

Improving quality of place

Ingrebourne Hill Community Woodland

Introduction

Ingrebourne Hill is a 56 ha site in the London Borough of Havering, adjacent to the Ingrebourne River, Hornchurch Country Park and the communities of South Hornchurch and Rainham. Formerly a farm, Ingrebourne Hill changed to a gravel extraction site in the 1950s, and then to a landfill site into the 1960s. In the late 1990s, the site was acquired by a waste management company who put additional inert materials over the existing waste, resulting in a landform distinctly higher than its surroundings.



Ingrebourne Hill (courtesy Forestry Commission)

Project methodology

The Forestry Commission, through the Thames Chase Community Forest, became involved with an aspiration of acquiring the site for public benefit. Funds were secured from Communities and Local Governments (CLG) to develop green infrastructure on the site over and above existing planning requirements. Extensive community consultation was conducted in support of site design, including questionnaires delivered to local residents, billboards and bus shelter advertising and a special newsletter. Several tree planting events were held for residents and local school children

Project aims

The project aimed to:

- Restore a brownfield site to community woodland.
- Actively engage local communities in the design, delivery and on-going management of the green space.
- Create suitable new habitats adjacent to the Ingrebourne Valley Local Nature Reserve - a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
- Develop recreational infrastructure to consolidate existing green infrastructure at the adjacent Hornchurch Country Park.
- Honour and promote the heritage of the site through its links to RAF Hornchurch
- Provide long-term environmental, social and economic benefits to locally deprived communities.

Funding

£1m funding in 2006 from CLG (Thames Gateway Delivery Unit) to develop the site. Combined with another CLG scheme, the project provided funding for several additional fixed term staff, including site rangers and an assistant landscape architect.

As with many other green infrastructure initiatives of this kind, there is no revenue funding for the ongoing maintenance and management of Ingrebourne Hill. Future maintenance will therefore have to be funded from existing FC budgets. This cost is estimated at around £1k ha⁻¹ yr⁻¹ (i.e. about £56k per annum for Ingrebourne). At present this funding difficulty is impacting on the organisation's ability to contribute to future green infrastructure projects.

Highlights

Ingrebourne Hill has a mosaic of habitats that contribute to both wildlife and community objectives. The green infrastructure assets include:

- Meadow and grassland areas.
- New hedgerows.
- A range of tree planting areas (high forest; low forest / high shrub; shrubs mix; screen and security planting for neighbouring residencies).
- Large pond adding wetland habitat adjacent to the Ingrebourne Valley SSSI.

Multifunctional land use Ingrebourne Hill is a green space with a good balance between wildlife habitats and community space. Public access is actively encouraged, including walkers, cyclists and horse riders. A mountain bike trail helps to engage traditionally difficult to reach teenage groups. Hard and soft paths provide an excellent network of access throughout the site. Site design incorporates elements of zoning to reduce conflict between different user groups, for example bikers and horse riders. High level public access has been dovetailed to the environmental and ecological requirements, including areas that are less accessible and establishing trees that offer good habitats and reduced disturbance.

Connectivity The site provides a section of the 138-mile (222-km) London Loop long distance walk. It is part of the East London Green Grid and one of 42 sites in the c. 532 ha Thames Chase Community Forest. It offers direct connection into Hornchurch Country Park to the North and pathways provide foot/cycle access to surrounding residential communities.

Water management This is controlled through drainage schemes and the on-site lake, designed to alleviate flooding to neighbouring properties and roads.

Biodiversity enhancement, corridors and linkages Habitat connectivity along the Ingrebourne Valley SSSI is provided at a landscape scale and additional habitats suitable for great crested newt, water vole, grass snakes and other reptiles, invertebrates such as Red Book bee species and diving ducks have been provided. Skylarks are also now regularly found throughout the year on the open grassland habitats. The area provides a robust buffer between the existing surrounding built environments and the Ingrebourne Valley SSSI.

Recreation, health and well-being Green exercise opportunities are now open to around 12 500 people, and picnic spots, rest points and community events are also provided. The site has a variety of natural play elements (rocks, boulders, grass mounds) as well as more formal play structures (leap-frog polls, 8 foot climbing boulder). Over 90% of visitors come to the site to exercise

Local distinctiveness Physical and visual links are in place, for example to existing large scale infrastructure, providing significant distinctiveness. Visual links have been provided to other significant regional features such as Ford's Dagenham wind turbines, Canary Wharf and Epping Forest.

Education The site provides a setting for educational opportunities for local schools and communities. Helps maintain geodiversity assets, including interpretation.

Stronger communities The creation of a permanent green space has brought to a conclusion decades of daily inconvenience and negative visual experience for local people living next to a quarry and landfill site. The new site gives confidence to local people that future for residential, retail or industrial developments are highly unlikely. General fly-tipping and vandalism have reduced, mostly due to the self 'policing' by users. The site is also a focal point for meeting and engaging with other local residents, establishing new relationships. Positive associations with the site are already growing as expressed by site users' desire for volunteer or other activist groups. Recent research demonstrates that 77% of visitors live within 2 miles (3.2 km) of the site, and a further 20% within 6 miles (9.6 km).

Recommendations

- Further funding streams are required to continue conversion of brownfield sites to GI.
- Capital regeneration grants require revenue funding for on-going maintenance.
- Integrated and sustainable approaches of land regeneration to greenspace need to be promoted to industry.

Reference

Forestry Commission (2008). *Ingrebourne Hill through time... delivering greenspace in Thames Chase 1998-2008*. Forestry Commission, Edinburgh.