

Medlock Valley

The Medlock Valley runs along the course of the River Medlock throughout the whole of East Manchester. The river runs from its source in Bishops Park in Oldham through Tameside into East Manchester where it runs through Clayton Vale and Philips Park, before it's confluence with the River Irwell. The river and the Medlock Valley itself touches on the lives of residents of East Manchester in Newton Heath, Ancoats and Miles Platting.

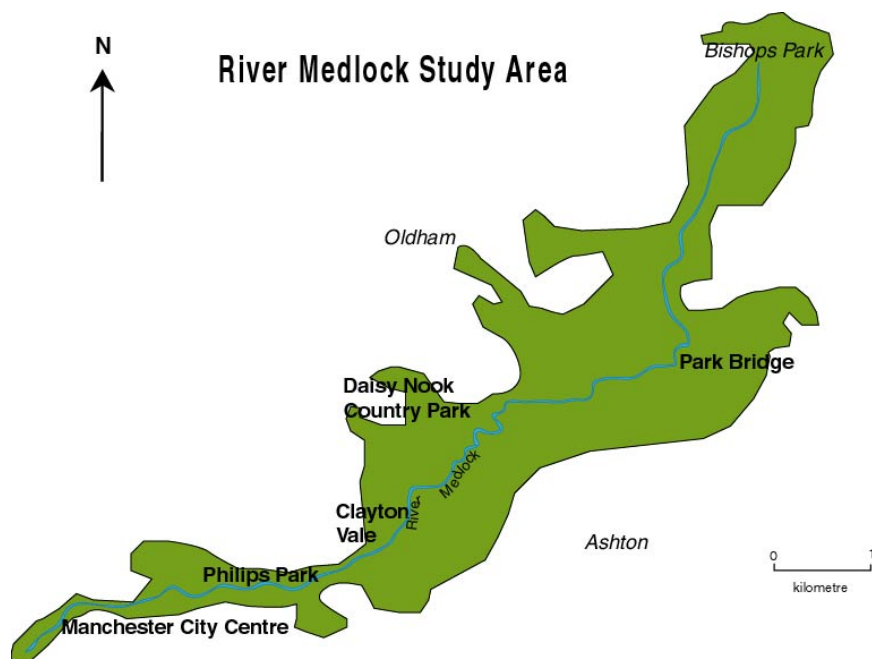


Figure 1: The Medlock Valley

The Medlock Valley can be roughly broken up into five separate sections as far as Manchester is concerned. There is the Upper Medlock, which runs from the rivers entrance into the East Manchester boundary up Clayton Vale, the section through Philips Park, the lower Medlock to the city outskirts at Pin Mill Brow and the stretch through the city centre at the point that it enters the River Irwell. From New East Manchester's perspective it is directly concerned with parts two, three and four of the river valley that are contained within the regeneration boundary. This distinction is made due to the different terrain that the river runs through with distinct changes once the river enters and leaves Philips Park.

The River Medlock has played an important part in Manchester's history first being mentioned over 2000 years ago during the time of the Romans. Outside the walls of the fort Mamcium was a small settlement called Manchester, which was situated, on the banks of the River Medlock. Before the industrial revolution both Manchester and the River Medlock were of little national importance, this all changed when Manchester became the industrial hub of Britain's global empire.

Throughout the course of the 19th and 20th centuries Manchester's waterways supported a variety of industries, acting as coolant, a power source and a dumping ground. During the 1800s there was a particularly bad flood in Manchester and the Medlock burst its banks and flooded the surrounding area. As a result the cemetery that borders the river had a number of its occupants washed away. It was due to this that the river was culverted from Bank Road Wildflower Meadow to the point at which the river exits Philips Park at Alan Turing Way. To date this has been a success as none of the occupants of the cemetery have felt the need to disappear since!

New East Manchester published its' Strategic Regeneration Framework (SRF) in March 2001 identifying the key drivers, opportunities and principles for ensuring successful, sustainable long term regeneration. The Framework identified the critical role that the Medlock Valley should be playing in the area as a largely under-utilised open space resource. It recognized that the three component parts of the Valley, the Lower Medlock valley, Philips Park and Clayton Vale, together formed a Green Framework.

The SRF recognized that all parts of this Green Framework required investment and the following key elements were highlighted:

- Creation of a continuous, high profile green open space which defines East Manchester
- Landscaping of the River Medlock and its' immediate environs to create a high value amenity for adjacent new and existing neighbourhoods
- Restoration of Philips Park
- Rehabilitation of Clayton Vale

The SRF recognised how addressing the above would help to contribute powerfully to the creation of a distinct sense of place. It highlighted the unique opportunity to transform the Medlock Valley, particularly its' western section, into a green, attractive environment that would attract and support high quality and high value housing development.

In East Manchester, this Valley provides local communities with much-needed areas of open space, close to residential, recreational and business sites. For the purpose of this project, the valley can be split into 3 areas of open space (total area approx 62.2ha). The linkages between and into these sites, via the proposed Medlock Valley Way, are key this project.

The decline of the heavy industry in the region meant that the Medlock's importance as an industrial tool was diminished, but its importance as a resource for the community had not even begun...

