

COLNE & CRANE VALLEYS
GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY
SEPTEMBER 2019
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Foreword - Colne Valley



*John Whitby
Chairman
Colne Valley Regional Park*

The Colne Valley Regional Park was established in 1965, a far-sighted step that seized the opportunity to restore damaged and derelict areas of urban fringe across five counties. Achievements include the creation of four country parks; many restoration schemes; and 50km of new paths to complete important connections across administrative boundaries.

It is a special place – a surprising survival of a rich and varied landscape so close to the urban fringe of London. It is a vitally important resource for people, and home to an astonishing variety of wildlife, including several threatened species.

However, in the 21st century, the Colne Valley finds itself sandwiched between two of the biggest civil engineering projects in Europe – HS2 and proposed Heathrow expansion – and a host of other significant development proposals.

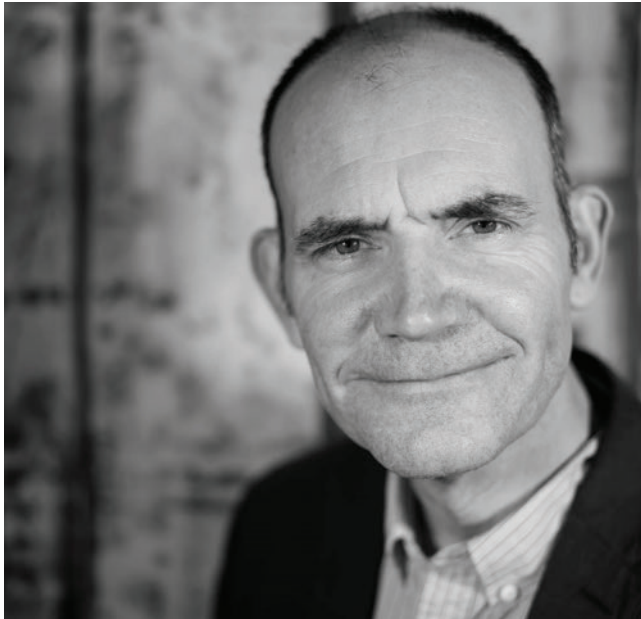
We feel the truly immense cumulative effects all this has on the Colne Valley is still underestimated. It is possibly the most threatened landscape of its kind in the entire country.

If this one comparatively small area is to host so many developments 'in the national interest', then we believe national and local government must respond by creating the conditions for a Regional Park that functions properly, offering an accessible high quality green resource for the capital and beyond. It needs greatly enhanced co-ordination of spatial planning and of environmental and community mitigation.

This Green Infrastructure Strategy can be used by developers and Local Planning Authorities to inform both the design of development proposals and their comprehensive mitigation/ planning obligations.

There is ample evidence that a co-ordinated approach to the landscape is the best way to create a vibrant, pleasant, and vitally important area for people and wildlife.

Foreword - Crane Valley



*John Waxman
Development Manager
Crane Valley Partnership*

The Crane Valley stretches across five west London Boroughs. Within this heavily urbanised landscape that is home to well over half a million people, the semi-natural river corridor acts as a unifying green thread, linking an extensive and remarkably varied network of publicly-accessible open spaces: parks and recreation grounds, nature reserves, water meadows and wetlands, woodland and scrubland. The green infrastructure of the Crane Valley is a precious commodity, providing a wide range of ecosystem services benefiting both wildlife and people.

We are now at a major crossroads. There has been a lot of great work over the last decade, by a wide range of public, private and third sector partners, to enhance the value of the Valley's natural capital and strengthen the links between its open spaces. This work is now starting to bear fruit. But there remains much to be done. Significant effort is still needed to reverse past interventions that have degraded the quality of the environment. For example, the river system within the Crane catchment has been extensively modified over the years, reducing its aesthetic and amenity value as well as its ability to support wildlife. In some places the Valley's watercourses are difficult to access or are hidden from view.

And population growth, major development projects, climate change and public sector funding pressures all pose significant threats to the available open space now and in the future.

A co-ordinated response is required, one that transcends administrative boundaries through a landscape-scale approach to protection and enhancement. And one which also recognises the important role that high quality green infrastructure

provision plays in the 'good growth' agenda. The response needs to involve local communities as well as local authorities and other public bodies. 'Friends' groups and other voluntary organisations are already helping to deliver significant positive change on the ground, and can do much more with the necessary support and encouragement.

This strategy is a call for action that highlights a wide range of 'greening' opportunities within the Crane Valley. It will serve as an essential reference guide for developers, local authorities, statutory bodies and other stakeholders committed to delivering good growth. And also for local community groups willing to take on active stewardship roles.

