



Colne Valley: a landscape on the edge

Landscape Partnership Impact Report



The Colne Valley is a wonderful patchwork of wetland, woodland, pasture, meadows and parkland that have been heavily influenced by water, underlying geology and socio-economic change. It is distinctive for:

Water courses – King amongst the abundant lakes and waterbodies is the River Colne as a blue, multi-stranded ribbon that weaves through the heart of the Valley and links it together;

Wildlife – An intricate mosaic of habitats with valuable ‘ecotones’ where habitats grade from one type to another. These support many species, including otters, Daubenton’s bats and many wintering wildfowl which are attracted to the extensive water in the valley;

Exploited geology – Mineral extraction and brick industries have left marks on the landscape, creating a string of brickfields and over 70 former gravel pits. Many of the pits are now attractive lakes used for angling, water sports and nature conservation;

Rich human history - Extraction and development have uncovered evidence stretching back 10,000 years of hunter-gather butchery sites and one of the country’s earliest settlements. Whilst in the 18th century the Colne Valley with the capital only a stone’s throw away, was a favoured spot for building country houses.

‘The Colne Valley – Landscape on the edge’ (‘the Scheme’ or the ‘Colne Valley Landscape Partnership Scheme’) was a partnership-programme covering 126km2 in parts of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Greater London, Hertfordshire and Surrey; broadly the area of the Colne Valley Regional Park.

The partnership was driven by a collective mission to improve the habitats of the Colne Valley and the lives of local people, enabling them to connect with and access the Regional Park more often and feel the benefits first-hand.

“It is beautiful with a mix of fabulous canals and lakes and also fields and trees, making for a super array of wildlife that is such a treat to watch. It is accessible but still feels tranquil; and peaceful.”

Steven Springall in
Country Rambles Round Uxbridge 1907

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Cover photograph: View across the Valley from Harefield, looking over Broadwater Lake

This page: Walking down to Grand Union Canal and Broadwater Lake





Directors and Trustees of the Colne Valley Park on a development day at Woodoaks Farm, September 2021.

“Improving spaces for wildlife has been a highlight for me; voles, eels, invertebrates and more have all benefited.”

Internal stakeholder

Our National Lottery Heritage Fund Landscape Partnership scheme ran for four years.

As this report testifies, I am not alone in the view that this project has been an outstanding success:

- **One that has been a catalyst of positive change and collaborative working**
- **One that will leave a valuable legacy in the Colne Valley Regional Park.**

“This project has realised a long held ambition to strengthen the Colne Valley Regional Park on all fronts and to bring together a host of partners that will continue to support the park into the future.”

Debbie Valman, Programme Manager

This area-based Scheme enabled vision and dreams to become reality as the positive incentive of partnership working raised the profile of the Colne Valley Regional Park amongst communities, both within the Park and amongst its visitors.

In just one example, conservation grazing of meadows has created collaborative working between farmers, landowners, environmental charities and the volunteer network as they positively identified with the cattle in the landscape. The project further required the ecological skills of the Wildlife Trusts in evidencing the outcomes of biodiversity enhancements within the fields. The positive results and human welfare interactions have truly brought the countryside alive in this otherwise challenged corner of green space.

The report shows that partners continue to work together to brainstorm ideas, find joint funding streams and work collaboratively for the benefit of the area.

However, we cannot rest on our laurels as the Regional Park is under an unprecedented level of development pressure. The situation is not helped by the fact that the Colne Valley Regional Park is within the boundaries of six planning authorities. It makes it especially difficult for any one of them to collectively review the cumulative effect of their decisions.

