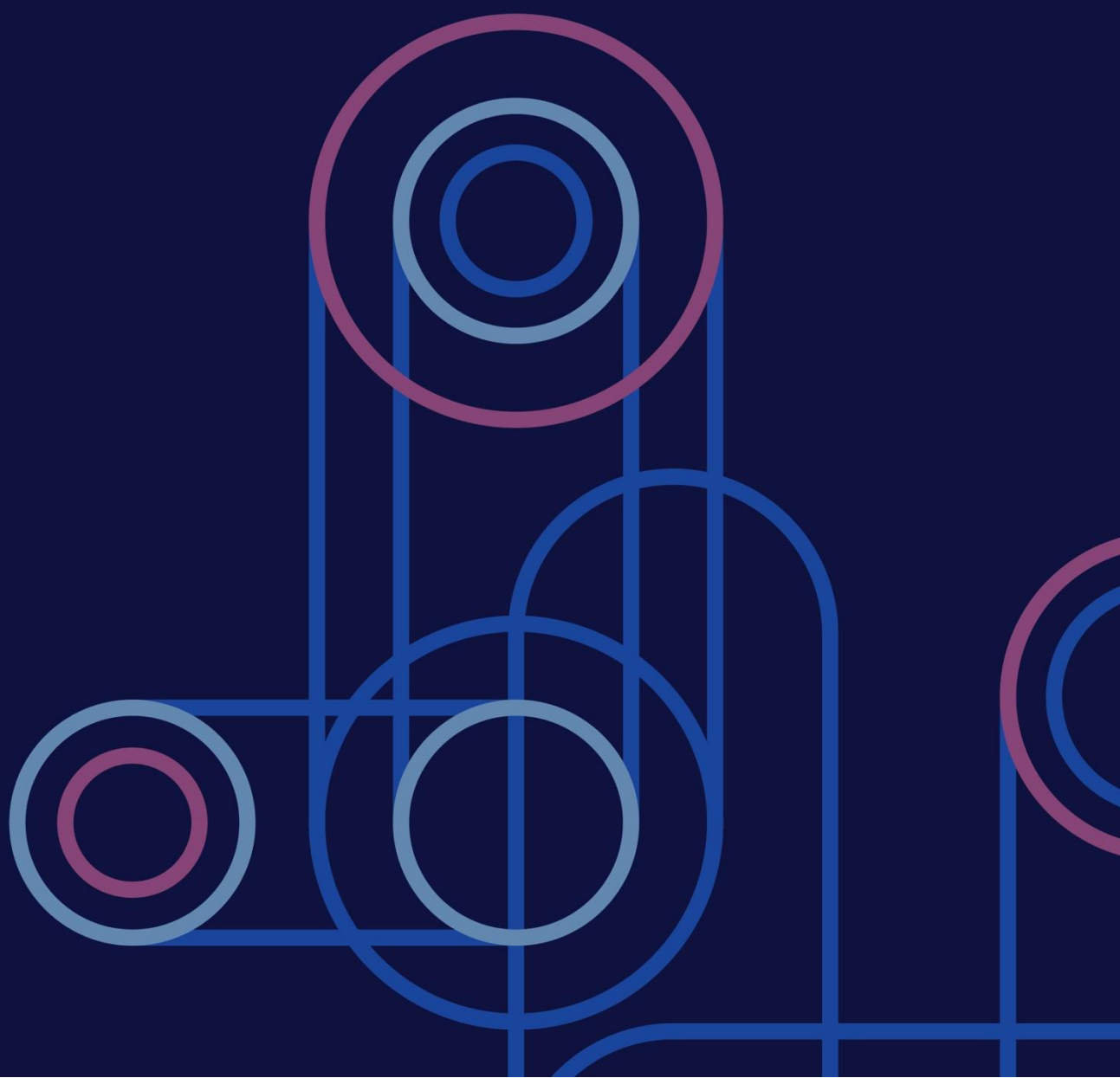


CASE STUDY

Dock Branch: A Community Focused Approach to Health

2025



Basic information	
WHO Region	EURO
City or Country	Birkenhead, United Kingdom
Timeline	2022 – ongoing
Type of intervention	Infrastructure; planning
Primary level of implementation	Neighbourhood
Primary sectors involved	Urban planning; transport; environment; health promotion; community development
Primary health outcomes or challenges	Inequalities in green space access; physical activity; mental well-being; social cohesion and trust

Case description

Dock Branch Park, located in Birkenhead, United Kingdom, within the Metropolitan Borough of Wirral, is a catalyst project in the Birkenhead 2040 Framework – an ambitious twenty-year strategy for transformative urban regeneration. The initiative aims to convert a disused railway corridor that cuts through some of the city’s most deprived wards into a continuous green corridor linking communities, improving mobility, and promoting health and well-being. Neighbourhoods along the route rank among the lowest on the national Fields in Trust Green Space Index and fall within the 20 percent most deprived areas in England for health and living environment domains. Recognizing these challenges, Wirral Council’s Regeneration and Place Directorate and Public Health Intelligence team have worked together to ensure that health equity and community voices are central to the project design.