By virtue of its geography, the Crane Valley also has considerable potential to act as a 'green highway' for people and wildlife, connecting the River Thames in West London with the Colne Valley and Chilterns AONB. With appropriate investment in green infrastructure and cycling/walking routes, this function can be developed and consolidated to the benefit of all the areas concerned.

Purpose of the strategy

This green infrastructure strategy has been prepared to address the significant and numerous challenges of the 21st century in the Colne and the Crane river catchments. It is intended for use by developers, local authorities, partnerships and statutory bodies to inform both the design of development proposals and their comprehensive mitigation and planning obligations.

The strategy will support a coordinated approach to project development, project approval and funding distribution. It will:

- provide a landscape-scale context for green infrastructure, including opportunities for enhancement and cross-boundary links;
- highlight the benefits of green infrastructure to all, and how it can underpin good development; and
- define a starting point for authorities and other organisations to prepare more detailed plans and delivery strategies for implementing projects.

The strategy has been prepared to work at all scales and to support delivery of short-term projects along with a long term transformation of the quality and functionality within the two valleys. It can be used to address both the immediate challenges of major infrastructure schemes such as High Speed Two (HS2) and the potential expansion of Heathrow, alongside consideration of the cumulative impact of nationally significant infrastructure projects, major housing and other developments.

Furthermore, the strategy highlights the unique green infrastructure assets of this area and sets out approaches to enhance and interconnect these to increase their value for both people and

wildlife, and to create resilience (both climatic and ecological).

It includes a map-based strategy for tying together and building on existing green infrastructure and environmental plans in consultation with key stakeholders. It is a framework for guiding future partnership working and to assist other authorities working towards other strategies including:

- Water Framework Directive;
- London Plan and National Park City status;
- 25 Year Environment Plan; and
- Local Plans and county green infrastructure strategies and biodiversity action plans.

The project has been commissioned by the Colne Valley Regional Park Community Interest Company. The project steering group includes representatives of the Colne Valley Regional Park and the Crane Valley Partnership.

Funding has come from the Heritage Lottery Fund Landscape Partnership Scheme (Colne Valley: A Landscape on the Edge) and government Planning Delivery Funds.

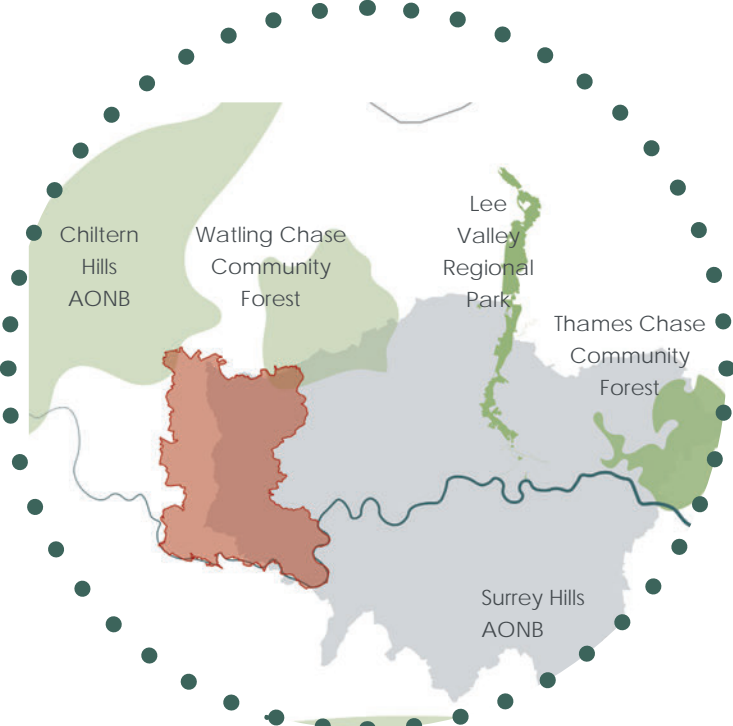


A haven for wildlife - Damselfly



Lowland river valley landscapes

The strategy area



**TOTAL STRATEGY
AREA 309 KM²**

**AREA 1/6TH OF
LONDON**





276KM
OF WATERCOURSES - THE EQUIVALENT
DISTANCE FROM LONDON TO PARIS



155KM
OF REGIONAL/NATIONAL RECREATION
ROUTES



30%
OF THE AREA SITS WITHIN THE FLOOD-
PLAIN ON THE COLNE AND CRANE ¹



430KM
OF MAJOR ROAD AND RAIL CORRIDORS ³



142
INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL ECO-
LOGICAL DESIGNATIONS ²



946
NATIONALLY SIGNIFICANT HERITAGE
DESIGNATIONS ⁴



1.6 MILLION
PEOPLE LIVE WITHIN 2 KM (20 MIN WALK)
OF THE STUDY AREA

1. Land lying within flood zones 2 and 3 (defined by the Environment Agency).
2. Ramsar sites, SPA, SSSI, NNR and ancient woodland.
3. Including motorways, A roads and railway lines (not including HS2).
4. Scheduled Monuments, Registered Parks and Gardens, listed buildings.