Clayton Vale

The part of the Medlock Valley known as Clayton Vale was used as a landfill, before it was decided in the 1980s to return Clayton Vale to an urban green space. Those who now visit Clayton Vale who did not know it as a landfill find it difficult to believe that it was never anything other than a green space. The 57ha site plays a critical role as a significant area of informal open space in the city. It is a key site in terms of biodiversity within East Manchester, and is being looked at as a future Local Nature Reserve (2006). Its regeneration will benefit a large number of neighbourhoods that are directly adjacent to the site and link to the wider regeneration of the area.



Figure 2: Clayton Vale

Philips Park

Philips Park is a formal park in the centre of the Medlock that is of particular historical interest. Opened in 1846 as one of the first ‘People’s Parks’. The park had its golden years between the wars, before entering a period of decline since 1960s. The catchment area of the park has seen a dramatic downturn in population in recent decades, with concerns over personal safety acting as a major deterrent to use of isolated open space. Investment from this project will focus on linkages to the wider valley, and the Medlock Valley way. Philips Park a regeneration project in its own right. More about this project can be seen from the Philips Park document on this website.

Lower Medlock

The Lower Medlock consists of a series of smaller green spaces along the river valley. As with the upper areas, there is a need for environmental improvement of these sites and for the continuation of a coherent Medlock Valley Way into the city centre at Ancoats. However, in the Lower Medlock, there are additional considerations in terms of the potential of high quality, high value housing development. The Lower Medlock has been identified as an area for strategic housing market renewal that will support the plans to build up to 12,000 new homes in the New East Manchester area. The

redevelopment of the valley will be a key driver in supporting the new residential developments and in encouraging people to relocate into the area.

The Aims

The Medlock Valley programme has the following aims: -

- To create a strong sense of place and identity for the Medlock Valley;
- To promote both community ownership and involvement within the valley;
- To improve accessibility; To further develop the role of the warden service to create a safe, secure environment;
- To improve the open spaces within the valley; To increase the activities on offer and address safety and security;
- To create a wider range of facilities catering for different users;
- To enable the Valley to develop its full role in the wider regeneration agenda, linking with new development and attracting future investment.

Improvements 2005-2008

All aspects of the Medlock Valley are being addressed in the regeneration framework and the area as a whole is undergoing significant improvements. This year there will be £300,000 spent on the Medlock Valley to improve its use and accessibility of all members of the public wishing to use this resource. The priority this year is to improve the main footpaths and bridges in Clayton Vale as well as addressing the issues of access onto the Vale. There is to be improvements carried out to the access to Clayton Vale at Culcheth Lane in order to improve the aesthetic look of a well-used entrance and in an effort to stop motorbikes from gaining access to an area that they show no regard for. The same is true of the Bank Bridge Road entrance where there is a wildflower meadow containing several species of botanical importance. The fencing along Bank Bridge Road is also to be replaced and reinforced, as the area has become a problem from people fly-tipping.

The footpath from Lime Kiln Lane, which forms part of the Medlock Valley Way, is to be improved, as it is one of the most used and in need of some improvement to reflect this. There is also going to be a concerted effort to improve the two existing

bridges on Clayton Vale that span the river, as they no longer reflect the image of the Medlock Valley in the 21st century. The brick bridge is going to be restored in keeping with its original design. However, the iron bridge is to be rebuilt as either a pedestrian bridge or a bridge with only light vehicle access.

In 2006 the large entrances to the Vale will undergo improvements, to make them more welcoming to the Medlock Valley and the pathways leading from smaller entrances will be addressed. In future years there is going to be a drive to enable more members of the community to become involved in what is happening on their doorstep and to get their input into the changes taking place. In total the whole scheme is set to receive £1.7 million over three years. It is the hope that at the end of the programme there will be a green resource on the cities doorstep enjoyed by all.

The Japanese Knotweed that is prevalent in part all along the Medlock Valley has been sprayed at least once and will be done again in the next year. Knotweed is a real problem plant, introduced by the Victorians for aesthetic reasons it is a plant that takes hold and spreads quickly. It is extremely problematic for all areas of the country as it takes root quickly and is extremely hard to eradicate due to having an extensive root system. There are several instances of Knotweed undermining the foundation of building and other structures. It is illegal to purposely spread Japanese Knotweed and any that is removed must be disposed of at specialised facilities. There is also a scheme in progress to remove much of the reeds from the ponds as they are beginning to have an adverse effect on the ecosystem of the ponds and discourage use of that part of the Medlock Valley.



Figure 3: Clayton Vale in snow

Clayton Vale has an active friends group who can be found at <http://www.friendsofclaytonvale.org.uk>, the group run events on the Vale such as Easter Bunny Hops and Halloween Howlers. There is also a friends group for Philips Park who meet at regular intervals to discuss matters of concern to the park and to offer a 'peoples' voice for the 'peoples park'. For more information on all aspects of the Medlock Valley please contact: -

- Jo Frazer, Medlock Valley Project Officer, 0161 237 5656
- Carol Baguley, Medlock Valley Community Link Officer, 0161 237 5656
- Julie Lawrence, Environmental Programmes Manager, New East Manchester, 0161 231 9550

With the work being done on Clayton Vale, Philips Park and the Medlock Valley in its entirety, the residents of East Manchester will have an outstanding green space of interest and importance on their doorstep.

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