

## HULME PARK IN MANCHESTER

Organisation	Landscape Projects
<b>Trigger</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Funding from the EU for a new park to help regenerate the area.</li> </ul>
<b>Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To design a safe and attractive park in the city centre that could be used by a range of different groups.</li> </ul>
<b>Tools/techniques</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Steering groups and interest groups.</li> <li>Presented a framework of new ideas to people for consultation.</li> </ul>
<b>Enablers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Started from the beginning, as the site was completely cleared.</li> <li>The whole area was also being developed.</li> </ul>
<b>Tensions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bureaucracy and clients' fear of being blamed for innovative approaches that might fail.</li> </ul>
<b>Impact</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Little crime.</li> <li>Well-designed park, with many innovative and attractive features.</li> <li>Civic Award.</li> <li>Generated further work for the designers.</li> </ul>
<b>Lessons</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Innovation undertaken by responsible companies may be stifled by rules and regulations.</li> <li>Parks can be designed to be safe and attractive.</li> <li>Subtle design feature can reduce crime and anti-social behaviour.</li> <li>Thinking ahead reduces the cost of any repairs required due to vandalism etc.</li> </ul>

### Synopsis

This case demonstrates the value of design in creating a safe, green and communal environment within an area of a city, previously notorious for high levels of crime especially in relation to robbery and burglary. The aim was to develop a park that would be safe, open to different users and serve to connect Hulme with the city centre itself. An open-plan style of park was developed, with pathways and roads connecting the park to other parts of the city. The permeable boundary was designed to encourage use and inclusiveness, yet could easily be repaired in the event of criminal damage. A mix of bollards, small trenches and grills prevented the open park area and/or specific features being misused by car drivers, motorcyclists or dogs. In addition to youth areas and sports facilities, children were catered for within a challenging play area located next to a school which ensured that children were visible to their teachers or parents. The park was surrounded by newly developed houses and low-rise flats and has significantly contributed to their value.

## Background to Hulme Park in Manchester

Landscape Projects was asked by Ian Simpson Architects to prepare a joint submission to develop an entirely new park in Hulme, just one mile from Manchester City Centre. In the late 1980s, the area was notorious for crime and poorly designed housing and thus funds were gained from the City Challenge to regenerate the area. Amec and Hulme Regeneration partnership was formed, prompting the Local Council and its partners to come together to prepare a brief for a new park. According to Neil Swanson of Landscape Projects, it was a visionary project and the brief for the park was excellent in that it was very specific and well thought out. The idea was to use passive surveillance to prevent the occurrence and fear of 'mugging', rather than control entry to the public space. This would mean using psychological, rather than physical boundaries, as well as paying special attention to the way in which spaces were overlooked. The team of designers was very excited by the project:

"It was a real opportunity, as there has not been much park design in Manchester for 50 years. To think what a park should be. It was really interesting. To have such a challenging brief, where you are building a park from the beginning" (Neil Swanson, Practice Principal).

This case is based on an interview with Neil Swanson, Practice Principal, Landscape Projects, a small team of landscape architects based in Manchester. Further information was gained from local residents and police, through the Hulme Residents Committee.

## Design Process

### Concept

The idea was that the park should be accessible to a whole range of users – elderly ladies walking their dogs, youths, children etc. The park would introduce a green, communal space into Hulme, connecting it with the City Centre through the walkways and roads. The open-plan style park would be divided by permeable boundaries into spaces for different age groups, which would support the surrounding facilities such as local community centres, a school and the Zion Centre, an important building providing cultural activities.



*Figure 1: Open-plan style of Hulme Park*

Landscape Project's submission to the City Council outlined a flexible framework, which took the Council's ideas as a starting point by, for example, defining the shape of the park and ways of creating areas for different users, yet allowed opportunities for consultation and change.

### **Developing the Site**

Except for 65 trees which were kept for reasons of sustainability, the park area was initially cleared and topsoil added. The road running through the site was to be kept, and new houses and low-rise flats built, all facing onto the park. Pathways for people to walk through the park were created.



*Figure 2: Plan of the park*

The park was 70 metres wide, which increased the sense of security of users, as Neil Swanson explains:

“We can pick out figures at a distance of 70 metres, recognising age, gender, even perhaps facial expression. As a way of increasing safety, a park should not be too deep, as this makes people feel uneasy. You can recognise people and perhaps subconsciously one is aware of not being anonymous” (Practice Principal).