Heathland and plantation - Black Park



Motorway infrastructure and Heathrow airport dominate parts of the valleys



River flowing through Crane Park



Watersports, Rickmansworth Aquadrome



Historic buildings within a parkland setting - Cranford Countryside Park



Grand Union Canal - Lock gates

A call for action

The Colne and Crane Valleys can work much harder than they already do in order to deliver:

- high quality and diverse open spaces for local and regional communities;
- improvements for wildlife including the areas designated as regionally, nationally and internationally important; and
- resilience to climate change.

This strategy is necessary to ensure that there is greater investment in green infrastructure which will yield the following benefits:

- boosting health and well-being through active leisure and lifestyles;
- promoting recreation within a natural living environment;
- promoting active travel;
- natural water management to reduce flooding;
- protecting precious water resources;
- improving air quality;
- providing carbon sequestration;
- enhancing biodiversity and ecological resilience;
- fostering community cohesion; and
- improving quality of life.

This strategy articulates the importance of the Colne and Crane landscapes, setting a vision and an approach for stakeholders to unite around.



Thriving waterways - The Grand Union Canal







Valuable but under-utilised - the Yeading Brook at Spider Park, Ruislip

Our vision

Our vision is for the Colne and Crane valleys to be a valued, connected network of open spaces for nature, recreation and wellbeing by 2050.

Key

-  Strategy area
-  Strategic green space
-  Linking green space
-  Key waterscape
-  Strategic green infrastructure network



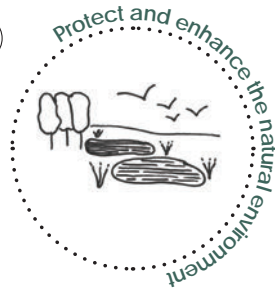
Key principles

1



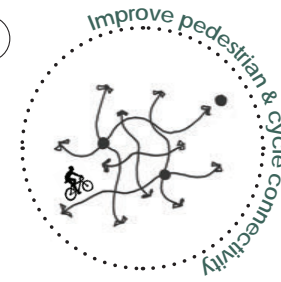
- Promote local distinctiveness through revealing tranquil river corridors, ancient lanes and vistas over wooded hillsides.
- Restore historic buildings, parklands and canal bridges.
- Celebrate local crafts, industrial heritage and market gardening.

2



- Protect and appropriately manage priority habitats and nature sites to create robust and connected wildlife corridors, building in ecological resilience.
- Promote a catchment scale approach to water management with an emphasis on natural flood management and nature-based solutions.
- Re-naturalise river banks and improve water quality.

3



- Create continuous, safe routes, encouraging active travel for commuting and recreation.
- Create identifiable gateways from stations and local centres to access open spaces.
- Restore routes severed by major infrastructure barriers.

4



- Raise community awareness of the value of local green spaces.
- Encourage local people to take stewardship of green spaces.
- Form green hubs for socialising, learning and community horticulture.
- Promote productive landscapes i.e. farming, woodlands and orchards.

5



- Ensure landscapes are multi-functional, capturing carbon and purifying the air.
- Promote natural flood management, water storage and Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS).
- Recognise and enhance natural capital and create new woodlands and wetlands.
- Ensure development delivers net gain in high quality green space provision.

6



- Enhance mental and physical health and wellbeing through access to nature.
- Encourage healthy lifestyles for all.
- Provide opportunities for recreation, natural play and sports activities.