A new Future Plan will help us make some inroads into addressing this. We plan to raise the profile of the Colne Valley Regional Park amongst the various planning departments that influence the planning decisions for the park. We wish to see the Green

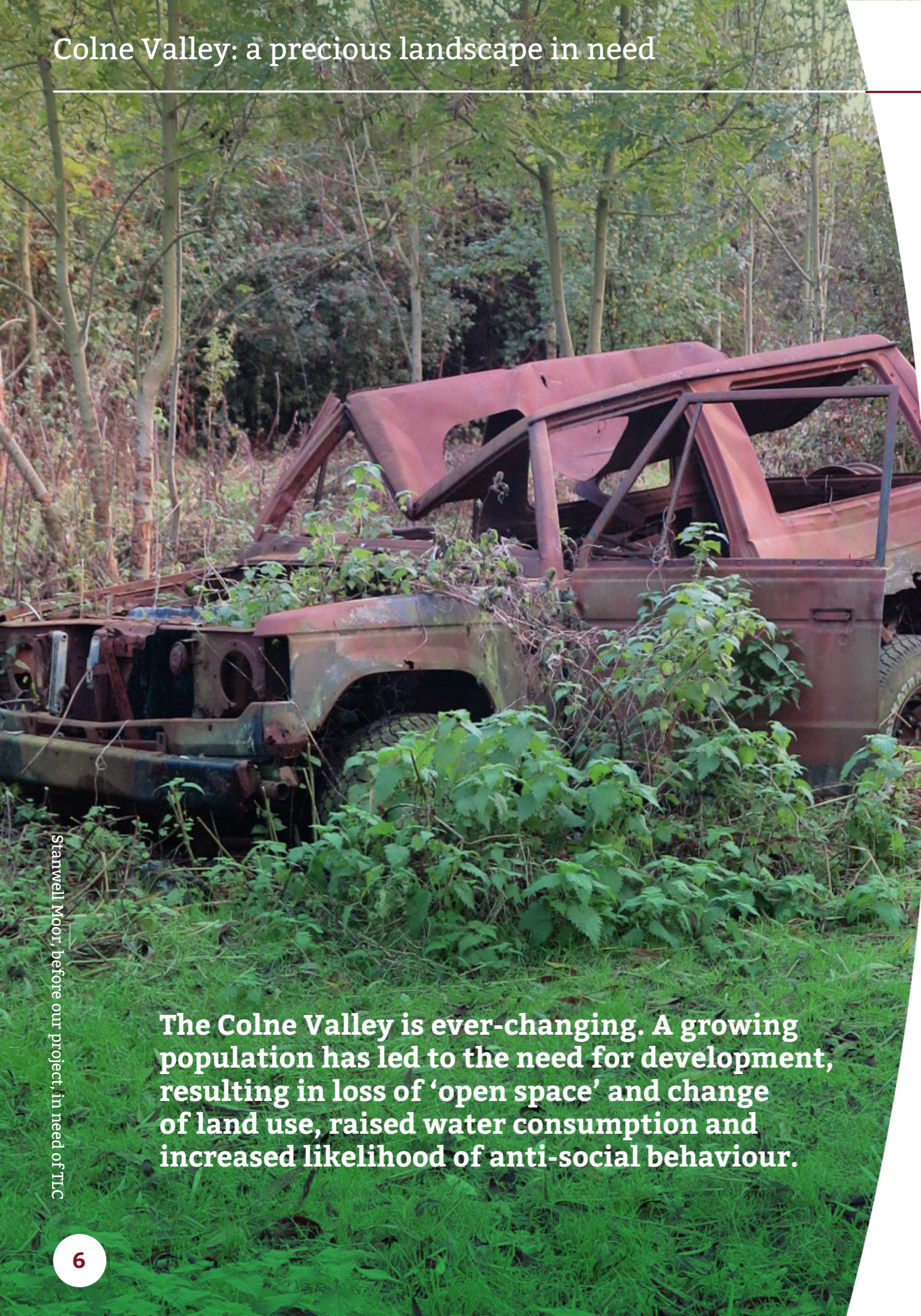
Infrastructure Strategy (which was funded by the Landscape Partnership) embedded in the emerging policies of all of them.

I also record my thanks to the National Lottery Heritage Fund, all the partner organisations and all those staff and volunteers who helped deliver this complex, multi-agency, ground-breaking project.

Thanks to this project, the future is bright.

I am confident that the partnership working evidenced in this report will have a lasting and beneficial impact on this next important phase. The Colne Valley Park Trust is charged with being the lead legacy organisation and will take on this challenge with energy and ambition.

