to produce a Vision Statement with appropriate technical supporting information, as a first stage in any future NWDA evaluation process. Although much of the background information is readily available and will be compiled as an in-kind contribution, for certain aspects of the information required, technical support needs to be bought in. Therefore, the Partnership is seeking financial support to employ a consultant to prepare a suitable Vision Statement, leading to a well-researched Regional Park Project Plan for further consideration by the NWDA.



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