Detailed strategies

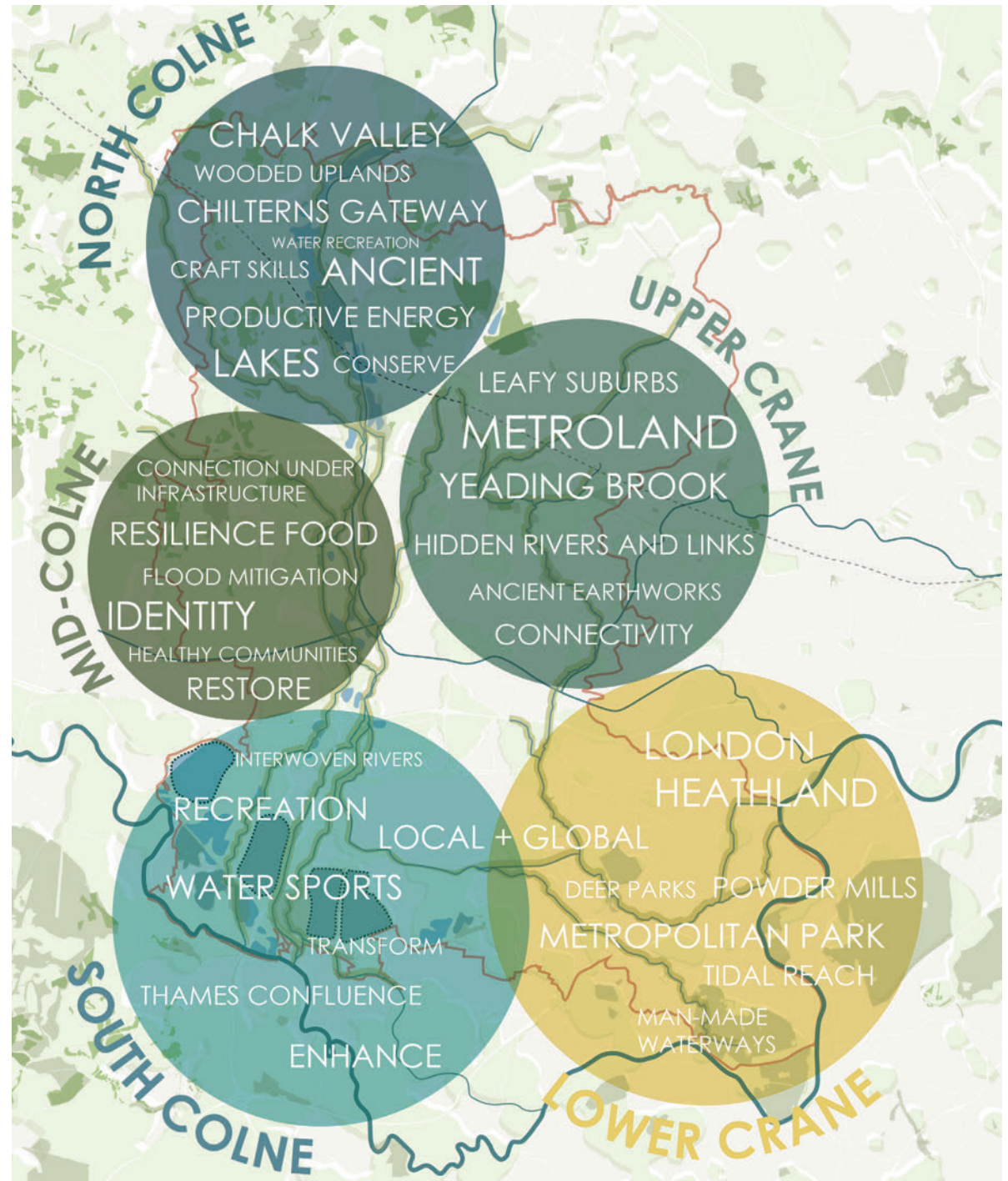
The individual special qualities of the Colne and Crane landscapes have developed over millennia of natural processes combined with human interventions - from farming and flood management through to the major infrastructure developments of the late 20th and early 21st Centuries.

The Colne and Crane valleys are subject to major current and future drivers of change. Population growth, major development projects, climate change and public sector funding pressures all pose significant threats to available open space. In the Colne Valley two of the biggest civil engineering projects in Europe - HS2 and the proposed Heathrow expansion - will potentially cause immense cumulative effects on the landscape. In the Crane valley, its significantly modified catchment and river morphology from past interventions have reduced its aesthetic, amenity and wildlife value. Part of the solution will be a co-ordinated approach to spatial planning and environmental and community mitigation across administrative boundaries, and recognition of the important role that high quality green infrastructure plays in the 'good growth' agenda.

The characteristics and priorities of the Colne and Crane valleys are captured on the plan opposite. These help to define the approach to developing proposals which respond to the uniqueness of place and also guide funding and action.

While the characteristics listed are not exhaustive, they help to set the context and direction for the more detailed short and long term opportunities identified in the detailed strategies section of this report.

Some key illustrative examples of the opportunities are summarised on the following pages.