John Whitby
Chairman
Colne Valley Regional Park



Stanwell Moor, before our project, in need of TLC

The Colne Valley is ever-changing. A growing population has led to the need for development, resulting in loss of 'open space' and change of land use, raised water consumption and increased likelihood of anti-social behaviour.

This area is under a unique set of pressures which are both large in number, and in scale:

- Large-scale infrastructure projects threaten the qualities of the landscape which attracted people to live in Colne Valley - major national transport projects including High Speed 2 (HS2) Rail Link and Heathrow Airport Expansion are impacting on the area and this has generated much local concern
- There are problems with barriers to accessing the landscape
- The rural-urban fringe puts pressure on the landscape - peri-urban issues such as trespass, arson, fly tipping and other illegal uses are prevalent. For local

farmers and land owners this significantly adds to their operational and insurance costs compared to their neighbours just a few miles away.

To compound the situation, the Colne Valley doesn't have a formal designation and has historically often been overlooked in the shadow of the nearby Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and the better publicly resourced Lee Valley Regional Park.

Finally, a lack of awareness by local people of the regional importance of the area, and a disconnect between people's actions and environmental impact put the Valley at risk of further decline.

The Colne Valley Landscape Partnership Scheme has

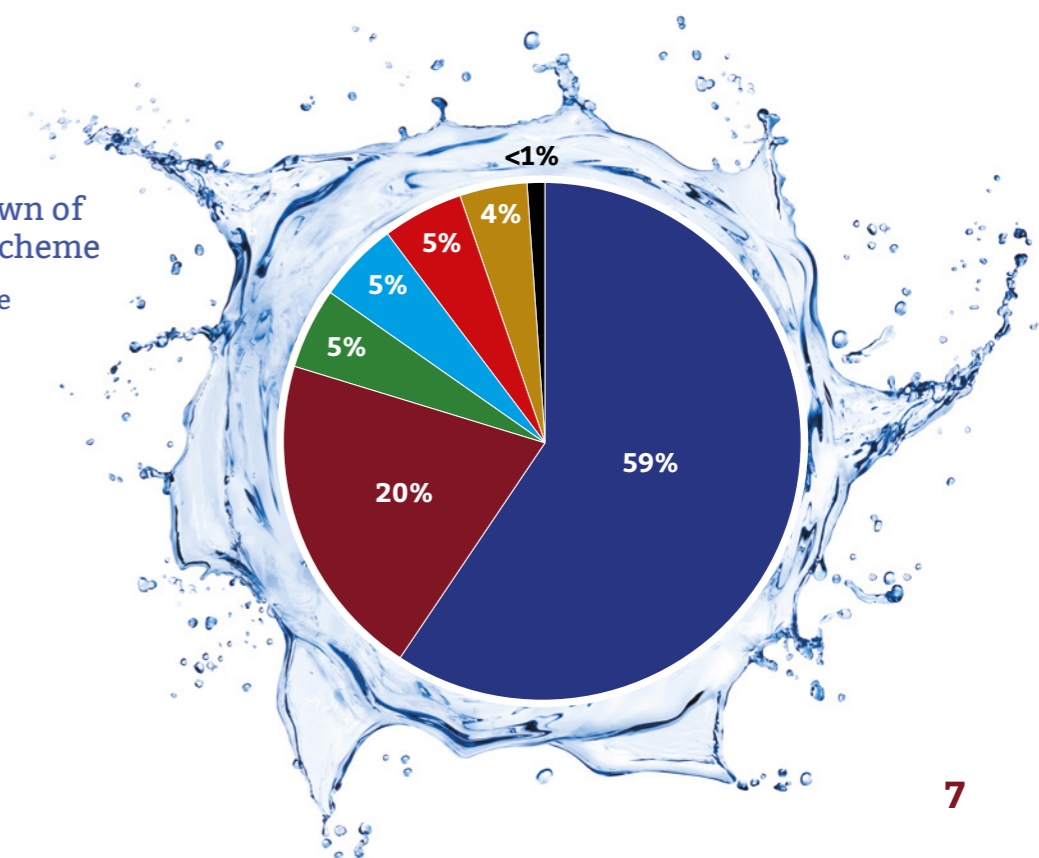
been an opportunity to leverage over £2.5m investment to bring positive enhancements to the area, build collaborative solutions, and focus for community engagement and action.

