



**GROUNDWORK**  
CHANGING PLACES  
CHANGING LIVES

# RESILIENT RIVER VALLEYS

Green Recovery Challenge Fund

 Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

The  
National Lottery  
Heritage Fund

 Environment  
Agency

 NATURAL  
ENGLAND

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# Introduction

The Resilient River Valleys project is a partnership between **Groundwork Greater Manchester**, **City of Trees** and **Mersey Rivers Trust**. The project was awarded **£1.4M** of funding from the Government's Green Recovery Challenge Fund in October 2021. The fund was developed by Defra and its Arm's-Length Bodies. It is delivered by The National Lottery Heritage Fund in partnership with Natural England, the Environment Agency and Forestry Commission.

Groundwork Greater Manchester acted as project lead, working in close partnership with City of Trees and Mersey Rivers Trust throughout delivery. Groundwork focused on delivering improvements in urban areas, City of Trees focused on woodland management and Mersey Rivers Trust led on river conservation.

The project worked closely with landowners including Southway Housing Trust, Northwards Housing Trust, Wythenshawe Community Housing Group, One Manchester, Manchester City Council, Bury Council and various other NGO's.



**Green Recovery Challenge Fund**



The National Lottery Heritage Fund



# The project set out to deliver **three key aspirations** across Greater Manchester

- 1 Green Skills, Employment and Training** – creating new, green job roles, with complimentary training programmes leading to an upskilled workforce more able to respond to the climate emergency.
- 2 Nature Conservation and Restoration** – focused around the installation of Nature Based Solutions (NBS) which help to tackle climate change and mitigate flash flooding by helping to slow the flow of water.
- 3 Connecting People with Nature** – consulting, involving and enabling communities to get involved in their local greenspaces, resulting in communities gaining a deeper understanding of nature on their doorsteps and leading to improved feelings of wellbeing.

Venetia Knight, Head of Employment & Enterprise at Groundwork Greater Manchester commented:

*“The climate and nature emergency requires urgent action from across all sectors of the UK economy if we are to achieve our nature recovery and net zero emission targets, including building a workforce with the right skills and competencies needed for the green economy of the future. The Resilient River Valleys project is an exciting new initiative enabling Groundwork to create new green jobs, with training, for people looking to build a career in the natural environment sector, as well as offering opportunities to inspire both children and adults to connect with nature or plan a future career in the green economy.”*



## Resilient River Valleys in numbers



**6,461**

engaged community members



**154**

community members regularly volunteering at their local greenspace



**6,687**

trees & shrubs planted



**693**

volunteers have supported green space improvements



**37.5** hectares of land improved



**1,237**

school children connected with nature



**895m**

metres of hedgerow planted or improved



**5.4km**

footpath created / restored



**361**

people trained



**26**

sites had NBS installed



**30**

trainees employed on the project

## Kickstarting careers

Several studies, including those by UK Youth, the Health Foundation and CABA, show that young people aged 12-24 years are one of the groups most affected by the labour market and mental health impact of the COVID pandemic. The Resilient River Valleys project generated **30** new traineeship roles including Urban Rangers, Community Outreach Assistants, Project Assistants and a Drone Pilot. Traineeships were designed to help young people from a variety of backgrounds and ethnic groups start a career in the Natural Environment and were part-funded through programmes including Kickstart, UK Year of Service and the CRF fund.

Groundwork's Job Coaches supported trainees to build their confidence and gain experiences that improved their chances of finding long-term, sustainable employment. They provided wrap around support on how to manage personal challenges and family responsibilities which enabled trainees to overcome barriers and stay in work.

### Green skills & training

Groundwork's Green Skills Trainers created and delivered bespoke training courses to trainees, partners, community groups and volunteers on a variety of natural environment topics. Courses covered topics such as climate change, green and blue infrastructure and invasive non-native species and often included a number of practical training tasks, such as wet woodland management and how to create Tiny Forests.

By the end of the project, **361** adults completed courses from the Green Skills Training programme, with **226** people gaining their Carbon Literacy certification, exceeding the original targets.



## Rhys' story as a Groundwork Urban Ranger



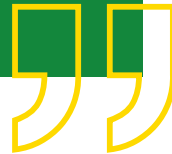
## Enhancing knowledge & capacity

Project partners were able to increase the knowledge, skills and capacity of volunteers and community groups thanks to the project, helping support management and maintenance of local green spaces.

City of Trees trained staff and volunteers in the practical skills of woodland and pond management, as well as learning about project management, charity finance and volunteer management within the charity sector. Educational training was also carried out at Outwood Country Park, with willow weaving and Fungi identification training sessions provided to the local community.

Mersey Rivers Trust expanded their River Guardians programme, engaging the local community about water quality testing and how to monitor the number of aquatic invertebrates present. They also worked with the Skill Mill charity, delivering river habitat restoration training to six local young people aged under 19 who had a history of offending. After taking part in the training, one participant commented:

“I’ve enjoyed working with Mersey Rivers Trust at Moston Brook, learning what a leaky dam is and how to make one. It’s making me consider going into forestry work in the future”







