



## River Soar & Grand Union Canal

### MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

## Introduction

The River Soar and Grand Union Canal corridor is a living, breathing and vital asset to the region. Through partnership working and a shared commitment, its potential can be realised; recognising the delicate balance between the needs of residents, visitors, and the ecological and working landscape.

By carefully protecting and enhancing its historic environment and the unique and valuable wild habitats that make it special, the River Soar and Grand Union Canal Partnership can harness that potential and make it more attractive and competitive as a place to live, to do business and as a leisure destination.

## Objective

We want to provide a simple yet effective framework for marketing the waterways offer in order to achieve a 'single voice' approach.

This approach enables us to take advantage of the wide range of partners and stakeholders connected with the waterways and mobilise them all as champions.

We aim to get more people using the waterways for social, leisure, tourism and recreation purposes and in doing so support the many local businesses and organisations in their vicinity.

In addition, the plan outlines a range of 'umbrella' activity that can be delivered on behalf of the partnership to provide cohesion across the individual strands of activity and start to build a clear picture and understanding of the offer in the minds of our audiences.

## The Partnership

This marketing plan supports the action plan of the River Soar and Grand Union Canal Partnership. Chaired by the city mayor, the partnership comprises representatives of the public authorities, statutory bodies and charitable and voluntary organisations along the corridor. It meets on a quarterly basis to consider issues and opportunities affecting the corridor and how, working together, it can promote the long term regeneration and sustainability of the waterway corridor.

Members of the Partnership:

Leicester City Council  
Leicestershire County Council  
Charnwood Borough Council  
Blaby District Council  
Oadby and Wigston Borough Council  
Harborough District Council  
Environment Agency  
Inland Waterways Association  
Leicester Shire Promotions  
Melton and Oakham Waterways Society  
Canal and River Trust

Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust  
Stepping Stones Project  
Non-powered craft (LOPC)  
Foxton Inclined Plane Trust  
Syston Hub  
Angling Trust East Midlands  
Central Shires Waterways Partnership  
National Farmers Union

## Where are we now?

Leicestershire's waterways are starting to fight back! After years of neglect and decline when the general way of dealing with them was to 'turn our backs' they are now recognised for the many benefits and advantages they can bring.

These advantages are wide ranging, from driving major regeneration schemes to opening up new leisure, relaxation and health opportunities.

This marketing plan focuses exclusively on the broader leisure development. As improvements continue, new people are discovering and enjoying the waterways all the time. This plan will accelerate and widen the reach of that process that is already underway.

The plan will focus on the key messages, who to communicate them to and the methods to be used.

We have looked at current tools that people use and a brief analysis of them is:

- Nicholson's Guide - seen as the 'must have' – limited in its content and geography. Informs but does not inspire or motivate. Does not cover events and what's on information
- Canal and Rivers Trust (CRT) – national places to visit guide. Good web based resource and intuitive app but very tightly limited to their own assets with little information beyond. Printed places to visit guides for Foxton and Harborough Basin, again does not 'reach' far beyond their immediate asset
- Waterways portal – a recent initiative of the partnership. Starting to provide a first point of contact for all information on the waterways. A good start with plenty of opportunities to develop
- Partner Activity – partnership members employ a variety of tools from websites to social media. All offer opportunities for better coordination and improvement
- Cycle routes, guides and information (including Sustrans) – a good range already exists, pulling all relevant information together through the on-line portal will make it easier for customers to find what they need.

## Where do we want to be?

The objectives of this plan are to:

- Help existing users get far more out of their use of the waterways by discovering new things on and in the vicinity of the water
- Motivate and inspire new people to explore and experience the waterways and become regular users both on and off the water
- Reposition the reputation of the waterway, especially the stretch through the City, with the boating fraternity and industry

## Who do we want to talk to?

The wider work of the partnership through its action plan will engage in a much broader conversation with stakeholders and directly interested parties. Therefore, this plan will focus on reaching;

- Boaters – primary audience is hire users who tend to be actively dissuaded from stopping in Leicester
- Land based leisure users – anglers, walkers, cyclists, environmentalists, nature lovers

- Water Based Sports participants – canoeing etc.
- People who are looking for events, activities and places to visit who may not have the waterways on their radar

We need to talk to both existing users and reach potential users in all groups. Each audience may need some specific information but there will be a core of messages that cut across all of them. Wherever possible, we will adopt a ‘single voice’ approach to ensure that a small number of agreed key messages are communicated clearly and often by all partners.

## What do we want to say to them?

Our message will be a combination of inspiration and practical information designed to motivate more people to experience and enjoy the waterways more often and for a wider range of uses. Our key messages for the agreed audiences are:

### Boaters

*Leicester is safe – offer evidence to counter prejudices and compelling reasons to stop and explore. Chip away at the waterways folk law of it not being safe to stop in the city. Provide real time practical information such as engineering works etc.*

### Land based leisure users

*Anglers - how and where to fish, license contacts, how to get started. Clubs that welcome temporary visitors*

*Walkers, Cyclists - distances, surfaces, circular routes, ‘coffee (or beer!) stops’, access points, practical information about repair facilities, toilets, first aid*

*Environmentalists, nature lovers – what to look out for, schemes underway*

*Prospective volunteers – opportunities*

### Water based sports participants

*How to start, support available, taster sessions, courses and clubs*

## Identity

We do not propose a complex branding exercise. Instead, we advocate adopting a ‘single voice, approach. This is centered around all key partners agreeing a simple, clear form of words and applying them consistently.

Following discussions, the recommendation is to focus on a single descriptor and profile the rest of the waterways offer by association. We understand this means that some partners may feel they are having to concede their own particular waterway. However, the strength of a single strong lead message if positioned and used correctly can add far more profile to the other partner waterways than an overly complicated and wordy solution.