Furthermore, the Scheme has provided a unified voice founded upon robust evidence and analysis to inform landscape management, and to set-out an agreed spatial vision for the Colne Valley.

The funding was a mix of National Lottery Heritage Fund grant and local funding see pie-chart below. In addition, a range of in-kind funding was leveraged to further support the programme. For example, over £20k of technical support from ARUP pro bono.

Piechart showing breakdown of sources of income to the Scheme

Income source	Percentage of total
National Lottery Heritage Fund	59%
Other public sector	20%
Local Authority	5%
Private donations	5%
Corporate giving	5%
Volunteer time	4%
Other funding	<1%



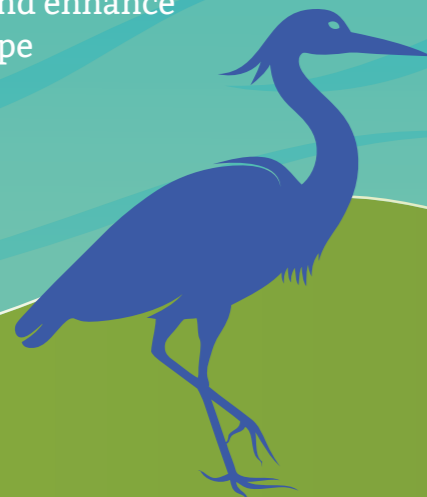
Together the partnership focused on enhancing the countryside through a diverse and ambitious range of 19 initiatives across four themes focussing on habitats and species, people, access and landscape change, and a fifth supporting theme:



Theme 1

A Landscape of Water, Meadows and Woods - improved wetland, grassland and woodland by:

- Building a better understanding of where wildlife is and what it needs
- Creating, rejuvenating and re-connecting habitats to help ensure a resilient thriving landscape
- Tackling invasive species and bringing the water voles back to our waterways
- Establishing new management practises such as conservation grazing, to protect and enhance the landscape



Theme 2

A Landscape of People - welcomed and engaged people by:

- Raising awareness of the value of the heritage right on the doorstep by telling the stories of the Colne Valley's heritage
- Inspiring people through led-events
- Helping people to take positive environmental action in their own lives, for example home water-saving
- Providing opportunities to be active in the community, for example, by being a volunteer River Ranger

Theme 3

A Landscape of Connections - addressed urban fringe issues and overcame boundaries by:

- Positioning the Colne Valley as the central focus for landscape heritage management
- Making green and blue spaces feel safer, more attractive and be easier to access



Theme 4

A Landscape of Change - understood and shaped change by:

- Raising awareness of past change and the surviving heritage of the Colne Valley
- Encouraging more people to explore and learn about their landscape by opening-up view-points, and by offering self-guided trails and led-events
- Creating a shared spatial vision that can help to inform management and development decisions in the future
- Being informed and educated to influence future change



“It’s been very rewarding to work with so many different people. The connections will continue to grow.”

Internal stakeholder

“It allowed me to meet like-minded people in the area and other organisations. It has been impressive how many groups they have brought together under one scheme.”

Partner

Conservation grazing in action

The Colne Valley is a complex web of land stewardship.

Modern administrative boundaries do not mirror the Colne Valley landscape; parts of 10 local authorities, including counties and districts, cover the area. As such, the Colne Valley has been in the ‘peripheral vision’ for strategic planning, management and funding.

The Colne Valley was established as a regional park nearly 50 years ago to increase recognition. It is now led by the Colne Valley Park Trust in collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders including the Colne Valley Landscape Partnership.

The Landscape Partnership Scheme area stretched from Rickmansworth to Staines and South Bucks to Hillingdon. Collaboration across boundaries and technical areas of expertise was absolutely essential to successful delivery of the Scheme. The Scheme has been able to capitalise on the sheer number of interested parties in the landscape by bringing them together in one unified and co-ordinated Landscape Partnership.

“It’s been very effective, we have built strong partnerships...they have been really proactive and strong.”

