



The River Soar and Grand Union Canal Partnership

If you would like to know more, go to

[http://www.leics.gov.uk/index/environment/countryside/environment management/river soar strategy.htm](http://www.leics.gov.uk/index/environment/countryside/environment%20management/river%20soar%20strategy.htm)

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River Soar & Grand Union Canal Partnership

2016 / 2019 Action Plan

Members of the Partnership



Executive Summary



The River Soar and Grand Union Canal corridor is a fascinating, complex and vibrant thread that weaves its way through the county. Its value as a strategic wildlife corridor and its potential for economic regeneration has long been recognised, but remains to be fully realised.

Balancing the needs of this living and working landscape is key to the long term success and

sustainability of the corridor, together with a strong commitment to partnership working.

By carefully protecting and enhancing its historic environment, and the natural wild habitats that make it special, the River Soar and Grand Union Canal Partnership can harness the potential of the waterway to make it more attractive to visitors, for business opportunities and as a place to work and live.

Chaired by the City Mayor, River Soar and Grand Union Canal Corridor Partnership comprises representatives of public authorities, statutory bodies and charitable and voluntary organisations. It meets regularly to consider how, by working together, it can promote the long term regeneration and sustainability of the waterway corridor.



The Waterway

The River Soar and Grand Union Canal corridor flows roughly from south to north through Leicestershire, passing through a fascinating mix of rural and urban landscapes. In doing so, it links the urban areas of Market Harborough, Oadby and Wigston, Blaby, Leicester and Loughborough to the North with the surrounding countryside.

The River Soar is a tributary of the River Trent and is approximately 40 miles long. From its source at Smockington Hollow on the Warwickshire border, the Soar Brook heads north-east, changing its name to the River Soar.

The Leicester section of the Grand Union Canal starts at Norton Junction, passing through Watford Locks, Crick and Welford Junction before reaching the famous Foxton Locks, where a branch canal goes off to Market Harborough. The canal passes close to a number of small villages heading north into rolling open countryside. The stretch from Market Harborough to Kilby Bridge is designated as a Conservation Area.

The River Soar and Grand Union Canal come together at Aylestone Meadows Local Nature Reserve, creating a canalised river. The river and canal then flow together through the city, characterised by the Mile Straight, a mile long section of engineered waterway, built as part of a major flood alleviation scheme in the 1880's.

The northern section of the River Soar runs through a shallow-sided valley which forms a distinct landscape character area, separating the rocky uplands of the Charnwood Forest to the west from the rolling farmland of High Leicestershire to the east. This section of the valley has always been an important communications corridor and now contains the A6, the main Leicester to Nottingham Railway and the river itself. The Loughborough navigation completes the remaining 9 miles of the Soar to finally join the River Trent at Red Hill.

CASE STUDIES

The partnership has worked together throughout 2014 and 2015 to meet many of the objectives within the Action Plan. Some of the achievements of the partnership are as follows:-



The Watermead Bittern Channel with new interpretative board. Photograph taken by Peter Williams, LROS.

The Partnership

Bittern Ditch at Watermead Country Park.

This partnership scheme was funded by Leicestershire County Council's Country Parks Section, the Stepping Stones Partnership Project and the Leicestershire and Rutland Ornithological Society (LROS). The aim of this scheme was to excavate a water channel through Leicestershire's largest reedbed at Watermead Country Park to ensure that the reedbed remains wet throughout the year to the benefit of aquatic life and species such as Bitterns (winter visitor at present), Grey Herons (heronry close by), Kingfishers, Little Egrets, Water Rails, Cetti's Warblers and Otters (now regularly seen in the River Soar next to the site). The channel was constructed in such a way as to provide good viewpoints for the public in order to provide a chance of seeing species that are generally otherwise very elusive. The channel connects the far reaches of the reed bed with the Crake Pool thus spreading the available water more evenly through the reed bed. This in turn helps to maintain the health of a significant reedbed site in Leicestershire, which is an important habitat identified in the Leicestershire Biodiversity Action Plan and subject to a specific Habitat Action Plan (HAP).

Official visitor website for Leicester and Leicestershire
Shortlist

STAY | SEE & DO | MARKET TOWNS | LEICESTER | EVENTS | INFO | ESHOP

EXPLORE THE WATERWAYS IN LEICESTER AND LEICESTERSHIRE

Leicestershire's waterways meander through some of the prettiest countryside in the city and county and past some great landmarks.

The broad and gently winding River Soar is full of wildlife, including large numbers of birds and coarse fish. Its source is midway between Hinckley and Lutterworth, and flows north through Leicester, where it is joined by the Grand Union Canal.

