



DERBYSHIRE LIFE

The government's ideas on liveability are being put to the test in the High Peak.

Words Kevin Gopal

Photographs Courtesy of Ferguson McIlveen, Lomas & Co, High Peak Borough Council

Glossop's overlooked river is to be at the heart of a £2.3 million facelift for the Peak District town that will also spruce up its parks and town centre.

Glossop Brook is to be opened up as an alternative thoroughfare to the town's busy high street, which not only serves residents but also provides a route into the Peak District for thousands of tourists.

Glossop is one of 27 towns and cities in England to be piloting the government's Liveability scheme, which offers funding to local authorities to spend on improving public spaces – much neglected over many years.

An under-used asset, Glossop Brook runs through the town unseen from the still characterful but congested high street. The investment holds out the promise of a river more welcome to people and nature alike that will provide a new way of navigating Glossop and link the regeneration of two large mills at either end of the town and the rejuvenation of two parks.

Glossop's involvement in the Liveability project arose from the findings of a Countryside Agency assessment of the town, explains Paul Armstrong, business manager for economic development at High Peak Borough Council. The health check identified concerns about Glossop's environment, the quality of the town centre public realm, the condition of the parks and poor use of Glossop Brook.

"The message that came was that people didn't want to see major new investment without a real improvement in quality," says Armstrong "The town has some very attractive traditional high street and key heritage assets, our challenge was to pull them together through a comprehensive approach, at the heart of which was the Glossop Brook." As the council was looking for ways to address these issues

over a five to ten year period, along came the Liveability scheme, offering funding to a small local authority that lacked resources and access to other streams of regeneration spending. Armstrong says that focusing on the river linked the town centre with the parks and the mills due for redevelopment, giving a unique aspect to Glossop's Liveability bid.

"We asked how we can get better interaction with the river," says Armstrong. "At the moment access to the river is limited and generally poor."

Liveability's money comes with conditions: local authorities must find improvements to the way they deliver services; they must consult extensively with local communities; and they must work in genuine partnership with other organisations.

High Peak Borough Council can point to its excellent rating in the last comprehensive performance assessment as proof of its willingness to embrace service reform. The 300 people who in one day voiced opinions on the Liveability master plan at a display in Norfolk Square show the extent of consultation. Partnership working is achieved through Glossop Vision, which brings the borough and county authority together with – among others – the local town partnership, Glossop Volunteers' Bureau and the Mersey Basin Campaign.

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“Investment in public space is overdue,” says Mark Turner, deputy chief executive of the Mersey Basin Campaign, which helped High Peak Borough Council with the Liveability bid and is now assisting with the aspects of the project that involve Glossop Brook. “A lot of political time is spent on big-ticket things like education and health but many people don’t use those services or use them infrequently. But things like walking down the street or using the local park – we do these on a daily basis.”

There is a clear rationale for Mersey Basin Campaign’s involvement in Glossop’s Liveability project, according to Turner. “Logically and sensibly we should be linking in to this kind of work. We are interested in improving water quality and the waterside environment at a local level through the network of action partnerships that we have.

“This project fits with that agenda - trying to make sustainable changes with community support.”

Turner, who sits on Glossop Vision’s board, has praise for the local authority’s approach to partnership working. “It’s not just local authority councillors and a few officers in a traditional local authority huddle,” he says. “They are engaging other organisations including the local volunteer bureau and the private sector – they have brought in the local small traders’ association.”

A management plan for Glossop Brook is being drawn up by Action Etherow & Goyt, part of the Mersey Basin Campaign. The rivers Etherow and Goyt rise in the moorland areas of the Peak District and flow through Whaley Bridge, Hayfield, New Mills and Marple Bridge as well as Glossop before reaching Stockport, where they meet the River Tame, a confluence that marks that start of the River Mersey.

Mary Lee of Action Etherow & Goyt says the management plan is only being drawn up after extensive consultation with the local community, including youth groups, carried out by Red Rose Forest.

“There was a great deal of enthusiasm and interest,”

says Lee. “People are aware of the river but it’s closed off. If people are to use the riverside they have to have a reason to do so.”

Consultation among young people also went some way to scuppering the myth of disaffected teenagers with no interest in their surroundings. As well as calls to provide more for teenagers to do on the riverside, there were also concerns about litter, safety and play opportunities for younger children as well as some creative ideas such as floodlighting the river from underneath.

“We expected young people not to have much sense of social responsibility but we were surprised and encouraged that they had many of the same concerns as older people,” says Lee.

