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
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, 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 Fosseway 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 Kitty 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 1860s.

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.

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, Blaby, Kitty and Wigston, Blibby, Leicester and Loughborough to the North with the surrounding countryside.

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.

**The Partnership**

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).

**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 Waterway Channel 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).

The Waterway Channel at Watermead Country Park.
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.

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

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.
City environmental improvements

Leicester City Council, the Environment Agency and the Canal & River Trust have successfully secured an allocation of £7.5M from the Local Growth Fund to deliver a series of access and environmental improvements to the Grand Union Canal and River Soar corridor.

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:

http://www.leicestershiwaterways.com

http://www.leics.gov.uk/index/environm/ent/countryside/environment_m anagem/ent/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

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.

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.

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.

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.

River Soar and Grand Union Canal Partnership – Action Plan 2016/19

Theme Two: IMPROVING THE NATURAL AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT

2.1 Communication and co-ordination

- Maintain Quick Wins database of planned, in progress and completed projects.
- Coordinate partner activities to maximise the benefit of improvement works.
- Maintain and develop links with CRT Central Shires and SE Waterways.

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.

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.

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).
### Theme Two: IMPROVING THE NATURAL AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT

#### 2.5 Cultural heritage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ref</th>
<th>Key Aim</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Lead Organisations</th>
<th>Timescale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Consider the production of a conservation plan for the river/canal corridor.</td>
<td>County/LROS, O&amp;MBC</td>
<td>2016-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Complete the Revealing Reedbed Secrets project.</td>
<td>City Council</td>
<td>2016-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Implement city grazing review and grassland improvement project.</td>
<td>City Council</td>
<td>2017-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hedgerow Restoration, Thurmaston Road bridge, Brstal.</td>
<td>LJWT, CRT</td>
<td>2016-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Create new nature reserve, Rothley.</td>
<td>CRT/Local authorities</td>
<td>2016-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>River Soar habitat management plan.</td>
<td>Local authorities</td>
<td>2016-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Identify opportunities to address invasive species throughout the corridor.</td>
<td>CRT/Local authorities</td>
<td>2016-19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 2.6 Flood management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ref</th>
<th>Key Aim</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Lead Organisations</th>
<th>Timescale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Support the EA programme of flood management improvements.</td>
<td>EA, CRT, City and County Councils</td>
<td>2016-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Seek opportunities to enhance the river corridor arising from flood management works, including biodiversity and access improvements.</td>
<td>EA, CRT, City and County Councils</td>
<td>2016-19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 2.7 Boat moorings and facilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ref</th>
<th>Key Aim</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Lead Organisations</th>
<th>Timescale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Identify opportunities to improve the quality and location of moorings and associated welfare facilities.</td>
<td>CRT / IWA, Local authorities</td>
<td>2016-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Implement improved mooring facilities at Memory Lane Wharf.</td>
<td>Local authorities, City Council</td>
<td>2016-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Create new moorings at Friar’s Mill.</td>
<td>City Council</td>
<td>2016-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Develop boating facilities at rear of ALDI, Aylestone Road.</td>
<td>CRT/IWA</td>
<td>2016-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Develop portage signage and platforms for canoes.</td>
<td>LOPC</td>
<td>2016-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Develop canoe facilities at Syston Hub.</td>
<td>MOWS/LOPC, Foxton</td>
<td>2016-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Enhancement works at Foxton Lock.</td>
<td>CRT/Local authorities</td>
<td>2016-19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Theme Two: IMPROVING THE NATURAL AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT

#### 2.8 Cycle and pedestrian routes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ref</th>
<th>Key Aim</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Lead Organisations</th>
<th>Timescale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Implement improved mooring facilities at Moor Lane to support the regeneration of the Loughborough Industrial Heritage Quarter.</td>
<td>CRT</td>
<td>2017-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Enable car parking off Moor Lane to improve access for visitors to the waterway and related assets within the Loughborough Industrial Heritage Quarter.</td>
<td>Local authorities</td>
<td>2016-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Implement the EA funded, Shared Waters Project: Willow Brook catchment and confluence with the River Soar.</td>
<td>CRT, City Council</td>
<td>2016-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Implement the Shared Waters- Green LifeBoat project.</td>
<td>City Council</td>
<td>2016-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Implement the Shared Waters - Willow Brook project.</td>
<td>CRT, Local authorities</td>
<td>2016-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Identify opportunities for improvement of pedestrian and cycle routes and opportunities to create a continuous and coherent route throughout the corridor.</td>
<td>Local authorities</td>
<td>2016-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Create an integrated network of pedestrian and cycle routes, linking all communities to the river and canal corridor.</td>
<td>CRT, Local authorities</td>
<td>2016-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Create a family friendly trail – Aylestone Meadows to Watermead Park.</td>
<td>CRT</td>
<td>2016-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Create a new pedestrian and cycle bridge over the GUC linking Charter Street and Abbey Park.</td>
<td>CRT, Local authorities</td>
<td>2016-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>City Council</td>
<td>2016-19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 2.9 Water quality and litter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ref</th>
<th>Key Aim</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Lead Organisations</th>
<th>Timescale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>EA</td>
<td>2017-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Implement the EA funded, Shared Waters Project: Willow Brook catchment and confluence with the River Soar.</td>
<td>Local authorities</td>
<td>2016-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Implement the Shared Waters - Green LifeBoat project.</td>
<td>City Council</td>
<td>2016-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Implement the Shared Waters - Willow Brook project.</td>
<td>City Council</td>
<td>2016-19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**River Soar and Grand Union Canal Partnership – Action Plan 2016/19**

**Theme Two: IMPROVING THE NATURAL AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT**

- 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, Brstal.
- Create new nature reserve, Rothley.
- River Soar habitat management plan.
- Identify opportunities to address invasive species throughout the corridor.

**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.

**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 boating facilities at rear of ALDI, Aylestone Road.
- Develop portage signage and platforms for canoes.
- Develop canoe facilities at Syston Hub.
- Enhancement works at Foxton Lock.

**2.8 Cycle and pedestrian routes**

- 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.
- 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.

**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.
### Theme Three: 3. PROMOTING THE WATERWAY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ref</th>
<th>Key Aim</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Lead Organisations</th>
<th>Timescale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Create a waterway brand identity</td>
<td>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.)</td>
<td>All partners County Council Leicester Promotions</td>
<td>2016-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Web presence</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>Leicester promotions All partners Leicester Promotions</td>
<td>2016-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Marketing strategies</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>CRT/ Local authorities Leicester Promotions Charnwood BC</td>
<td>2016-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Boat users</td>
<td>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 local and other users.</td>
<td>CRT / IWA LOPC Leicester Promotions</td>
<td>2016-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Involving residents and volunteers</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>IWA / CRT, LOPC Leicester Promotions County council</td>
<td>2016-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>Towpath users, pedestrians, cyclists and paddlers</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>Local authorities County Council City Council LOPC/CRT Local authorities</td>
<td>2016-19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>