

# **.WYKE BECK WAY COMMUNITY FORUM**

## **Annual Report 2007-2008**

### **1. Summary of the Year**

1.1 Centre and Forum activists over the past year have spent much time on absorbing and responding to the consultation process of the two Area Action Plans for the local authority's EASEL and the Aire Valley regeneration projects. The upside to this work allied with other emerging factors, has been that it has sharpened awareness of the need for a major Landscape Master Plan for the Valley, a policy objective we have been promoting since our inauguration back in 2005.

### **2. Vision for The Valley**

2.1 Throughout the year we engaged fully in the City Council's new Local Development Framework consultation process. This new concept, replacing the existing Unitary Development Plan, proposes two Area Action Plans for the EASEL and Aire Valley Regeneration projects which together embrace virtually the whole of the WB Valley. The Centre prepared comprehensive written reports and organised LCC presentations to The Board and The Forum, following which we submitted detailed critical comments on both AAPs. Whilst our comments found serious deficiencies behind the proposals, we have continued to develop a good relationship with DevelopmentDept/LCC representatives. Officers from a wide range of LCC Depts. continue to attend Forum meetings and to acknowledge the positive role the Forum can perform in debating current LCC issues so far as they relate to Valley perspectives.

2.2 As we drew towards the end of the year, an opportunity came for all parties to come together under the aegis of Aire Action Leeds [Leeds Initiative's Waterways Partnership Group] to seek ways of developing a Landscape Master Plan for the Wyke Beck Valley. Teamwork groups are now being organised through a partnership between AAL and the WBW Centre to develop a brief for The Master Plan. By this approach we aim to utilize the resources of the various government and local authority agencies, key private sector players and environmental groups that have relevant expertise. The most important aspect of this recent development is that it also enables us to invite our own Forum members to participate in this group dialogue and Master Plan preparation. This can now be seen as strengthening the approach we developed earlier in The Forum when we first outlined our own plans some 18 months ago to form similar groups to define our 'Vision for the Valley'.

### **3. Flooding within the Valley**

3.1 The driving force for other bodies to now see merit in our demand for a Master Plan for the Valley as a whole, has been that of 'flood alleviation'. For such measures to be

effective in The Wyke Beck Valley they have to present a balanced approach to preserving and preferably enhancing local biodiversity and open space. The Environment Agency are key to releasing funding to address flood alleviation. They in turn have to demonstrate to The Government who hold the purse strings, that the affected areas within The Valley have demonstrably strong claims to such funding. However it is also key to obtaining successful funding that the measures when implanted will not only substantially lower flood risk but will also improve local biodiversity and enhance local community amenity. The Master Plan approach highlighted above, will aim to present this balanced solution and therefore has the support of the Environment Agency.

3.2 Despite recently completed measures to keep the Wyke Beck free of obstruction, the regular occurrence of flash floods continues to present flood risks to people living at low points in the Valley close to the Beck. This is particularly relevant for the residents in the Dunhill Estate off Selby Road. Pledged as we are to ensuring that The Forum addresses local Valley concerns, we took successful steps during the year to invite a representative from the Dunhill Flood Action Group to attend a Forum meeting and inform us of their concerns. We now have a good line of communication with this group who we hope will join the Forum and the Master Plan dialogue. In this way The Forum can be assured that it can demonstrate that it is sensitive to local community concerns about flooding. At the same time residents such as those in the Dunhills become better aware of all the factors that have to be taken into account to achieve an effective flood alleviation strategy and implementation.

#### **4. Protecting and enhancing Open Space/Access in the Valley**

4.1 During the year we were involved in the successful proposal by Sustrans to obtain additional lottery funding to develop their 'Connect 2' concept of new and enhanced cycle ways within urban areas. This project will aim to improve the connection between home, school and work, for example, via cycle/ footpath routes. Sustrans are members of The Forum and would like to improve cycle access throughout the Valley connecting it at both ends to regional cycle networks. This is an approach which The Forum fully supports but the speed of the process behind the Connect 2 bid meant we could not consult with local people about the proposal in sufficient depth to feel we could give the scheme our backing at this stage. We hope of course that there will be scope in the future to embrace this concept and that Sustrans will come on board with these ideas through the Master Plan dialogue.

4.2 We expressed concern during the year about possibilities that greenspace adjacent to Killingbeck Cemetery might be used for an extension to that cemetery. This possible new use and loss of publicly accessible open space, something that on the face of it we would not wish to see, illustrates one of our major criticisms of the City Council. They consistently use their open space ownership in the Valley to seek to address otherwise legitimate new site needs with a 'rip, rip, rip' approach that the community's greenspace. .

The preparation of Area Action plans does not appear to address or aim to improve this behaviour. However the identification of the above Master Plan, given status as a Supplementary Planning Document, should help lay down parameters which encourage a more holistic approach to the future use of open space in the Valley.