North Colne



- Legend**
- Study Area
 - Existing**
 - Key stations
 - Existing watercourse
 - Existing waterbody
 - Existing green spaces of high value (eg. national designations)
 - Existing green infrastructure important for open space/wildlife
 - Other green space including farmland
 - Colne Valley Regional Park (CVRP) boundary
 - Area of outstanding natural beauty (AONB)
 - Existing landmark/destination to conserve and enhance
 - Existing views/viewpoints to conserve and enhance
 - Existing conservation areas
 - Opportunities**
 - Pedestrian/cycle links to enhance/create
 - Opportunity to improve access at major infrastructure barriers
 - Opportunity to enhance waterscape/watercourse
 - Opportunity to enhance landscape/wildlife value/create public open space
 - Opportunity to enhance waterscape/watercourse
 - Opportunity to restore/reinstate historic landscape
 - Opportunity for new landmark/destination
 - Opportunity to create new views
 - Enhance/create new gateway
 - Detailed strategy areas - refer to associated schedule

Selected strategy areas:

Broadwater Lake

Existing SSSI - improve visitor experience through new path network, view management, link to Grand Union Canal, visitor facilities and bird hides. Potential to create a new nature reserve and wetland habitat enhancement to the south. Create joined up management plan. (Align with HS2 Additional Mitigation Plan).

Link to principles



Broadwater Lake

Ruislip and Bayhurst Woods

Continued management of important ancient woodland asset. Buffer zone around woodland to remain open, preventing habitats becoming fenced in by development. Improve connections to local communities through paths and signage upgrades.



Ruislip Woods - Ancient Woodland

New landscape demonstration hub

Illustrative opportunity for the concept of an enhanced, more resilient visitor infrastructure e.g. at Colne Valley visitor centre. Enhancing the existing visitor centre as a regional hub celebrating the productive history and future of the Colne Valley e.g. watercress beds and orchards, providing facilities for educational activities and interpretation.



Illustration of productive hub

Mid-Colne



Legend

Existing

- Key stations
- Existing watercourse
- Existing waterbody
- Existing green spaces of high value (eg. national designations)
- Existing green infrastructure important for open space/wildlife
- Other green space including farmland

Opportunities

- Pedestrian/cycle links to enhance/create
- Opportunity to improve access at major infrastructure barriers
- Opportunity to enhance watercourse/watercourse

Detailed strategy areas - refer to associated schedule

- Opportunity to enhance landscape/wildlife value/create public open space
- Opportunity to enhance watercourse/watercourse
- Opportunity to restore/reinstate historic landscape
- Opportunity for new landmark/destination
- Opportunity to create new views
- Enhance/create new gateway

Selected strategy areas:

Iver Environmental Centre

Potential to enhance educational offer e.g. diversify community projects on environment/ climate change. Potential to expand and adapt surrounding land uses for micro food growing in agreement with land owners.

Grand Union Canal Slough Arm

Improve accessibility, biodiversity and vegetation management enhancements along Grand Union Canal including dredging and towpath resurfacing, plus way-marking. Offers gateway into Colne Valley Regional Park from surrounding settlements/ stations at Slough, Iver, West Drayton.

Habitat enhancements

Illustrative opportunity for the concept of conservation and enhancement of woodland, heathland and parkland such as at Black/ Langley Parks. Opportunity to extend and connect characteristic habitats/ species in the surrounding landscapes such as Iver, to reduce the visual impact of development and enhance biodiversity and ecosystem services.