## Nature conservation & restoration

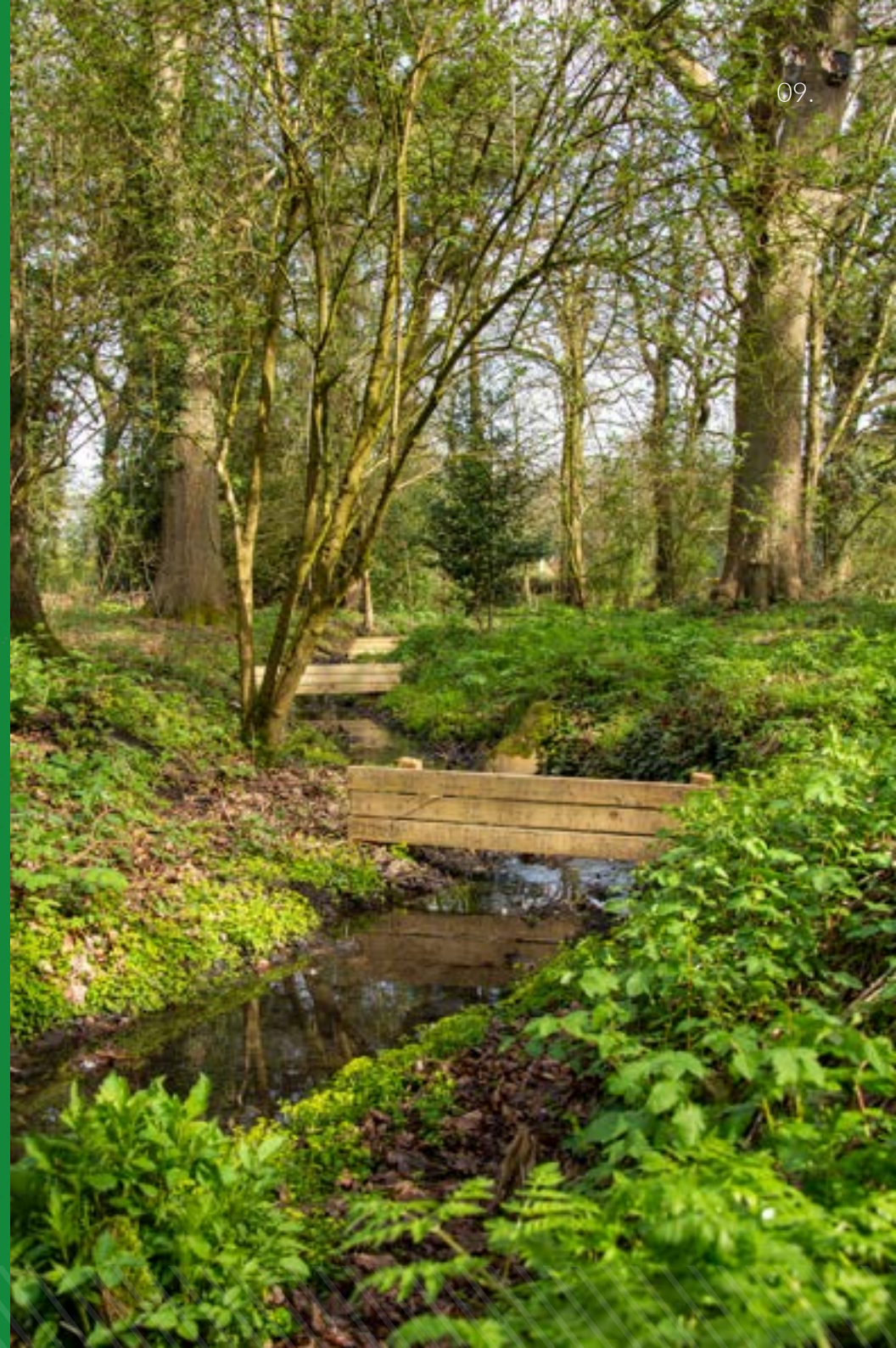
# Woodlands

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The State of the UK's Woods and Trees 2021 report by the Woodland Trust states that existing native woodlands are isolated, in poor condition and there has been a decline in the amount of wildlife they support. It states that in order to tackle the effects of climate change, woodland creation needs to quadruple at its current rates.

Wet woodlands are rare in the UK but there are many that need protecting and enhancing in Greater Manchester. Wet Woodlands are essential natural barriers against flooding, providing areas where water can be stored in heavy rainstorms helping to slow the flow of water and protect from flash flooding.

Thanks to the Resilient River Valleys project **17.5 hectares** of mixed broadleaf woodland was improved by volunteers and project partners.



## Wythenshawe Woodlands

Wythenshawe Woodlands (SBI Grade C) required urgent intervention to prevent further deterioration due to the prevalence of invasive species, reduced maintenance (due to decreasing budgets) and increased use during lockdown. Left without intervention, the site was vulnerable to losing its grade C status as a Site of Biological Importance, leaving the site susceptible to further resource shortage.

Groundwork's trainees learnt and applied wood-working skills on site, supporting the creation and maintenance of footbridges, steps and **1.57km** of footpath, helping improve public access across the woodlands.

By undertaking conservation activities guided by Wythenshawe's Woodland Management Plan, City of Trees employees, project partners and volunteers were able to directly improve **12.8 hectares** of land across Big Wood, Park Wood, Hatchetts Wood, Princes Spinney and Blackcarr Wood, with **0.91 hectares** of ponds and ditches improved too. Invasive species such as Cotoneaster, Rhododendron and Laurel have been controlled across **0.59 hectares**, of the woodlands too. Woodland improvements included removal of invasive species, pathway clearance, rubbish and debris removal, woodland thinning and habitat creation. Pond improvements included removal of debris and duckweed, and daylighting the edges of the water. The Wythenshawe sites were also planted with **930** woodland and wetland wildflowers.

This valuable conservation work has helped restore the woodlands to their natural function, helping Wythenshawe take another step towards vision as a 'garden city', an aspiration when the district was first established in post-industrial Manchester.



Groundwork's newest employees learnt wood-working skills on site, supporting the team to build footbridges, steps and to create and restore **1.57km** of footpath to improve public access across the woodlands.

Nature-based solutions were implemented across **7.63 hectares** of greenspace with **934** wildflowers planted to support the biodiversity of Wythenshawe's woodlands. At Blackcarr Woods, **36** volunteers spent **123 hours** conducting litter picks, clearing back existing and new pathways on site, removing debris from the pond and brook on site and creating new habitat piles, leading to approximately **2.9ha** of woodland improvements.