Internal stakeholder

This Scheme brought together a diverse mix of specialist wildlife conservation organisations, community-action and special interest groups, local authorities, and regional water companies:

- Affinity Water
- Buckinghamshire Council
- Berkshire and Oxon Wildlife Trust
- Colne Valley Park Community Interest Company (this is now the Colne Valley Park Trust)
- Colne Valley Fisheries Consultative
- Environment Agency
- Friends of Colne Valley Park
- Groundwork South
- Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust
- Iver & District Countryside Association
- London Borough of Hillingdon
- London Wildlife Trust
- National Trust
- Ruislip Woods Trust
- South Bucks District Council (Former)
- Spelthorne Borough Council
- Spelthorne Natural History Society
- Thames Water
- Canal and Rivers Trust.

Together the partners have made significant progress towards shared conservation and community goals. In doing so, networks have grown and solidified, and partnership working has become more transparent.

Increased collaboration between organisations operating in the Colne Valley is one of the most important legacies of the Scheme. This has included joint advocacy, influencing, project development and delivery, and bringing in new partners such as the Soil Association.

“We have been working with ARUP; a big multinational consultancy. They gave us some pro bono time, some of the work they undertook on our behalf was beyond us. Working with them we have already won pre-feasibility money on a next project.”

Internal stakeholder

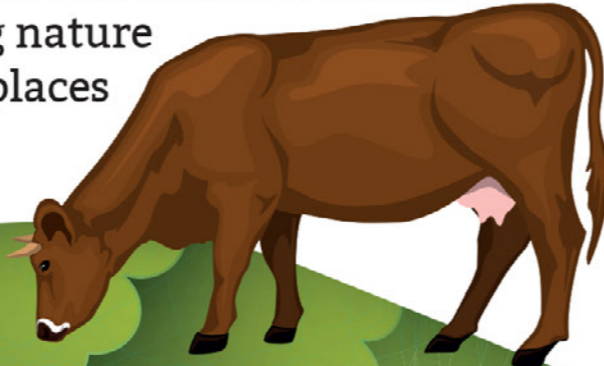
Theory of change: How the Landscape Partnership has made change happen in the Colne Valley