Link to principles



Iver Environmental Centre



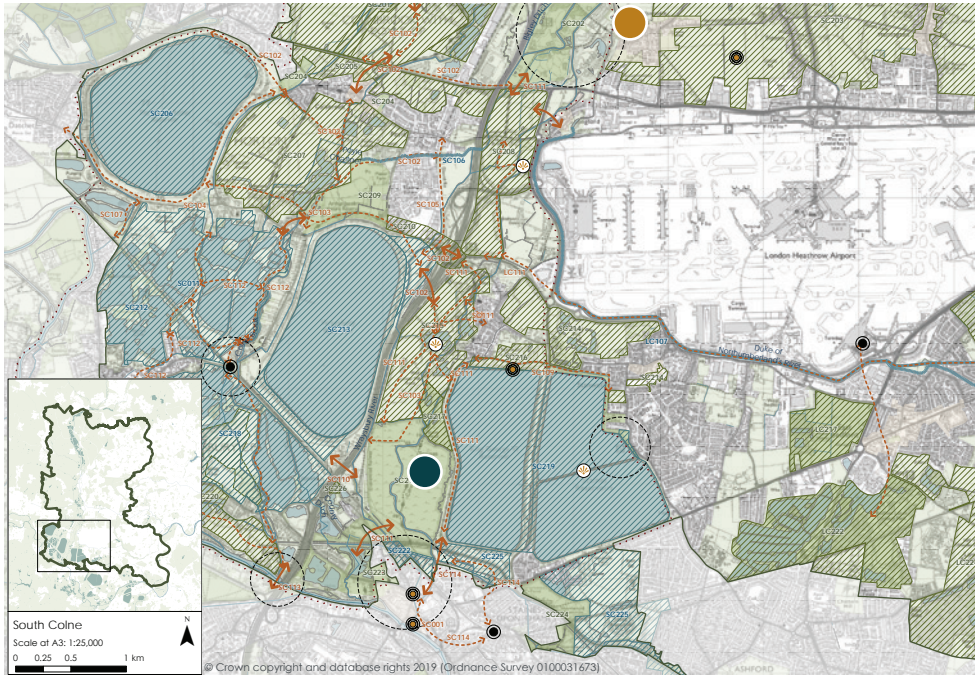
Grand Union Canal, Slough



Illustration of woodland/ heathland



South Colne



Selected strategy areas:

● 26 Harmondsworth Barn

Conserve Grade I listed barn and its setting, a distinctive and key feature to the character of the area. Potential opportunity to enhance interpretation/ access/ understanding of the site's historic importance. (Align with any future Heathrow expansion mitigation plans).

Link to principles



Harmondsworth Barn



● 7 Staines Moor

Conserve and enhance the existing SSSI, lowland meadows & grazing marsh habitat. Opportunity for interpretation of cultural heritage e.g. historical mead landscape. Ongoing management and potential to increase status as a major destination/ landmark due to proximity to Staines gateway and the Thames reservoirs.



Staines Moor

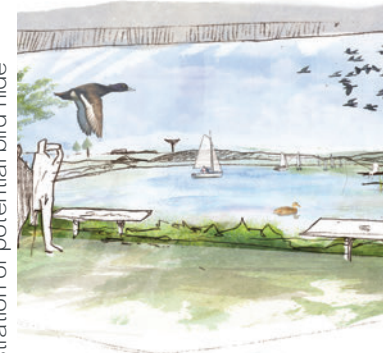


New and enhanced wetland visitor experiences

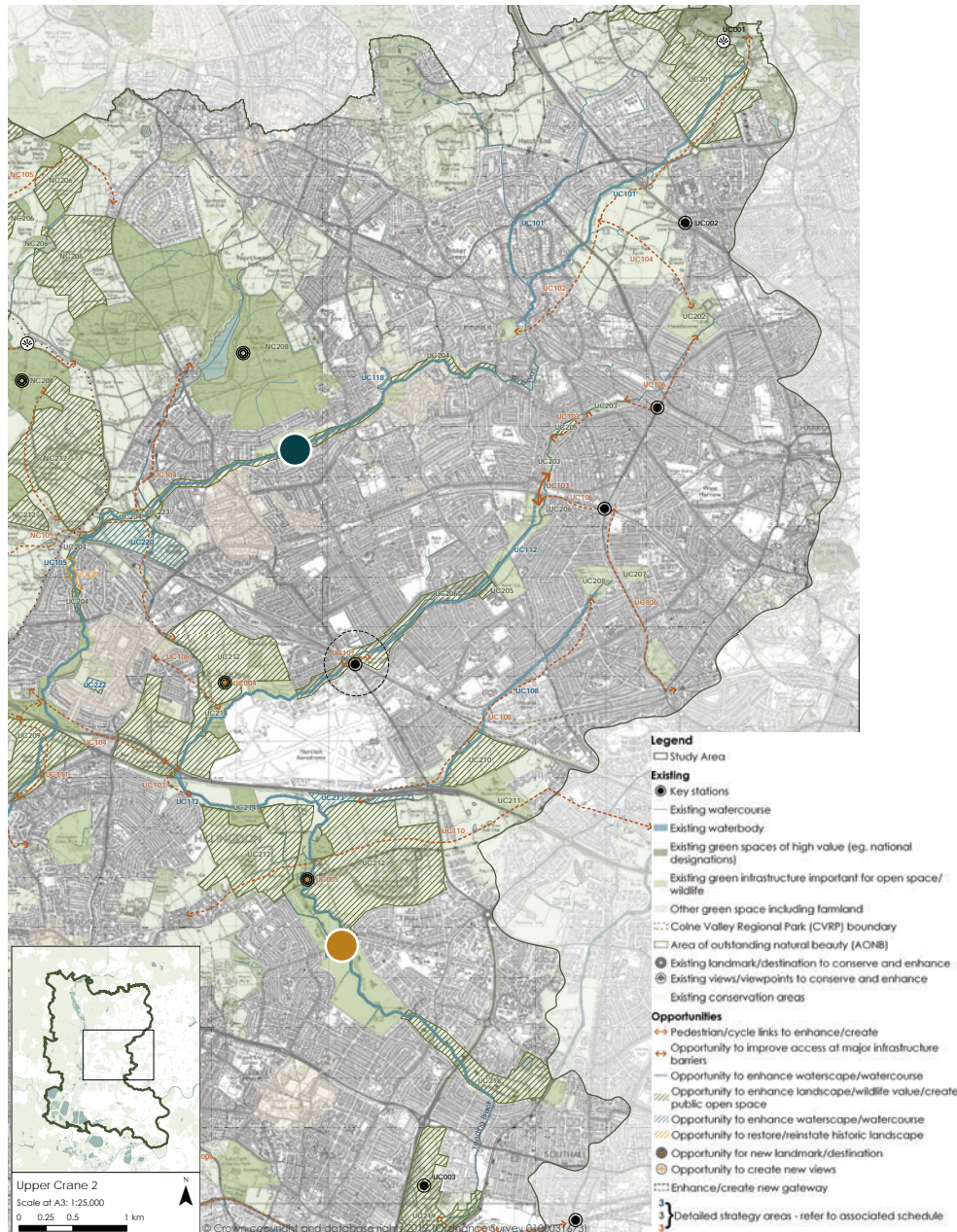
Illustrative opportunity for the concept of a vibrant new wildlife destination such as at King George VI and Staines Reservoirs. Indicative opportunities include a new landmark feature to promote tourism, a bird hide and viewing platform, visitor/ education spaces/ facilities, access improvements and interpretation related to climate change adaptation.