In the city, the National Space Centre, Belgrave Hall & Gardens, Abbey Park, Abbey Pumping Station, Castle Gardens, Aylestone Meadows Local Nature Reserve and the Richard III Visitor Centre are all close by the river within easy reach for cyclists, walkers and boaters.

The river continues through Leicestershire passing Loughborough and Kegworth, until it reaches the River Trent at the county boundary. The Leicester navigation connects to the River Soar south of Loughborough, both forming part of the Grand Union Canal.

The Leicester Line of the Grand Union Canal takes a quiet, meandering course through unspoilt countryside. The Market Harborough Arm is one of two branches of the Leicester Line, part of the Grand Union Canal. There are no locks on this stretch of canal just four miles from Foxton. But there's lots to see as boats travel along the canal to the terminus at Market Harborough.

- Angling Trust
- Ashby Canal Trust
- Canal and River Trust
- Foxton Locks
- The Grantham Canal
- Inland Waterways Assoc.
- The Partnership

Leicestershire Waterways Portal

Following an audit of how easy it was for people to find out about the local waterways, it was agreed that a new ‘portal’ would be developed to signpost people to sources of the most appropriate information. Leicester Shire Promotions worked with group members to develop the ‘Waterways in Leicester and Leicestershire’ site which can be reached using the following address:

The site provides an introduction to the waterways and enables access to comprehensive listings of businesses, leisure pursuits, walks, rides and volunteering opportunities. Each organisation that is a member of the partnership also has a link through to their own site which will help to drive more traffic.

Partners are now working to improve the quality of the listings for waterways events as the portal continues to develop.



Michael Jeeves Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust

Cossington Meadows fish refuge

The Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust acquired several areas of land alongside the river and in late 2014 it carried out work at its Cossington Meadows nature reserve to benefit spawning fish and other wildlife.

- There were two elements to this project:
- A fish refuge, consisting of a large elongated

- pool connected to the river.
- A large, shallow pool or ‘scape’ that shrinks in the summer to expose mud for birds to feed on and plants to grow on.

The total cost of the project was £60,000 and the majority of the funding came from the Environment Agency. Other contributors were

the Wildlife Trust, Leicestershire and Rutland Ornithological Society and Leicestershire County Council Stepping Stones Project.

The two features straddle a brook and can be viewed from a footpath along the river bank. Illustrated information boards have been provided.

Riverside Cycleway Green Route 1

The County Council with support from Sustrans and the Big Lottery worked with the City Council to develop a cycle and walking route which

follows the River Soar and Grand Union Canal south from Cossington, with links to Syston, Birstall and Thurmaston, through Watermead

Country Park and into the heart of the city.

River Soar Flood Alleviation Scheme

The Environment Agency and Leicester City Council have worked together to secure £7m funding for a scheme to reduce the risk of flooding to approximately 4,700 properties in Leicester, through improvements to green infrastructure. This includes the creation of over 1 hectare of new wetland habitat in an urban environment alongside the river and the transformation of public open spaces. Additional benefits will be realised by linking the construction programme to the Local Growth Funding secured through the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership, delivering improvements to cycle routes, improving the landscape and encouraging recreational activity along the river.



Photograph by Jon Vann

Photograph by Jon Vann

2016/19 Action Plan

This Action Plan represents the next phase of our strategy and Action Plan for the next three year period. This will give partners the opportunity to develop projects, look forward and plan resources effectively. This new action plan covers three core themes :

- The Partnership: profile and resources
- Improving the natural and built environment
- Promoting the waterway

This Action Plan builds on the original 2009 Waterway strategy and 2014/15 strategy and action plan update. It aims to provide a framework for the partnership to maximise the positive economic, social and environmental benefits that the River Soar and Grand Union Canal Corridor and River Soar corridor can bring to the region. The action plan complements the Local Planning frameworks and Masterplans for development in Leicester, Charnwood, Blaby, Oadby and Wigston and Harborough, providing a unified

strategy for the Waterway as it passes through the county.

The action plan is a working document and will be regularly reviewed and updated to reflect the changing needs of the waterway corridor.