Flash flooding of Glossop Brook in 2002 that damaged Manor Park, Harehills and the town centre, according to Armstrong, “had a huge impact on psyche of people.” He continues: “While clean-up got underway quickly and the debris was shifted we were keen not to rush some repairs when more wide reaching regeneration might be possible.”

Lee says that now the town has recovered the floods provide an opportunity to have a “rethink and a redesign.”

Even as the management plan is being drawn up, activities on the riverside are gaining momentum. The environmental charity Groundwork is establishing a volunteer ranger scheme and Lee is helping set up a friends of the river group to ensure that improvements can be identified and implemented beyond the life of Liveability funding.

“The river channel is artificial,” says Lee. “It’s not attractive or wildlife-friendly. How to make it look and function better without compromising flood protection requirements is one of our challenges.

“The water quality is not bad and there are some fish in it. Is it possible to enhance the river and make it more conducive to wildlife?”

Consultation suggests that whatever changes are made should be as natural as possible. Armstrong summarises the message from residents: “Don’t formalise it too heavily. We don’t want an engineered riverbank, we want it quite natural. Yes to stone walls, no to concrete edgings.”

He adds: “It’s been interesting to see how people have connected with the landscape, keen to reflect the qualities of the Dark Peak.”

Glossop Brook runs through two notable areas of parkland, Manor



60-second expert

- Formerly a significant cotton mill town, Glossop combines the urban and rural – a gateway to the Peak District but close to Stockport and Manchester.
- Glossop is one of 27 English towns and cities piloting the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's Liveability programme, offering funding to improve public spaces.
- To secure funding of £2.3 million, local authorities must also improve the way they provide existing services, show genuine partnership working and consult extensively with the community.
- Glossop Brook, which runs through the town, is regarded as an under-used asset.
- Glossop town centre retains much of its traditional character, a fact that local people want to build on with improvements in quality.
- Glossop's Liveability plans include improvements to the river and riverside, so that it becomes a new thoroughfare for the town. Transformation of the rail station area is also planned.
- The new river thoroughfare also links regeneration of two large mills and improvements to two parks.

MORE INFORMATION:

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ABOVE MANOR PARK

Park, a significant formal park, and the more modest area of Harehills, positioned behind the town centre. Both offer the potential to attract visitors from outside the town, encouraging visitors to Glossop to stay longer and spend more.

Proposals for Manor Park, developed after suggestions from the Friends of Manor Park, focus on moving facilities around to make more sense, as well as improving wheelchair access.

Armstrong says: "At the moment the children's playground is next to the skate park so you've got the toddlers alongside the teenagers. The plan is make the park more user friendly, perhaps moving the toddlers play area next to the pavilion, shop and toilets, which is better for parents, while the teenagers get their own separate area."

Harehills, by contrast, full of mature trees and north-facing, has been described as "dark and dank" so work needs to be done to address safety concerns and bring more people into the park.

"The best looked-after sites are the ones that are looked after by the biggest range of the community," says Turner. "They are self-policing, people feel safe."

The priority for Harehills is to inject life into it, encouraging a wider range of people to use it as a green oasis on the edge of the town centre by improving its facilities.

The Liveability project extends to the high street and the town centre as well, where the aim of investment in public spaces is twofold: to encourage local people to shop in their own town rather than heading off to Stockport or Manchester, and to persuade the thousands of people on their way to established parts of the Peak District that Glossop can be something of a destination in its own right.

In Glossop's favour is a town centre that still retains its own character, with a range of vibrant independent retailers and a traditional market. Private-sector investment in the redevelopment of the Howard Town and Wren Nest mills at either end of the town should provide new retail and leisure attractions. But congestion and small but significant details such as poor signposting are a problem.

Chief among the remedies offered by Liveability is the transformation of the railway station area so that cars no longer dominate and it can become more of a public space. But residents are keen on doing the small things better, says Armstrong.

"People are keen to see an increase in general quality. Yes, ambitious schemes and visionary ideas are good but actually we would like to see better quality pavements, better quality street furniture. Don't be too ambitious, get the nuts and bolts right."

Liveability has brought the council and the community together for the first time, says Debbie Enever of Glossop Volunteer Bureau and a member of the Glossop Vision board. She has praise for the creative way that the local authority has encouraged participation.

The result is enthusiasm across the board. "Time is the only enemy," says Enever. "The will is there. I've not come across anyone who hasn't bought it. This is the first chance we have had to look at our open spaces. It's like lifting the lid." 