4.4 In order to assess better ways of looking after the kind of open space we enjoy or could enjoy, we organised a visit to the 'Green Estate' organisation in Sheffield. Here a partnership between Bellways, the preferred developer for the EASEL regeneration project, and the Green Estate had developed successful new open space concepts. Members saw impressive new open spaces provided to a high standard together with long term management agreements and community employment schemes. A number of positive spin-offs came out of the visit. Groundwork Leeds, who accompanied us as Forum members, have successfully obtained funding through EASEL to research the feasibility of a Wyke Beck Valley community training initiative. This would provide training through Valley projects involved with environmental improvements and new open space provision. The Forum were pleased to learn that Bellways are willing to introduce The Green Estate concept into the EASEL project as soon as they are able to proceed. We have therefore welcomed Bellways into the above Master Plan dialogue.

4.5 Better efforts were made to acquaint Forum members of the key factors on the ground at the southern end of the Valley. Aided by Forum members from Rothwell Footpath Group we had an enjoyable and informative walk with them during summer '07 taking in the lower reaches of Temple Newsam Estate and Skelton Lake. We continue to sit on Biffa's ecological management group for 'Lagoon 21'. This is part of the planning approval for Biffa's controlled landfill tipping and reinstatement east of Skelton Lake and is being monitored by the City environmental and amenity groups attending. Our Rothwell based members have continued to maintain contact with Evans of Leeds who have a key interest in developing land at this end of the Valley. More recently we were pleased see Evans represented in the Master Plan dialogue referred to above.

4.6 Later in the year we supported the call by Friends of Roundhay Park to seek improvements to the current very dangerous footpath crossing of Leeds Outer Ring Road at the head of Roundhay Park i.e at the northern end of The Valley. We share with the Friends the importance of improving the attractiveness of walking through the Park which defines the northern end of The Valley. Hopefully the work on the Master Plan, which The Friends will be invited to participate in, will open up opportunities to upgrade the importance attached to this footpath linking the north to the south of the City via The Valley.

## **5. Improving links with the City and the local community**

5.1 Excellent progress was made this past year in attracting Leeds Met. University's School of Architecture and Landscape Dept. to undertake student landscape studies and designs

for The Valley. We acted as clients of the students and spent time helping to create imaginative briefs with their tutors which a wide group of our members participated in. We hope the outcome from the students work will illustrate new conceptual thinking and help promote opportunities for The Valley, given new resources which may flow from the two major regeneration projects. This is one way in which we can show local people the potential which the Valley offers and encourage local people to begin to take pride in their surroundings. We were pleased to select one of the schemes as worthy of our, first, 'Valley Pride' award and aim to display the work with other landscape aspects at this years Gipton Gala and our AGM.

5.2 Taking advantage of this University contact and the student design project, we made good contact with The David Young Community Academy which lies immediately adjacent to the northern end of The Valley and whose theme is The Built Environment. We put LMU and DYCA in touch with each other around our Landscape project and hope that liaison between the two will lead to Academy students taking a better interest in their Valley surroundings and perhaps seeing the potential in a wide range of landscape career opportunities. There is also the longer term opportunity for the students to suggest ways in which they can participate in the community's plans to promote The Valley.

## **6. Forum Accountability**

6.1 There have been four (4) meetings of The Board of Trustees throughout the year which have been almost fully attended with only two absences recorded. Comprehensive written reports have been submitted to each meeting by The Centre Manager and The Treasurer for consideration by both the Board and The Forum. This year we welcomed onto the Board Dr.Brian Waters who has played a valuable and enthusiastic supportive role in our work throughout the year. At the end of this year though we have to say farewell to Peter Huxford who wishes to retire from the Board. We express our thanks and appreciation to him for his support and in particular for his contribution on the Primrose Valley front, introducing us to its supporters who are now members of The Forum.

6.2 The Forum took steps to seek further funding through Leeds Voice to support its Vision for The Valley Programme. An outline bid was well received but appears to involve more detailed work to finalise a formal submission. We do however have sufficient funds to meet all known commitments over the next two years. Additional funding will support new work and hopefully sustain our administrative overheads into year three.

6.2 As with the Board there have also been four (4) full meetings of The Forum throughout the year. Each has seen a reasonably good attendances but as with all community organisations we must strive to expand our core strength. We are of course aware that individuals are giving up their own time to participate in these discussions, not least the

representatives of the City Council and Valley agencies, and are grateful to them for that.

6.3 Finally we must thank everyone who has contributed voluntarily to our work this past year, be it in creating our web site, helping to disseminate our meeting agendas and papers, representing us at key meetings or being available to help us in our moments of need. We have had another successful year and it could not have been so without that team spirit which enables us to 'seize the moment to make good things happen'

Eric Cowin Centre Manager May 08

On behalf of The Board and for submission to The AGM July 08