In 2023, the Council and the GroundsWell Consortium – a UK partnership of academic and community organizations focused on place-based urban health research – collaborated to create the Dock Branch Neighbourhood Community Panel. The Panel brought together residents with lived experience of the Dock Branch area with Council representatives to review design options and advise on neighbourhood priorities. GroundsWell initiated the collaboration after observing that early consultations underrepresented marginalized communities and that health considerations were weakly specified. The community panel functions as a continuing interface between residents and decision-makers. Its input has directly shaped design modifications to



Site visit including college students and Backin' Birkenhead members.

Birkenhead, UK: 2024. © Stephanie Wynne.

improve, for example, accessibility, lighting, and connections with local services and active-travel routes.

A range of additional actions have cultivated a sense of stewardship among key stakeholders. Through its link with Wirral Public Health Intelligence, GroundsWell convened a multi-sectoral “Evaluability Assessment” to define health outcomes and evaluation methods for the park and the wider regeneration programme. Dock Branch has also encouraged participation by local environmental NGOs, businesses, and cultural groups, whose efforts have helped align the park’s social, ecological and economic objectives. Regular workshops and open consultations have built trust, overcoming initial opposition from segments of the community and enabling broader acceptance of the project’s vision.

Following its first year of operation, GroundsWell facilitated a systems thinking workshop to review the Panel’s activity and identify its role within Birkenhead’s wider regeneration and health system. This exercise helped to consolidate the official standing of the Panel as a mechanism for iterative feedback and co-production beyond Dock Branch. The resulting collaborative structures reflect transparent communication, shared decision-making, and resource-pooling across public, academic and civil-society partners. In 2024 the Panel developed into a standalone entity: the Backin' Birkenhead

Town Team. Open to all people who know and care about Birkenhead, its priority has been to develop a community-led Place Plan that has cemented the participatory ways of working at its core.

Key barriers have included irregular funding and bureaucratic delays linked to multiple funding streams, as well as staff turnover within Council teams and community scepticism rooted in past regeneration experiences. Nevertheless, strong Council support for participatory methods, GroundsWell's evidence-based approach, and the visibility of tangible design changes have helped to maintain momentum. Ongoing work focuses on ensuring long-term maintenance of the park and sustaining Backin' Birkenhead as a model for future projects.

Strategic Highlight

Dock Branch Park illustrates how participation and partnership operate as mutually reinforcing principles in strategic urban health action. The project has fostered legitimate, transparent, and active participation by creating formal structures for community co-creation – rather than one-off consultation. The Backin' Birkenhead team offers authentic influence over planning and design choices that affect health determinants such as mobility, green space access, and social cohesion. By involving residents from under-represented groups, Backin' Birkenhead addresses power imbalances and builds local ownership of health solutions.

In parallel to this participatory core, the project models effective partnerships, fostering co-creation among public, private and civic actors within transparent, accountable frameworks. Wirral Council provides legitimacy and resources; GroundsWell supplies research and evaluation capacity; civil-society partners mobilize local knowledge and trust. This arrangement enhances decision-making quality, stimulates innovation, and manages conflicting interests through shared purpose. The relationship between community and Council – mediated by Backin' Birkenhead and academic facilitators – illustrates how co-produced evidence can translate directly into design and policy outcomes.

The Dock Branch/Backin' Birkenhead model shows that participation is not a singular event but a system function requiring continuity, ongoing feedback, and capacity-building. Partnerships sustain that function by providing infrastructure, resources and mutual accountability. Together, they transform a physical redevelopment into a social process of trust-building and shared stewardship—an approach transferable to other cities seeking to integrate health into urban planning.

Further Information

- [Dock Branch Park](#)
- [Dock Branch Park: Have your say Wirral consultation](#)
- [Dock Branch Neighbourhood Masterplan](#)
- [Birkenhead 2040 Framework Summary](#)
- [Dock Branch Park regeneration: Evaluability assessment report](#)
- [Backin' Birkenhead on Facebook](#)
- [GroundsWell: Community-engaged and data-informed systems transformation of Urban Green and Blue Space for population health – a new initiative](#)