## Moston Fairway

Moston Fairway is a 3-hectare nature reserve, comprising of grassy areas, woodland and marshland, which needed significant work to re-instate it as a wet woodland habitat. The site is only the size of a football pitch and yet is home to cotton grass, marsh willowherb, patches of heather, orchids, kestrels, smooth newts and white frogs. Groundwork's Urban Rangers worked in conjunction with The Lancashire Wildlife Trust to:

- > Remove invasive species and plant native woodland wildflowers alongside the footpath edge.
- > Coppice trees and create glade areas within the wet woodland, increasing light levels, rejuvenating trees and allowing ground flora and fauna to flourish. Coppicing in the open marshland encourages the existing cotton grass – Manchester's symbolic plant - to flourish
- > Create brush piles and 'dead hedges': a great habitat for wildlife!

During this work, the site provided a live classroom for our trainee urban rangers to learn about wet woodland management and the plants and animals that you can find living in this habitat.



# Outwood Country Park

Outwood Country Park in Bury covers 61-hectares and features a variety of habitats, including young broadleaved woodland, grassland, heathland and ponds.

City of Trees staff, project partners and volunteers worked across **6.61 hectares** of Outwood Country Park, improving the structure of the young woodland, enhancing the resilience of grassland and heathland, and improving the water quality of ditches and drains.



Arboricultural clearance of dangerous stems and branches has opened up areas of the woodland previously deemed unsafe for volunteers to work in.





Invasive species management formed a large part of the programme of works at Outwood Country Park as there are extensive patches of Himalayan Balsam, Japanese Knotweed and Giant Hogweed present across the site. Due to the extent of the coverage and limitations of the project funding, invasive species removal was limited to accessible patches of Himalayan Balsam. Pupils from St Gabriel's Primary School, local residents and veterans' group 'Walking with the Wounded' supported with removal of Himalayan Balsam across the park. These groups were trained in 'Balsam Bashing' which is the uprooting and destruction of the root ball of the balsam prior to flowering. Through education of volunteers, it is hoped that the local community can continue to remove sections of Himalayan Balsam during their normal use of the site. An informational lectern about how to manage Himalayan Balsam has also been installed on site to educate people too.

The Himalayan Balsam, Japanese Knotweed and Giant Hogweed was also professionally mapped across the site. This information has been passed onto Bury Council to help inform future management plans.



The team have installed 10 informative lecterns and 10 rubbing posts, and created a website dedicated to the park, helping to reconnect the people of Bury with the park, and inform them of its natural wonders in years to come.

A series of 4 leaky dams were installed by City of Trees staff to slow the flow of water across the site and increase coverage of the wet woodland habitat. City of Trees staff also took part in pond management training provided by The Conservation Volunteers at Outwood Country Park, Bury and at Park Wood in Wythenshawe. This training enabled the City of Trees delivery team to conduct pond management volunteering sessions for the Resilient River Valleys project. The training included learning about different management techniques, invasive species removal and the health and safety of managing volunteers in the pond. This training informed City of Trees' events programme and enabled correct procurement of the required equipment for pond management activities.

# Nature conservation & restoration

## Rivers

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Manchester has three main river valleys; the Irk in the North, the Mersey in the South and the Medlock in the centre. Most of the valleys are visibly green, with woodlands and grasslands dominating the floodplains. The valleys have many Sites of Biological Importance and priority habitats, and are recognised as ecological networks in the City's Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy.

When mapped it is clear how critical these river valleys are to both creating natural habitat corridors into our urban area, and serving an important function in separating and containing development and providing respite from the city.

From a nature perspective, river valleys are refuges, offering stepping stones and corridors for wildlife on their journey through the city and helping sustain our pollinators, birds and bat populations. Natural England's Ecological Network Model highlights in particular the importance of woodland and wetland habitat creation in Manchester to support the recovery of the wider network.



# Moston Brook

Moston Brook is a tributary of the River Irk and is a green corridor which links Failsworth and Moston. Mersey Rivers Trust and Groundwork installed six leaky dams at Moston Brook between Moston Lane and Broadway to help slow the flow of water during times of excess rainfall. The leaky dams were constructed from meter long cuts of wood and secured into the bank. This allows the water to still run through gaps between the timber but slows the flow down. As well as the flood prevention benefits, leaky dams create a crucial habitat for invertebrate wildlife and prevent further erosion of the river bank.



The woodland within Moston Brook Valley contained trees of a similar age, which consequently compete for light and develop as trees which are tall, thin and straight, reducing their capacity to support wildlife. Mersey Rivers Trust coppiced **250m<sup>2</sup>** of the woodland, stimulating new growth and providing variation in the ages of the woodland's trees. Coppiced trees were then used to construct habitat piles for local wildlife.

The team also planted **150** shrubby plants, creating a mid-layer between the ground and the tree canopy, improving the woodlands' structure. Halo thinning was also undertaken, creating space for young oak trees, the UK's most valuable tree species for supporting native wildlife.

The Mersey Rivers Trust team focused on managing Giant Hogweed growing on the river banks of Moston Brook. A **30m** stretch of mature plants were sprayed with weedkiller, with aspirations to continue spraying mature plants and digging up young seedlings over a three-year programme. Giant hogweed not only shades out native plants, but is also significantly harmful to human health. Permanent eradication would improve safe accessibility of the brook, and encourage growth of native species, thus promoting biodiversity along the brook.

Mersey Rivers Trust has trained **10** volunteers from the Friends of Moston Brook group to become River Guardians, who can now identify invertebrate species and monitor the water quality of the brook. They surveyed **330m** of the watercourse, monitoring the nitrates and phosphates and identified two species of Mayfly Larvae - which require clean water to thrive - indicating that the brook's water quality is improving. However, Water Hoglice were also present, indicating further improvements are needed.

Access to Moston Brook was good in areas but poor in others. In the past, particularly after bad weather, some pathways would get muddy and waterlogged. Even during the summer, the path was full of tree roots, stone and uneven ground, which made it inaccessible for wheelchair and scooter users. Resilient River Valley's partners worked with Oldham Council to help with the restoration and protection of pathways throughout the site.