The purpose of the identity is to:

- Present the widest possible understanding of the opportunities on offer
- Help users to re-think what the waterways mean to them
- Present the component parts as all being part of a bigger offer
- Make it clear there is something for everyone

In order to achieve this, we suggest creating the concept of something that is anchored on the waterway but has a much wider geography and range of offers.

Therefore, we advocate that partners explore an identity solution in the style of –

## THE RIVER SOAR TRAIL

enjoy our beautiful rivers, canals, waterways and beyond

Alternatives to ‘trail’ could include ‘way’ or perhaps even ‘park’ but this may be open to some different interpretations. Partners will also need to consider and agree if Leicester and Leicestershire need to be included in the headline or if they are happy this will be explicit throughout the use of the identity.

The partnership should also look at their existing logo and ensure it remains fit for purpose and then encourage all stakeholders to use it proactively.

### How will we reach them?

A variety of communication methods will be used and wherever possible, information will be made available through different outlets and in different formats. Methods that are reliant on Wi-Fi and/or strong mobile phone signals will be avoided as coverage cannot be guaranteed.

Where appropriate we will seek to use **first person testimonials** written by existing users of the waterways. This will add credibility and authenticity to the messages we are conveying. These could include volunteer lock keepers, boat owners, riverside rangers, long-term users etc.

Target Audience	Key Message	Communication Method	£?	Lead
Boat Hire outlets	Customers should not be dissuaded from stopping in Leicester	Ongoing programme of educational visits for hire staff	Boat hire Refreshments	
		Supply of new promotional/information guide	£3,500 <sup>1</sup>	
		New ‘Top Tips’ leaflet for day-hire customers	£400 <sup>2</sup>	
Boat Hire customers	It’s safe to stop in Leicester and there are lots of great reasons why you should	New Promotional Guide	As above	
		Web Portal	-	
		Social Media Activity	-	
		New ‘Top Tips’ leaflet for day hire customers	£400 <sup>2</sup>	

<sup>1</sup> Based on 20,000 A2 folded to dl, full colour both sides

<sup>2</sup> Based on 20,000, dl, full colour both sides

		Expand city heritage boards to mooring points (you are only xx minutes' walk from.)	tbc	
Water Based Sports participants	Focus on people yet to try the variety on offer	New Promotional Guide  Web Portal  Social Media  'Have a go' sessions run by partners	As above  -  -  -	
Anglers	How to start, what to do, where to go, licenses and visiting	New Promotional Guide  Web Portal  New 'Top Tips' leaflet  Social Media  'Have a go' sessions run by local clubs	As above  -  £400 <sup>2</sup>  -  -	
Walkers and cyclists	Distances/times from A to B, surfaces, circular routes, coffee (or beer!) stops, access points, practical information about repair facilities, toilets, and first aid.	New Promotional Guide  Web Portal  Existing leaflets  New 'Top Tips' leaflet  Social Media  Collate all existing routes, guides (inc Sustrans) through the portal  Guided walks and rides	As above  -  -  £400 <sup>2</sup>  -  -  tbc	
Environmentalists, nature lovers	What to look out for, new schemes and activities, how to get involved	Web Portal  New Promotional Guide  Social Media  Talks, Guided Walks etc.	-  As above  -  tbc	
All	Consistent messaging	Review partnership logo Agree Identity Develop and share usage guidelines	- - -	

In addition to the above activities, partners collectively need to pool any existing databases and use all available methods to start to build an effective database of interested customers. Once sufficient numbers are collated, regular e-blasts and newsletters can be developed to maintain and on-going conversation.

## Social Media

Social media can be hugely successful in raising the profile of Leicestershire's waterways. The main benefit of using social networking sites for the waterways is the increased exposure / awareness. It also allows you to quickly answer any questions potential visitors may have, which can be picked up and resolved faster than the traditional means (customer phone call).

However, social media activity also comes with an element of risk due the wide reaching nature of the activity. Therefore, this approach has been developed to allow as much monitoring of activity as possible and will focus on the more manageable platforms, Facebook and You Tube. Any relevant twitter activity can be shared via existing tourism accounts. In addition, a 'code of conduct' is to be produced that all partnership members will be asked to sign up and adhere to. An analysis has been undertaken of how active partnership members are on the various social media platforms and where opportunities exist for improvements. These have been discussed with partners at a workshop arranged to support individual waterway organisations to improve their social media activity further.

Partners will be supported by a range of 'umbrella' social media activity that will be delivered on behalf of the partnership by Leicester Shire Promotions.

In addition, consideration should be given to staging an on-going photography 'competition' to encourage the uploading and sharing of photographs and positive images of people enjoying the waterways into a growing online gallery.

A separate Social Media plan has been developed but in summary this activity will include:

- A new central account – create and manage a central account that will monitor partners' social media activity and share content. The central account will cover Facebook and YouTube

Individual partners are encouraged to:

- Promote the central account to followers in order to build up an audience and increase awareness of Leicestershire's waterways.
- Follow Each Other's Social media accounts and retweet / share content.
- Ensure individual organisation's accounts are kept active through regular postings and updates
- Theme posts – e.g. Spring walks, summer events
- Take more of an active role in social media, post more, retweet / share content.
- Engage more with your target audience (ask questions such as "where is your favourite place to walk along the waterways)
- Amplify each other's social media activity

## Marketing Plan Launch

The partnership should consider holding a 'launch' event for this marketing plan in the early autumn of 2016. This would be targeted at stakeholders who are potential supporters and participants in the proposed range of activity. For example, the event could be used to introduce the idea of a new waterways guide and seek financial support from marinas, hire companies, waterside pubs, restaurants etc.