

Community Engagement Project

Rediscovering the River Colne

September 2020



Presented by
The Colne Catchment Action Network





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Groundwork East
The Colne Catchment Action Network
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Affinity Water	Groundwork South
Bath Road Piscatorial Society	Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust
Blenheim Angling Society	Herts Countryside Management Project
British Airways	Herts County Council
British Airways Angling Society	Impress the Chess
Bucks County Council	Iver & District Countryside Association
Canal & Rivers Trust	Iver Parish Council
Chesham Town Council	Landscape Futures
Chiltern District Council	London Borough of Hillingdon
Chilterns Conservation Board	London Wildlife Trust
Chilterns Chalk Stream Project	Misbourne River Action
Chiltern Society	River Chess Association
Colnbrook with Poyle Parish Council	Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead
Colne Valley Fisheries Consultative	St Albans City & District Council
Colne Valley Park CIC	Slough Borough Council
Dacorum Borough Council	South Bucks District Council
Dacorum Environmental Forum Water Group	Spelthorne Borough Council
Eastcote Conservation Panel	Spelthorne Natural History Society
Egham & Staines Conservation Volunteers	Thames Water
Environment Agency	Three Rivers District Council
Friends of Colne Valley Park	Uxbridge Rovers Angling & Conservation Society
Friends of Gt Barn, Harmondsworth	Ver Valley Society
Friends of Pinn Meadows	Watford Borough Council
Friends of Stockers Lake	Wild Trout Trust
Greater London Authority	Wraysbury Parish Council
Groundwork East	Zoological Society of London

Rediscovering the River Colne Workstream 4 Delivery Partners:

This community engagement project was produced by Groundwork East in partnership with all partners included on Appendix 1 and 2 of the report.



INTRODUCTION

Watford Borough Council (WBC) states in the Rediscovering the River Colne Project brief that for the wider project to be successful the River Colne needs to be championed and valued by the Watford community. They state that the project must bring together the Watford community to celebrate, value and protect the River Colne and that stakeholders must feel involved and empowered so that they can make a worthwhile contribution to delivering the benefits of the scheme.

Stakeholder feedback received during this work agrees with this position stating that there is 'no point' trying to improve the river habitat if people are not caring for it and/or there is not enough water in it, therefore community engagement is essential throughout all elements of the Rediscovering the River Colne project. There are already many diverse projects and groups interacting with the River Colne and this forms a strong base which can be built on throughout the ten years of the project.

The aim therefore is that through the community engagement plan the river corridor will be brought into the heart of the community through a programme of volunteer days, events, information and tailored communications, enabling local people to become actively involved in and stewards of their environment.

ENGAGEMENT PLAN

A detailed three-year plan has been produced identifying a wide range of linked activities, themes and messages, the potential lead, where possible an approximate cost and timescale with potential funding streams being displayed within the separate funding strategy.

The document will work as a guide to be assessed annually to reflect changing interest in and effectiveness of activities as well as changing local priorities and funding opportunities. The project delivery is dependent on available funding and this document should be used as a resource to encourage and engage. The engagement plan includes community engagement information from the Environmental Monitoring workstream and there will be further opportunities to be added as part of the annual updates once timescales of river improvement plan activity are finalised. The full engagement plan can be found at:

- Appendix 1 – filtered by current status of the activity and
- Appendix 2 – filtered by themes. These incorporate an exciting wide range of activities and partners.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT METHODOLOGY

- A community and organisation focussed survey was created to ascertain the following - current river Colne uses, events and activities that are being run, people's views on additional events/activities, current issues preventing people using the Colne and whether people would be willing to volunteer in the future (a full list of questions and answers, including potential volunteers can be found as Appendix 3. This contains personal data where it has been agreed that this could be collated but this must not be widely circulated.
- 131 responses were received in total, including 13 organisations who wished to be further involved in the project and 32 people wishing to be involved with volunteering.

- A meeting was hosted including stakeholders and community groups attended by representatives from Groundwork, Watford Borough Council, Green Gym, Community Connections Projects CIC, Colne Valley Fisheries Consultative, Environment Agency, Affinity Water, Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust, Watford Community Housing, Courtlands Residents Association
- Further meetings, discussions and emails were held with relevant groups that attended the meeting and further interested parties including Herts County Council Countryside Rights of Way, Woodside Morris Men, Watford Mayor, local schools, WBC park officers, Watford Museum, Veolia, yoga groups, art groups and Friends of Oxhey Park.
- A business list was also created of businesses that are within 150m of the river Colne in Watford (Appendix 4) but these have not been approached as of yet
- A meeting took place with WBC on 18/12/19 to consider the initial results of the study and options for further development to the engagement plan and these were then incorporated.

THEMES

To present potential engagement, themes were established to link activities and messages, each event and activity has been assigned to one of the following:

- **Arts and Heritage** – including history walks, exhibitions, art workshops and dance
- **Education** – including school programmes, workshops and public talks
- **Health and Wellbeing** – including health walks, Green Gym and fitness
- **Public Outreach** – including sustainability projects, competitions and festivals
- **Volunteering and Conservation** – including clean-ups, river monitoring and corporate team building days

KEY ENGAGEMENT PLAN FINDINGS AND PROPOSED PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

The plan (Appendix 1 and 2) shows a wide range of current and potential activity from those that will continue as is, those where there is potential for expanding delivery and those which are proposed to start. These range from conservation and river clearance sessions, history and wildlife walks, yoga, Morris Men activity, school engagement, monitoring of the river, training opportunities.