Groundwork's Urban Rangers installed a new, all-weather pathway alongside the brook, using flexi-pave – a material **made from 2,685 recycled tyres** - creating a porous surface, which holds moisture and allows rainwater to slowly permeate through into the earth below. The 933m long pathway acts as a Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SuDS), removing pollutants from rainwater before it eventually reaches the brook.





## Drone Surveying Invasive Non-Native Species

In the North West of England, **78%** of water bodies are failing to meet good ecological status. One contributing factor to this is the prevalence of invasive non-native species (INNS) such as Giant Hogweed, Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam.

INNS are defined by the RSPB as 'species which have been introduced into areas outside their natural range through human actions and are posing a threat to native wildlife'. INNS outcompete our native species for food and resources and can be a danger to humans and other wildlife.

Thanks to the Resilient River Valleys project, Groundwork employed a Trainee Drone Pilot, who gained their GVC and A2CofC certification in 2022, allowing us to explore new ways of surveying blue and green infrastructure.

Between June and October 2022, the Trainee Drone Pilot worked alongside the Natural Course team to survey INNS plants in the Irwell catchment.

Areas along the river bank are notoriously difficult to access due to cliffs, marsh, dense vegetation, and private land. The Trainee Drone Pilot was able to capture images of places that were previously inaccessible by foot or boat. As a result, the partnerships conducted the largest and most comprehensive survey of the Irwell Catchment to date.



## The results revealed:

- > There are over **2,000** instances of recorded Japanese Knotweed and over **700** instances of Giant Hogweed across the whole Irwell Catchment.
- > Japanese Knotweed is present on over **109 km** of riverbank and a further **45 km** contains Giant Hogweed.
- > Within the Irwell catchment there is approximately **436 km** of Statutory Main Rivers length, comprising a left and right bank. This means that out of a possible linear riverbank of **872 km** approximately **1/8** or **12%** of riverbank has Japanese Knotweed present.
- > This also means that in isolation that Giant Hogweed also covers **5%** of all the river corridor in the Irwell catchment.

“This is a particularly impactful survey because the catchment wide results can be used to attract more resources to tackle the infestations and to improve the targeting of their removal.”

**Mike Beard, Natural Course Project Officer**



“I think it’s great to see organisations investing in new technologies and methods to combat the invasive issue we have up North. For me personally, the experience allowed me to think about how I can be using my new skills as a drone pilot in the future - both for surveying invasive species, but also for surveying blue and green infrastructure in general. It’s exciting to think about what other opportunities may come my way”

**Chelsea Dudley, Groundwork Drone Pilot**

## Nature conservation & restoration



# Urban Greenspaces

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Urban greenspaces provide a key stepping stone for wildlife, enabling it to move around our busy towns and cities. They are refuges for people too, providing space for relaxation, exercise and an opportunity to connect to nature and each other, decreasing feelings of loneliness and improving our wellbeing.

Several of our projects focus on restoring and enhancing nature with a number of housing trusts across Manchester. Groundwork's trainee Urban Rangers, with the help of local communities and volunteers, implemented nature-based solutions like planting trees, hedgerows and wildflowers across urban greenspaces, resulting in spaces that have greater potential to store carbon and water, whilst encouraging ecosystems to flourish.

Greenspace improvements were undertaken alongside community consultation and a series of activities which engaged residents with the nature on their doorsteps, introduced them to the project and allowed us to listen to their thoughts regarding the installation of nature-based solutions in their local greenspaces.





**18** greenspaces enhanced



**8** wildflower meadows created



**7.4** hectares of land improved



**815** metres of hedgerow improved or planted



**4207** trees & shrubs planted

Groundwork has worked in partnership with Northwards Housing Trust, Southways Housing Trust, Wythenshawe Community Housing Group, Manchester City Council and One Manchester to install nature-based solutions on existing greenspaces across their estates, helping to mitigate against the effects of climate change, such as flash flooding, by helping to slow the flow of water entering our drainage systems.

Greenpace improvements were undertaken alongside community consultation and a series of activities which engaged residents with the project. This included a mixture of tree, bulb and vegetable planting days, along with arts and crafts activities, allowing people to connect to nature in a way that matched their needs and interests.

The trainee urban rangers implemented these nature-based solutions across **16** different greenspaces in residential areas. This included planting native trees and bulbs, and creating native hedgerows and wildflower meadows. The local communities were involved in the planning of where the NBS would be installed on each site, to make sure we wouldn't be taking over their spaces, hindering people from using them for their recreational activities. For example, on one of the Southway Housing Trust sites in Burnage, we moved the planned location of the wildflower meadows so that the children could still use the greenspace to play football.

## Tiny Forest, Gorton One Manchester

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Pulling inspiration from Akira Mayawaki's concept of a Tiny Forest, the urban ranger trainees planted **600** native trees, including fruit trees, along with a mixture of herbaceous plants to create Manchester's first tiny forest in Gorton. The chosen site was a small greenspace nestled between a residential area and railway line which had been neglected, allowing the existing vegetation to overgrow, limiting accessibility for local residents to use the space. One Manchester assisted with the removal of litter from the site, whilst our ranger team cut back the overgrowth and prepared the ground for the tiny forest.

The benefits of a tiny forest:

- > They store more carbon because there's more trees densely packed together
- > They boost biodiversity, creating food and shelter for wildlife in our cities
- > They're faster growing than a regular woodland so we can benefit more quickly
- > They create a small haven to reconnect people with nature in an urban setting
- > They can prevent flooding and waterlogging by soaking up excess surface water after intense rainfall

### Energy House, Burnage Southway Housing Trust

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Southway Housing Trust have been installing ground source heat pumps to their properties across South Manchester. In order to demonstrate how these new systems work, a vacant property was turned into a demonstration home for local residents to visit.