If you would like further information on the River Soar and Grand Union Canal Partnership, go to:

www.leicestershirewaterways.com.

http://www.leics.gov.uk/index/environment/countryside/environment_management/river_soar_strategy.htm

The original 2009 Strategy is available at : **<http://www.thewaterwaystrust.org.uk/media/7333/riversoar.pdf>**



The Action Plan

Theme One : THE PARTNERSHIP - PROFILE AND RESOURCES

| Ref | Key Aim | Actions | Lead Organisations | Timescale |
|-----|---|---|--|--|
| 1.1 | Maintain a strong waterway partnership | Maintain a programme of quarterly meetings, including site visits and guest speakers, as appropriate. Encourage partnership working between members. Monitor and review partnership membership periodically. Seek opportunities to secure funding to employ a development officer to support the work of the partnership and its activities. | All Partners | 2016-19 Annually 2016-17 |
| 1.2 | Complementary organisations and stakeholders | Encourage presentations from and discussions with complementary linked organisations, projects and wider stakeholders to encourage information exchange. Develop and maintain wider stakeholder contacts and mailing list. Maintain working relationship with the River Soar Catchment Partnership. Consider holding an annual meeting with wider stakeholders. | All Partners | 2016-19 Ongoing Annually |
| 1.3 | Planning policy, regional and local planning neighbourhood and strategic plans | Partners to ensure that, as far as possible, these Action Plan aims and objectives are reflected in their own organisations' planning policies, local, neighbourhood and strategic plans. Engage with the planning process and the way in which the partnership can contribute to and benefit from local planning. Contribute to the development of local and national planning policies over time. | Local Planning Authorities CRT, EA Local Planning authorities | 2016-19 Ongoing Ongoing |
| 1.4 | Baseline information and evidence base | Maintain a database of baseline data and information, including habitat and species data, as an evidence base resource for all partners. Submit data as it is produced to add to the bank of data held by the partnership. Review the existing map data and its format and identify options to improve its accessibility and readability. Identify options to map and maintain information on current and proposed development affecting the river and canal corridor. | County Council All Partners County Council City and County Councils | Review annually Ongoing |

Theme Two : IMPROVING THE NATURAL AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT

| Ref | Key Aim | Actions | Lead Organisations | Timescale |
|-----|--|---|--|---|
| 2.1 | Communication and co-ordination | Maintain Quick Wins database of planned, in progress and completed projects. Co-ordinate partner activities to maximise the benefit of improvement works. Maintain and develop links with CRT Central Shires and SE Waterways. | All Partners All Partners CRT | 2016-19 Ongoing Ongoing |
| 2.2 | New development | Secure CIL, S.106 and other developer contributions as appropriate to deliver enhancement and improvement to the river and canal corridor. Ensure any new developments are sympathetic to the existing cultural and natural heritage and follow any relevant planning guidance. Deliver new housing development at Leicester waterside. Prepare a Master Plan for the regeneration of the Watermead Corridor including the Thurmaston Waterfront. Support the delivery of an improved link between the edge of Syston and the Grand Union Canal corridor. Enable the delivery of improvements to the canal corridor in association with the regeneration of the East Loughborough Industrial Heritage Quarter. | Local planning authorities LLEP, EA, CRT City Council Charnwood BC Charnwood BC MOWS Charnwood BC | 2016-19 2016-20 2017-19 2016-19 2016-19 |
| 2.3 | Funding and partner projects | Seek external funding and/or support Partners specific projects, as appropriate. Support funding applications by partners, parish and town councils, voluntary organisations and volunteer groups for improvement works. | All Partners All Partners | 2016-19 2016-19 |
| 2.4 | Biodiversity value | Support the development of a landscape scale approach to management of the Soar catchment, based on the LRWT Living Landscapes approach. Maintain and protect sites along the waterway corridor that support biodiversity. Identify sites with potential for significant enhancement for nature conservation and biodiversity (Linked to city and county Biodiversity Action Plans) | All partners LRWT Local authorities, CRT LRWT | 2016-19 Ongoing 2016-19 2016-19 |

Theme Two : IMPROVING THE NATURAL AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT

| Ref | Key Aim | Actions | Lead Organisations | Timescale |
|-----|------------------------------|---|--|---|
| | | Consider the production of a conservation plan for the river/canal corridor Complete the Revealing Reedbed Secrets project Implement city grazing review and grassland improvement project Hedgerow Restoration, Thurmaston Road bridge, Birstall Create new nature reserve, Rothley River Soar habitat management plan Identify opportunities to address invasive species throughout the corridor. | County/LROS O&WBC City Council City Council LRWT LRWT CRT/Local authorities | 2016-19 2016-20 2017-19 2016-19 2016-19 |
| 2.5 | Cultural heritage | Protect existing built heritage and encourage participation and appreciation. Identify historic sites with potential for improvement or regeneration. Support opportunities to better reveal the heritage value of the site of the old isolation hospital and toll house, Meadow Lane, Syston. | Local authorities CRT MOWS Charnwood BC | 2016-19 2016-19 |
| 2.6 | Flood management | Support the EA programme of flood management improvements Seek opportunities to enhance the river corridor arising from flood management works, including biodiversity and access improvements. | EA IWA CRT City and County Councils | 2016-19 |
| 2.7 | Boat moorings and facilities | Identify opportunities to improve the quality and location of moorings and associated welfare facilities Implement improved mooring facilities at Memory Lane Wharf. Create new moorings at Friar's Mill. Develop boaters facilities at rear of ALDI, Aylestone Road Develop portage signing and platforms for canoes. Develop canoe facilities at Syston Hub Enhancement works at Foxton Locks | CRT / IWA Local authorities City Council City Council CRT/IWA LOPC MOWS/LOPC Foxton | 2016-19 2016-18 2016-18 2016-19 2016-19 2016-19 2016-19 |

Theme Two : IMPROVING THE NATURAL AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT

| Ref | Key Aim | Actions | Lead Organisations | Timescale |
|-----|-----------------------------|--|---|---|
| | | Implement improved mooring facilities at Moor Lane to support the regeneration of the Loughborough Industrial Heritage Quarter. Enable car parking off Moor Lane to improve access for visitors to the waterway and related assets within the Loughborough Industrial Heritage Quarter. | CRT Charnwood BC | 2017-19 2016-19 |
| 2.8 | Cycle and pedestrian routes | Identify opportunities for improvement of pedestrian and cycle routes and opportunities to create a continuous and coherent route throughout the corridor. Create an integrated network of pedestrian and cycle routes, linking all communities to the river and canal corridor Create a family friendly trail – Aylestone Meadows to Watermead Park Create a new pedestrian and cycle bridge over the GUC linking Charter Street and Abbey Park Support the delivery of a signed town trail linking the waterway to the wider assets of the Loughborough Industrial Heritage Quarter and the town centre. | CRT Local authorities Local authorities LRWT City Council Charnwood BC | 2016-19 2016-19 2016-19 2016-17 2016-19 |
| 2.9 | Water quality and litter | Work with statutory, voluntary and other sectors to reduce the impact of litter and improve ongoing maintenance and water quality to meet the Water framework Directive. Implement the EA funded, Shared Waters Project: Willow Brook catchment and confluence with the River Soar Implement the Shared Waters- Green LifeBoat project. Implement the Shared Waters - Willow Brook project. | EA Local authorities CRT City Council City Council City Council | 2016-19 2016-19 Ongoing 2016-19 |

Theme Three: 3. PROMOTING THE WATERWAY

| Ref | Key Aim | Actions | Lead Organisations | Timescale |
|-----|--|---|--|-----------------------------------|
| 3.1 | Create a waterway brand identity | Consider options for developing and implementing a consistent brand identity for the whole corridor and related activity (e.g. website, print etc.) to create a recognisable brand (e.g. Peak District, Thames Path etc). | All partners County Council Leicester Promotions | 2016-19 |
| 3.2 | Web presence | Further develop the web presence and populate the website portal. Link partner organisations websites to the portal and Partnership webpage. Actively promote the portal as the primary source of waterways related information in the county. | Leicester promotions All partners Leicester Promotions | 2016-19 |
| 3.3 | Marketing strategies | Develop associated marketing strategies to raise the national profile of the waterway corridor, attract business investment and more visitors. Explore opportunities for integrated marketing of the waterway in partnership with the GCR and other assets within the Industrial Heritage Quarter. | CRT/ Local authorities Leicester Promotions Charnwood BC | 2016-19 2016-19 |
| 3.4 | Boat users | Develop and publish waterway guides to on-the-water activity for all boat users in print, on line or smart phone apps. Develop an online resource for boat and other users. | CRT / IWA LOPC Leicester Promotions | 2016-19 |
| 3.5 | Involving residents and volunteers | Develop and promote waterway-related events, volunteer opportunities, arts events and community activities. Develop a heritage based community arts project along the canal and river. | IWA / CRT Leicester Promotions County council | 2016-19 2016-19 |
| 3.6 | Towpath users, pedestrians, cyclists and paddlers | Review existing signage and co-ordinate a programme of improvements. Produce a Cycling Strategy and identify opportunities for improvement of pedestrian and cycle routes and opportunities to create a continuous and coherent route through the corridor. Develop and publish route maps and leaflets and use social media to encourage people to use the waterway for walking, cycling and canoeing. | Local authorities County Council City Council LOPC/CRT Local authorities | 2016-19 2016-19 2016-19 |