Illustration of potential bird hide



Upper Crane



Selected strategy areas:

[Link to principles](#)

102 Yeading Brook Meadows opportunity

Opportunity for riverbank enhancements and identifying strategic locations for flood mitigation via seasonal water bodies and wet woodland creation. Also improvements to riverside paths, interpretation, seating, signage and vegetation management (to reduce overshadowing) would be beneficial.



Yeading Brook Meadows



122 River Pinn corridor enhancements

Improve quality of routes and promote use for active travel: path resurfacing and widening, cycling infrastructure, signage, interpretation and safe crossings between green spaces. Manage/restore riparian zone and allow for natural flood mitigation as appropriate.



Headstone Manor



Improved cycle routes & gateways to the river corridor

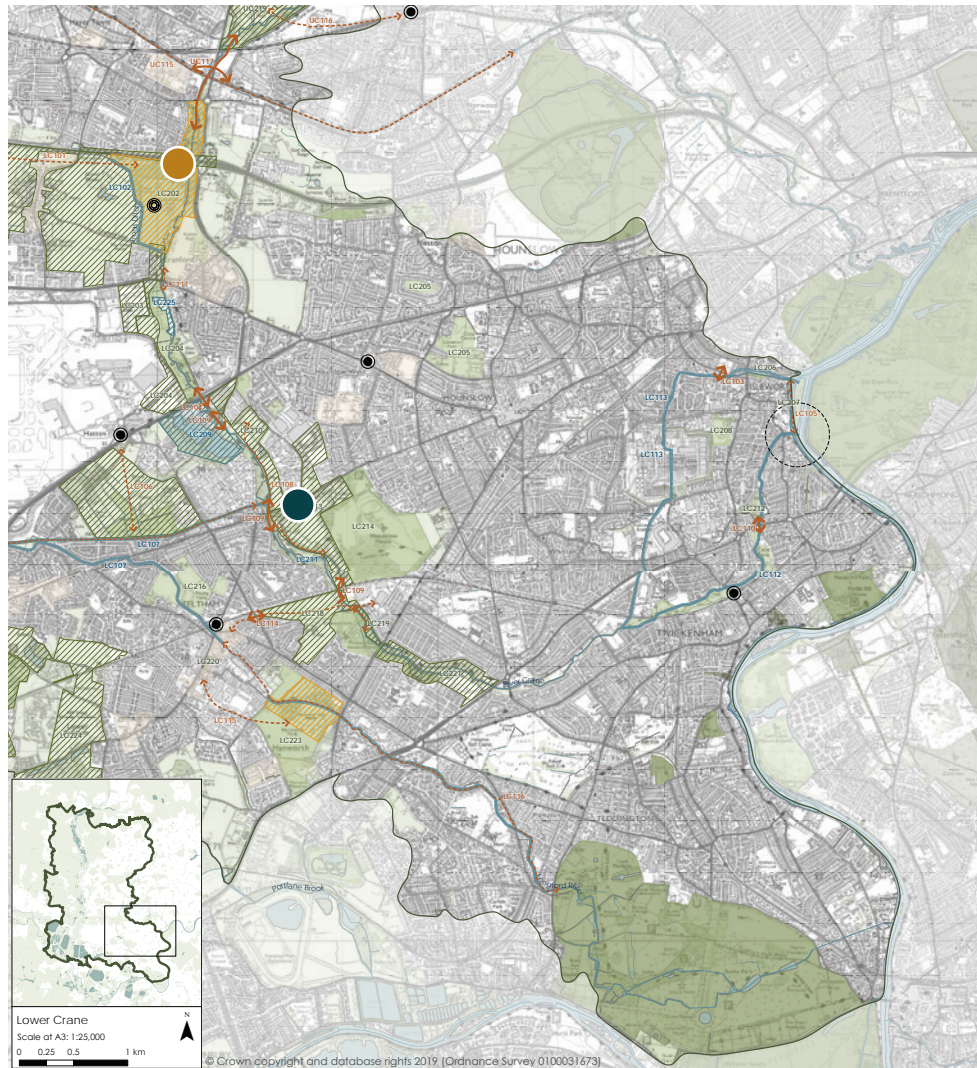
Illustrative opportunity for the concept of creating connections between key 'gateways' such as Ruislip Gardens tube station, and nearby green spaces. This should be a key priority for connecting people with their environments and promoting active travel - both for recreation and commuting.