Groundwork Greater Manchester were asked to renovate the garden, utilising existing materials and adding new nature-based solutions to demonstrate how residents can add similar features to their gardens, making them more wildlife friendly and resilient to the effects of climate change. The RRV trainee Urban Rangers rose to the challenge, learning lots of new woodworking and planting skills in order to create;

- > A bin shed which was topped with a planter for growing herbs
- > A permeable driveway which replaced the existing concrete driveway
- > Planter with herbs and wildlife friendly plant species
- > Native hedges along the fence line
- > Rain water storage so excess rainwater can be captured and repurposed
- > A lawn made from an array of herbaceous plants and bulbs to provide food for wildlife throughout the year



### Mitchell Gardens, Wythenshawe Wythenshawe Community Housing Group

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The RRV project helped to deliver a number of projects across Wythenshawe woodlands but also in urban environments with Wythenshawe Housing Trust to create green links for wildlife by enhancing existing green space. The team first met with residents (and joined in a game or two of bingo) to listen to what improvements could be made to the greenspaces in Mitchell Gardens, whilst still allowing space for recreational activities such as their summer barbecues.

It became clear that a lot of the residents were keen gardeners, with many having their own planters outside their doors, so they were excited for the team to plant wildflower turf and a fruit orchard to brighten up the existing grass lawns, and provide food for both wildlife and the residents. The team also planted a variety of bulbs on the greenspace at the back of the property where it wasn't accessible for residents because of the steep ground, making this area a little bit wilder for local wildlife to thrive.

## Connecting People with Nature

The Resilient River Valleys project has been primarily been working in Radcliffe in Bury and in three localities in Manchester;

- > North Manchester
- > Burnage
- > Wythenshawe



In 18-months, projects partners have engaged:



**6,461**  
people in the project



**1,919**  
people in nature-based activities



**1,237**  
school children in nature-based activities

Diversity was a key part of the project. We knew that communities made up of people from lower income households and ethnic minority backgrounds had less access to good greenspaces and green careers. This informed our plan of action when advertising for our trainee roles and approaching new communities for the first time.

## City-wide events

To raise awareness of the Resilient River Valley project and provide a platform to celebrate and showcase local communities work, project partners took part in a number of large city-wide events. This included the Manchester Flower Show, Manchester's Festival of Nature, Wythenshawe Games and the Love Your River Irk Celebration event.

Our teams engaged with thousands of people about nature-based solutions and the Resilient River Valleys project goals; speaking about opportunities to get involved with the project, and encouraging people to explore the nature of their doorsteps, and take action in their local community.



## Manchester Flower Show 2022



City of Trees engaged with residents at HMP Styal, making bug hotels and bat boxes. The sessions with the residents had a positive impact, with residents being engaged on why these habitats were being created and keen to put them up around the prison grounds so they could view the wildlife using what they had created. They highlighted the important wellbeing factors of outdoor engagement. Family sessions at HMP Styal also provided wellbeing benefits for the residents and their families. Craft activities at the family event provided a good intermediary for residents and young visitors to connect over, providing distraction support for the young people who were not dealing well with visitation.

## North Manchester

Project partners worked closely with Ann Bates, Moston Brook Project Officer and local community champion, throughout the project. Her long-standing commitment with the area and connections with the community that reside there was fundamental in delivering environmental improvements at Moston Brook.

Partners worked together at Moston Brook to deliver a series of events which encouraged the surrounding community to explore the area and learn more about the conservation work taking place, with opportunities to shape delivery and volunteer provided throughout.



Mersey Rivers Trust worked closely with 10 local volunteers from the Friends of Moston Brook community group, training those with an interest to become River Guardians. The River Guardians are now able to carry out regular surveys, gather data about trends in water quality and detect and report any pollution. This training will have a lasting legacy at Moston Brook, leading to improved water quality in the future.



“It’s been a really enjoyable experience learning about what lives in our brook with Mersey Rivers Trust, and I’m looking forward to going out to do some identification. The Mersey River Trust team know the local rivers and the insects that live in them”

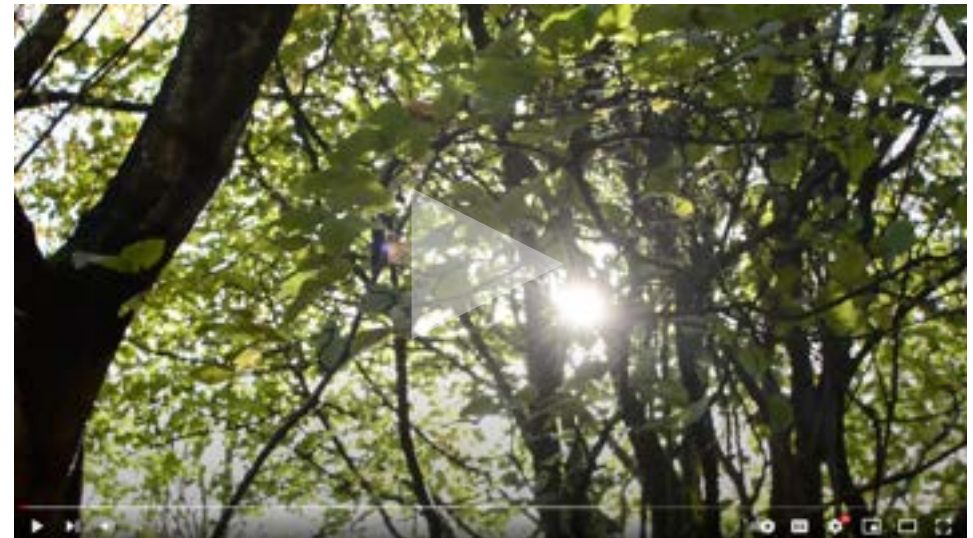
– **Member of the Friends of Moston Brook who participated in the River Guardians training.**

Thanks to the new pathway created through the Resilient River valleys project, local residents are now able to explore new areas of the brook, never before enjoyed.

“Thanks to the new pathway created through the Resilient River Valleys project, local residents who once struggled accessing the brook can now explore new areas they haven’t been to before.”