## Permeable and Sustainable Barriers

The perimeter fence surrounding the park comprises an attractive red brick wall, which is about one metre high, with metal railings above. The permeable fencing is a way of encouraging use of the park as evidence suggests that only people living up to three blocks away will use a public space, otherwise it is considered outside of their territory. The wall was constructed using break joints, held together by steel, which prevents the wall from distorting and allows panels to be unbolted and sections of wall removed. This makes repairing the wall easier and cheaper, as Neil Swanson explains:

“You have to think of how it’s going to be abused. They may trash their cars, driving them into the wall. You have to be able to repair a small area, without needing to change the whole lot” (Practice Principal).

Horizontal, rather than vertical, railings were used (see figure 2), as they are easy to see through, as Neil Swanson explains:

“It used to have ‘sod off railings’, but ours are different – they are horizontal. We want it to be inclusive, so that they are see-through. Vertical railings all converge, so that you can’t see through them” (Practice Principal).

The railings were also set at an angle to discourage children from sitting on them.



*Figure 3: Park railings*

Parking around the park is encouraged as a way of creating a busy atmosphere, although cars are prevented from entering the park by bollards. In addition, there are small trenches for recycling water which prevent motorbikes from driving at speed across the park.

## Park Features

Inside the park, there is a podium for events and carnivals, with an easy to erect shelter safely contained in a white box. The flooring is made of scree strips, (i.e. pieces of stone) which is produced locally and is attractive, inexpensive and relatively safe. In addition to youth areas, there are several play areas for children, including a treasure island near the school, which dogs are kept out of by a grill. This is a challenging area full of shipwrecks, dunes and monsters.



*Figure 4: Children's play area*

Landscape Projects worked with local artists to provide artwork pertinent to the park and young people. They also encouraged local people to write their secrets on pieces of paper and this, along with some personal items, were laminated and put in a wall. Unfortunately, the use of gold leaf gave the impression that these were valuable and they were therefore stolen!

### **Tensions and Techniques**

Landscape Projects believes in presenting new ideas to people that capture their imagination, rather than simply asking them what they want. Consultation, considered extensive, was through a steering group and various interest groups for the children's play area, sports facilities and overall. The main bone of contention was the fencing around the park. The Council initially expressed concern about children sitting on the wall and potentially hurting themselves, so the metal railings were positioned at an angle, rather than being flat, as Neil Swanson explains:

“People said you can’t design a wall like that, as kids will climb on it. We said, yes, they might, that’s no problem. Lets except this and make it so that they can do it safely without damaging the fencing. We will tilt the horizontal bar on the top of the fencing, to stop them sitting on the top. They can sit on the wall part of the fencing though” (Practice Principal).

Another problem was coping with the bureaucracy, as council representatives tend to be cautious. In the future, Neil Swanson would like to see councils supporting innovation:

“Working with a bureaucracy is difficult and you have to reassure them that they are not going to be exposed to blamed. They don’t want to be blamed for something, which is why they stick to what they know. But you have to innovate from new, not old” (practice Principal).

## **Impact**

In Neil Swanson’s opinion, “*parks do make a difference*” to city centres. Indeed, the contractor responsible for the surrounding housing development has been forced to contribute towards to the park’s development, in view of its impact on the value and attractiveness of the surrounding flats and houses. The apartments facing the park cost £20,000 more than their counterparts facing away from the park. The park has been relatively free from crime and was described by a local Police Officer as “*a triumph of design*”. While the area has seen a reduction in crime, it should be noted that the whole area has changed with new housing and the influx of new residents, thus making it difficult to establish the impact of the park.

The park was the winner of a Civic Award and features prominently on the promotional material used by Landscape Projects, whose success has led to further work. In addition, the park itself has seen further developments with the building of a new Zion Centre.

## **Lesson Learned**

This case shows that careful design can create a safe and pleasant communal environment in a city, with features that can easily repaired. Neil Swanson feels that Treasure Island should have been flat, rather than being on a mound, to improve visibility. The monster, although a wonderful feature, has not been made to work in the way that was planned. Overall, however, the open-plan design of the park combined with innovative features for specific target audiences worked really well and, as long as it is properly maintained, will benefit the local residents.

According to Neil Swanson, councils should do more to support the development of green, communal spaces within city centres. Rather than preventing people from planting shrubs (seen as creating areas for criminals), he would like to see them focusing on increasing the presence of people on the streets, as this helps reduce fear of crime. He also believes that councils should be prepared to try new approaches for improving the city centre and reducing crime, as innovation needs to come from new, not old ideas.

## References

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## Classification Index

Ekblom's crime classification	misbehaviour (violence against the person, criminal damage, anti-social behaviour).
BCS crime classification	Robbery, criminal damage and anti-social behaviour.
DAC	Catering for the needs of local residents and improving connections.
Primary motivation	To cater for the needs of local residents and improve the environment.
Type of designer	Landscape architect
Approach	Innovative approach to improving a residential area in the city.
Sector	Public spaces
Location	Park
Author	Caroline Davey

DAC Hulme park