Illustration of access improvements



Lower Crane



Selected strategy areas:

36 A30 and Central Line crossing

Create new connection at the major blockage in the middle Crane. Opportunity for a new bridge link to connect Causeway open space and Crane Meadows at this location on the London Loop, making parks, nature reserves and open spaces more accessible.



Railway Underpass/Cranewalk



240 Donkey and Brazil Mill Woods

Conserve Donkey Wood and Brazil Mill Wood and enhance wet woodland habitats. Recommend a study is undertaken to assess how to improve access around the site. Create links to the heritage story e.g. through interpretation of nearby heritage features - Blast Mounds, Baber Bridge, mill site.



Wet Woodland, Crane Valley



Restoring and enhancing designed parklands for community enjoyment

Within Hanworth Park there are opportunities to establish a more diverse landscape experience by de-culverting the Longford River, enhancing the visual amenity of the existing open river sections and adding interpretation. The restoration of Grade II listed Hanworth House provides an opportunity to reinstate this historic building as a focal point in the park.



Wet Woodland, Crane Valley



Next steps and recommendations

The Green Infrastructure Strategy for the Colne and Crane Valleys is a major step in positive planning for green infrastructure for the valleys for the short and long term, and in securing resilience and adaptation to change over the coming decades.

The strategy identifies a significant body of potential capital projects and initiatives which can be taken forward in partnership with others by the Colne Valley Community Interest Company, the Colne Valley Partnership and the Crane Valley Partnership, so that the green infrastructure network achieves its full potential over the coming years and beyond.

Going forward, five key steps will enable the delivery of the green infrastructure projects and initiatives in this strategy. These are:

Prioritise projects and opportunities for delivery

The schedules in this strategy provide a useful starting point so that projects can be evaluated against local priorities, available resources and funding opportunities. An outline of priorities can be seen in Appendix 1.

Build support for projects and initiatives

The Colne Valley Park CIC and the Crane Valley Partnership will work to ensure this strategy is adopted and actively used by all interested parties to inform their plans. This will include working

with the local planning authorities in embedding key messages of this strategy in future Local Plans so that this can form a basis for delivering green infrastructure through the development management process. An outline of planning policies for the Colne Valley Regional Park and for development close to watercourses can be seen in Appendix 2.

Scope delivery mechanisms, funding models and options

Identify a suite of delivery mechanisms, funding models and streams and match the prioritised projects to these in terms of criteria, outcomes delivered and viability. Funding the delivery of the strategy needs to move beyond the traditional funding streams to new forms such as the new ELMS scheme, biodiversity offsetting, carbon offsetting etc.

Form partnerships to deliver projects

Informed by this strategy we will identify opportunities for joint working across multiple projects. This will involve identifying partners to develop, scope, secure funding and then deliver the projects.

Future maintenance funding and administration in perpetuity will be a fundamental part of the project planning.

Monitor and review

This stage is essential to understand lessons learned in relation to project delivery and to streamline the process for future projects. Monitoring and review should also be applied to future iterations of this strategy e.g. during the mid-point of the Local Plans it seeks to influence, to maintain effectiveness.

contact us:

Colne Valley

colnevalley@groundwork.org.uk

www.colnevalleypark.org.uk

Crane Valley

cvp@greencorridor.org.uk

www.cranevalley.org.uk

The full report, detailed list of opportunities and accompanying map can be seen at

www.colnevalleypark.org.uk/whatwedo