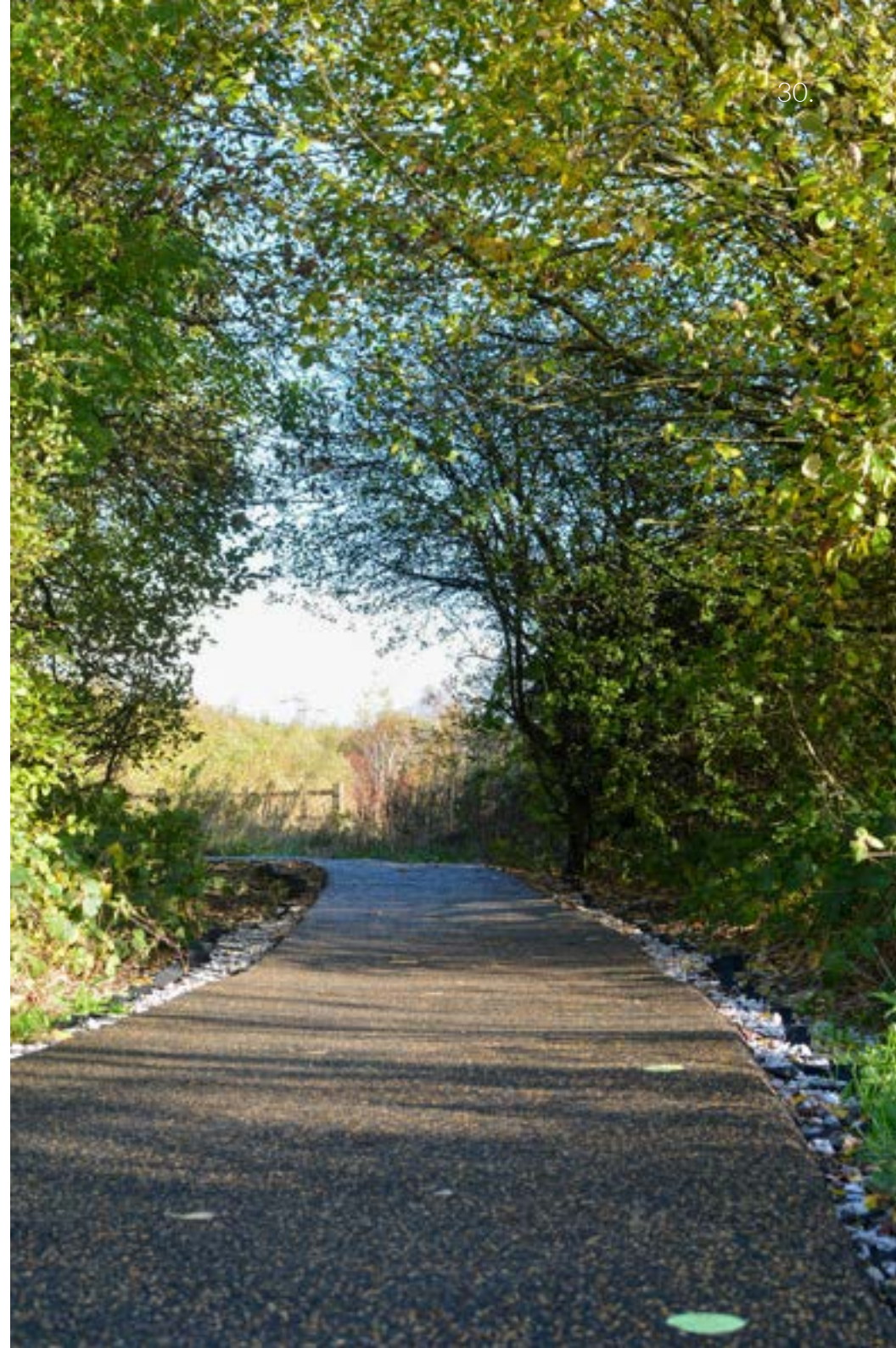
– **Janet, local resident**

## Pathways to nature | Moston Brook



Marina from the local Moston Cycling Club is delighted with the new path too, which provides an off road route through Moston Brook for family cycle rides, linking with the existing Cycle Route 66 along Rochdale Canal and other routes across North Manchester. The path has also created a safer route for children to walk and cycle along on their way to school.

Elsewhere in North Manchester, Mersey Rivers Trust engaged **152** children from Irk Valley Community School in educational River School activities, both in the classroom and outdoors along the river. Children took part in river dipping to see what species they could discover living in the watery habitat, measured the flow rate of the river and took part in nature trails and a River Safari.



# Burnage

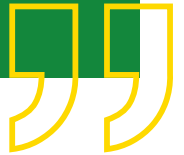
To celebrate the 15th anniversary of Southway Housing Trust, an age friendly walking route has been created across key sites in the Burnage area. Groundwork's community team delivered **17** events which were attended by **191** residents representing different groups in the area. Art pieces such as willow structures and painted bird boxes were created with local groups, enhancing the green spaces and fostering a sense of local ownership with local people.



"This has been really peaceful. I'll look forward to seeing my art on the trail"

"We walk past here nearly every day, so I can't wait to see our bird house up in the trees!"

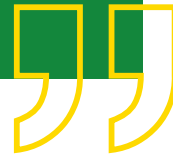
**- Participants of Burnage Age Friendly Walking Route and Arts Trail**



# Wythenshawe

Resilient River Valleys partners responded to a call to action from local residents and councillors to help tidy up Walney Road Woodland - a small forest situated in the middle of a residential area in Sharston, Wythenshawe. After a full day of cleaning the woodland space and declogging the brook, the group of volunteers cleared out 66 bags of rubbish, alongside an array of larger objects such as a mattress, tyres, an old toaster and TV, discarded chairs and much more. Residents were grateful for the hard work undertaken by everyone involved, with one resident, Herbie, commenting:

“We’re extremely grateful to have you all here today to help us clean up this space. Isn’t it nice when people walking past thank you for the work you have done – the fact they really are appreciative.”