It is recommended that a role of river outreach officer is required to further develop and encourage engagement and ensure opportunities are maximised. This half time role will deliver some activities but also liaise with existing and potential groups to support the running of their events and facilitate the wider community delivery of activity. The river outreach officer will also lead engagement with harder to reach groups to ensure the message is being brought to the widest possible audience. This role could be hosted by the local authority or a community partner and costs built into funding bids as required. In the interim it is recommended that a project partner begins this work. There is a recommendation in the environmental monitoring workstream for the role of a monitoring officer and it is advised that together these will form one full time position or two part time roles. It is recommended that the river outreach officer/environmental monitoring role should be in post for 3 years to support relevant groups including the establishment of a Friends Group after which it is expected that a programme of activity can be facilitated from within WBC PR and Parks Departments. The river outreach officer/environmental monitoring officer will link to/co-ordinate with all the volunteering opportunities throughout the whole programme incorporating all workstreams. They will develop plans for all practical conservation type

activities through liaising with partners and so that the plan engages with as wide a variety of groups to deliver the work.

It is proposed that the year 1 focus be: (amendments have been made in the light of Covid19).

- A programme of events will be identified, publicised and run during 2021 advertising all opportunities – developing links with project delivers, supporters and partners including: - Green Gym, WBC, CIC, CVFC, Friends of Oxhey Park, CRoW, Veolia, Herts Health Walks (HHW), Woodside Morris Men, ArtyAmber, Watford Museum, Yoga with Arjie, Thames Water, Affinity Water, HMWT, EA, residents associations and various housing associations.
- A Friends’ group for the entire Watford Colne will be established bringing input from connections built up from this initial stage of work. This will ensure current groups are working together on projects along the Watford Colne alongside providing a pool of specialisms and interests to be involved with separate workstreams. It will ensure that the project activity is guided by and developed with the local community. The aim is to be set up formally in first year so that it can also bid for separate project funds. This will take place from Dec 2020.
- A community river festival would be an ideal way to focus the implementation of the engagement plan and assist with further ‘Friends’ recruitment. This to take place in summer 2021 with adaptations made as required by relevant Covid19 government guidelines. Various Watford Colne competitions and promotions will run alongside this.
- Included within the river festival will be environmental monitoring activity invertebrate workshops run by partners facilitated by CVFC.
- A history of Watford Colne event will be run from Watford Museum in parallel to the community river festival.
- A historic Watford Colne walk will be developed from the end of 2020 to early 2021 – to be developed by Watford Museum alongside Groundwork East.
- School activity coordination will take place early 2021.
- Alongside the above a Watford wide sustainability and water saving and quality messaging programme needs to be run. Further work on this is required and built upon with further input from Affinity Water, Thames Water, Environment Agency and Groundwork.
- Businesses will be approached as part of a corporate membership scheme (Corporate Friend of the River Colne) alongside a more formal approach to larger businesses to discuss how they can be involved with future funding.

YEAR ONE COSTS

Activity	Activity Lead	Cost
Events programme	Officer	Officer cost and £5,000 for funding partner delivery incl purchases
Friends group creation	Officer	Officer cost
River Festival	Officer/WBC – engaging all	Officer cost and £5,000 capital
History of Colne Exhibition	Watford Museum + Groundwork	£2,500
Invertebrate Workshop	Officer/CVFC	Officer cost/CVFC no cost

Historic Colne Walk	Watford Museum + Groundwork	£2,500
School activity coordination	Officer	Officer cost
Watford wide water/sustainability messaging	Officer, Affinity, Thames, EA	Officer cost and £5,000 for funding partner elements of delivery
Corporate Friends	Officer	Officer cost
Events Programme	Officer	Officer cost

Note: costs of practical volunteer activity within the river improvements and environmental monitoring are showing elsewhere within the project budget – see summary report.

All the above will be done through working closely with WBC PR and Marketing staff.

Over the first 3 years it is estimated that the officer will be involved in over 40 projects/events per year as per Appendix 1 and 2 (new activities will be added throughout the process), priorities for these projects will be established during regular meetings with WBC with additional projects added as. An annual cost of £47,500 has been identified to cover an externally hosted staff member with a £20,000 capital budget. Indicative use of the £20,000 capital spend is identified above for year 1 but will be amended depending on final choices of activity to progress, the scale chosen and also whether funds can be attracted from other funders. A key role of the Friends Group will be to secure funds to support and expand the delivery of activities going forward.

This engagement plan will remain a working document through the process of project delivery. It should be assessed annually by the established Friends Group alongside WBC to ensure activities are effective, meeting the need and to add new proposals. As the engagement plan will include volunteering opportunities within the river restoration works these will also need to be reviewed annually alongside the wider plan.