City of Trees hosted a stall at Wythenshawe Games in Painswick Park promoting Resilient River Valleys whilst engaging **112** children in boggart making and a leaky dam demonstration. Working with young people, City of Trees and Groundwork ran activities with local school children and the 1st Wythenshawe Scouts group, engaging children in nature craft and wellbeing sessions. City of Trees also provided sessions for the outdoor adventure learning group NARCO, and Bright Futures in Wythenshawe. Sessions included interactive games for learning about woodland management and using nature as a mindfulness tool.



Local community group Wythenshawe Waste Warriors took part in events with Groundwork and City of Trees, providing useful insight into their local green spaces, which helped inform management aims for the Resilient River Valley sessions. This group focus on cleaning up Wythenshawe woodlands through regular litter picking events. Through this connection, Resilient River Valley events were advertised through Wythenshawe Waste Warrior channels, reaching a larger number of local residents, allowing the delivery teams to make new connections.



Get back to nature

## Radcliffe, Bury

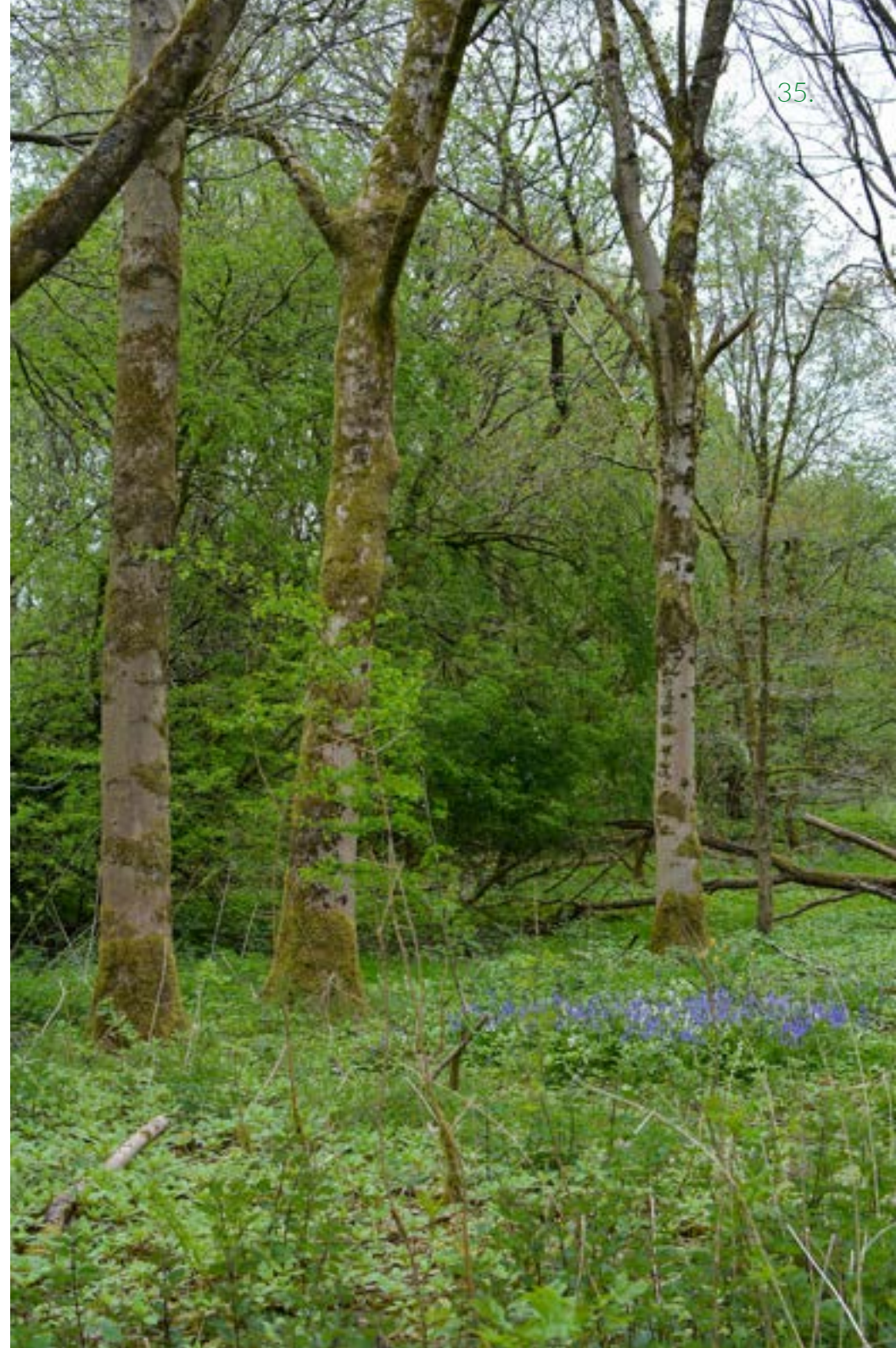
City of Trees worked with **96** local volunteers to improve Outwood Country Park. Volunteers learnt new skills and helped to support woodland, pond and heathland management, whilst also taking part in citizen science activities.

Willow thinned from the park was put to great use at willow weaving workshops, hosted by local artist Cherry Chung.

Local expert David Winnard also hosted a Fungal Foray walk, which was warmly welcomed by participants who gained knowledge in identifying different types of fungi and where they can be found within deciduous woodlands.

Increased use of the site was encouraged by City of Trees who hosted guided walks for local residents, explaining the sites rich history and diverse botany.

Local charity, Incredible Edible Radcliffe were engaged in the project too and integrated their delivery in the project. **31** local school children were invited to the allotment, where sessions were adapted to learn not only about growing fresh produce but about the value of woodlands and biodiversity.





# Wellbeing Survey

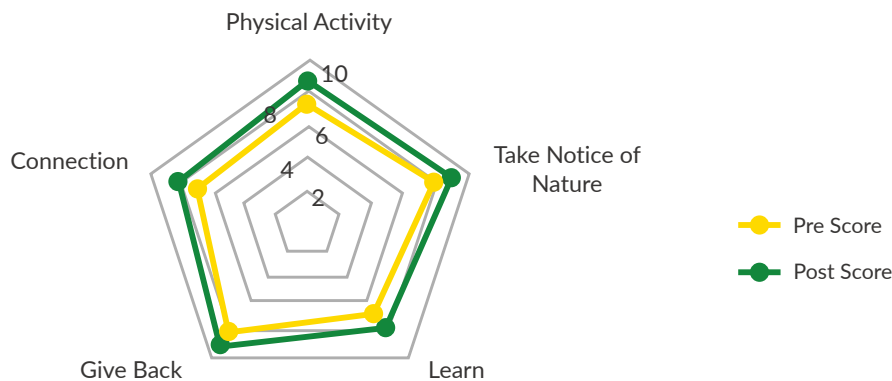
City of Trees conducted a research project exploring the wellbeing impacts that come from people taking part in projects and schemes that improve local green space at a neighbourhood level. During volunteer sessions, volunteers were given the opportunity to take part in the survey. **155** participants agreed and completed the questionnaire before and after they had taken part in a volunteer activity. The questionnaires consisted of open-ended questions about feelings and motivation, and were intended to capture change in mood on a scale based on the '**5 ways to wellbeing**';

- > Physical activity
- > Take notice of nature
- > Learn
- > Give back
- > Connection



Of the **130** participants who shared both pre and post mood scores, **115** individuals showed an improved mood following physical activity within nature. This equates to **88.5%** of participants, exceeding the project target of **80%**. No participants reported a deterioration in mood.

### Average Change in Importance of Each of the 5 Ways to Wellbeing



The volunteering events allowed individuals to talk to new people, learn skills from others and work collaboratively to complete woodland and pond management tasks. More than **67%** of participants in the wellbeing research reported that they felt a greater connection to other people after taking part in a volunteering activity.

“I’ve had a blast volunteering for the Green Recovery Challenge Fund events with City of Trees. At these events, I met some great people, learnt new skills and helped improve woodland across Wythenshawe; most importantly, I got my hands dirty! I will look forward to signing up to volunteer for future projects.”

The volunteer sessions ran by City of Trees also demonstrated how nature can bring a sense of familiarity and connection to local space by creating feelings and sensory experiences that individuals have experienced elsewhere. The Manchester Centre for Youth Studies brought a group of refugees along to one of the volunteer events in Wythenshawe, commenting:

“Positive feedback from the group included the opportunity to learn new skills, and reconnect with skills and memories from gardening activities back home.”



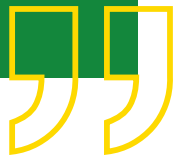
**88.5%** of participants showed an improved mood after the activities



**71%** of participants agreed they learnt/developed new skills



“Felt part of a group instead of alone. I always enjoy Groundwork visits it really helps me with my mental health and gives me confidence”



“It’s great to be involved and putting work into helping the environment”



**53%** of participants felt a greater importance in social connection as a result of the activity

**35%** of participants felt a greater importance in giving back to their local community

“Today has inspired me to find similar volunteering activities closer to home. I would like to work at my local park and give back to the community. I love being outside and learning new skills, thank you!”



# Learning Outcomes

## Planning and listening

Central to the Resilient River Valleys project was a focus on protecting and enhancing greenspaces for, and with, local communities. By taking this approach, residents felt part of the improvement process and developed an increased sense of ownership of their local greenspace, leading to a sustainable legacy for the project. This approach to community outreach has delivered a wide variety of outcomes, as highlighted throughout this report and has opened connections with organisations and community groups that project partners have previously been unable to engage with.

One un-forecasted challenge was the delays created by the COVID pandemic. Some of the consultations on improvements in urban areas had taken place before the pandemic and due to the delay caused by the pandemic, findings had been forgotten and, in some cases, things had changed altogether, meaning the consultations were void. The Groundwork team re-consulted once this challenge was identified, making sure that residents were listened to, going door-to-door to get individual feedback and explaining the situation. People appreciated the extra effort and were happy to share their views for a first or second time.

## Every connection counts

The Resilient River Valleys project identified that not only is it important to connect with new groups and organisations, but it's as important to build upon the connections partners have already made. Established community centres and groups support and/or represent diverse communities and are essential in understanding the intersectional link between nature and health and wellbeing.

Project partners were able to enhance relationships with communities via these community centres. As community engagement lead on the project, Groundwork intends to continue supporting these communities in future projects, replicating this projects approach to community engagement.



## A balance of quality and quantity

Seeking to achieve the biggest and best numbers, it's easy to be drawn to large events or activities that attract crowds. However, throughout the project we have learnt that quality conversations with small community groups who we have developed a trusting relationship with is typically more valuable. In these settings we can ask deeper key questions that provide more insight.

## Time management

Lots of learnings have been gained from Resilient River Valleys relating to time management, should the project be replicated again for a similar 18-month period, the following should be considered:

- > Much of the first two months of the project were taken up with recruitment
- > Fixed-term funded posts resulted in project staff leaving the project early to secure employment, meaning the period of full operational efficiency was less
- > Seasonal time constraints influenced much of the environmental improvement work, with only one woodland planting season available. Much more could have been achieved with two.





# Conclusion

The Resilient River Valleys project has delivered significant improvements to habitats across the Greater Manchester, whilst engaging many diverse people in activities that have connected them with nature, in some cases for the first time, and equipped young people with the skills and experience to develop a career in the environmental sector. It has also provided benefits to Groundwork Greater Manchester, City of Trees and Mersey Rivers Trust, and seems set to act as a catalyst to them being able to develop and deliver further large-scale projects in the future, some of them derived from the Resilient River Valleys approach. The Resilient River Valleys team hope that the work of our project will continue to help people enjoy nature, look after it in the future and inspire more people to help make Greater Manchester a more climate resilient city.





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