	Started by...	So that...	And then...	This will contribute towards...
<p>Natural and cultural heritage</p>	<p>Completing a Landscape Character assessment in order to develop a shared understanding of the Colne Valley's heritage</p> <p>Identify risks to local heritage and mapping opportunities to improve it</p> <p>Identifying and researching key stories of the Colne Valley's rich heritage</p>	<p>Undertake restoration, habitat creation works and Nature-Based Solutions to enhance the waterways, floodplain, meadows and woods</p> <p>Continue to collect data about the heritage</p> <p>Tackle specific issues such as Non-Native Invasive Species and highwater consumption</p> <p>Land and watercourse managers are trained, enthused and inspired to help care for the Colne Valley</p> <p>Implement new land management regimes such as conservation grazing, and putting in place the infrastructure required</p>	<p>New or updated management plans ensure that heritage is better managed</p> <p>Individual habitat and species begin to recover</p>	<p>A fresh energy concerning the Colne Valley Park and its importance</p> <p>Strengthened landscape character and ecosystem services</p> <p>A strong evidence base upon which to base future decisions</p> <p>More resilient habitats and species populations</p> <p>Landscape- and catchment-scale recovery</p>
<p>Local residents and communities</p>	<p>Consulting with local people and creating investment plans that respond to their needs and reduce barriers to participation</p> <p>Building a better understanding of those lesser seen in heritage, their needs and barriers, and designing activity programmes to respond to these</p> <p>Identify communities and community groups that are already, or could support the Colne Valley's heritage</p>	<p>Develop relevant and engaging interpretation to bring the stories of the Colne Valley to life</p> <p>Create 'ways in' to local heritage through physical access routes, signposting and 'intellectual gateways' such as books and engaging digital content</p> <p>Imaginative programming provides 'an appointment to explore' the Colne Valley for local people</p> <p>Local people and community 'gatekeepers' learn about heritage and how to benefit from it</p> <p>More people volunteer for nature, culture and community in their hyper-local area</p>	<p>Green and blue spaces are more accessible and enhanced</p> <p>More people are encouraged to explore, learn about and value their local area</p> <p>Local people are more connected to nature and cultural heritage</p> <p>Communities have greater capacity to care for and share their local heritage through more people mobilised to volunteer and speak up, new skills, and through more robust community organisations</p>	<p>The character of the Colne Valley is more 'visible' in community life leading to an enhanced sense-of-place</p> <p>The local area is a better place to live, work and visit</p> <p>New hyper-local projects and initiatives</p> <p>The Colne Valley is more 'investment-ready'</p>
<p>Workforce, including trainees</p>	<p>Identify training needs and design CPD opportunities to address these</p> <p>Putting in place a specialist team to deliver the Landscape Partnership Scheme</p>	<p>Trainees from diverse backgrounds bring new talent into the partner organisations</p> <p>Trainees develop the confidence, social capital, technical knowledge and qualifications needed for future roles</p> <p>Staff are trained, more knowledgeable and have experience of delivering a major investment programme and/or targeted projects</p>	<p>Employability of trainees and other staff is enhanced</p> <p>Lessons are learnt about how to ensure an effective delivery team for future investment packages</p>	<p>Better career prospects</p> <p>A skilled workforce and pipeline of new candidates</p>
<p>Strategic and delivery partners</p>	<p>Identifying potential partnerships and putting in place agreements</p> <p>Brainstorm ways of engaging 'harder-to-reach' partners</p> <p>Gaining a collective awareness of the need for collaboration and action within the Colne Valley</p> <p>Organisations begin to develop mechanisms to strands through practical projects</p> <p>Major funding secured</p>	<p>Processes and protocols are developed, stress-tested and refined for nature's recovery, supporting cultural heritage, and engaging a wide range of people</p> <p>Partnerships are cultivated through tangible action that delivers against shared goals</p> <p>Partners collaborate across boundaries to create a landmark Green Infrastructure Plan</p>	<p>Partners have a 'portfolio of evidence' to show the impact of what they can do and a demonstrated ability to deliver impactful programmes</p> <p>Partners reflect upon, and begin to embed and celebrate the benefits of collaboration and new delivery models</p> <p>Organisations are better networked and see the value of collaboration</p>	<p>A team of strong advocates for the Colne Valley</p> <p>Increased organisational expertise in place-based working</p> <p>Partners share the delivery models and lessons learnt</p> <p>Tools for organisations to respond to planning applications proactively, and to inform planning decisions</p> <p>Leveraging more investment into the Colne Valley and the wider work of partner organisations</p> <p>Contribute towards wider policy and priorities</p>



the Landscape Partnership in numbers

7 herds of conservation cattle
helping to bring nature
back to special places



Signs

42 wayfinding signs, 20 information boards, and 4 hand-carved statues to mark the Colne Valley Trail

36 people trained
to check for signs of water voles and monitor for mink

and **44km** of rivers surveyed

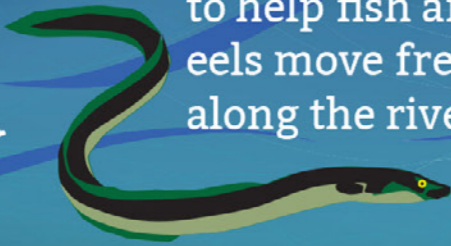


1 unifying vision for improving local green and blue spaces

800 volunteers contributing **8,000 hours** to conserve and improve the Colne Valley

32 organisations collaborating

5 weirs adapted to help fish and eels move freely along the rivers



Colne Valley Park covers **40 square miles** on the edge of **5 countries**
Over 70 lakes
200km of river and canals

Water saving advice in 14 different languages

70km of river checked for damaging invasive species

1.5km of river corridor enhanced for water voles



8km of river managed sympathetically for water voles by anglers

44 Fishery managers trained in nature conservation



14 places improved for countryside recreation and exploration

72 training and expert sessions

2 trainees now in employment or further study

4 knowledge exchanges to help local conservation groups swap great ideas

Spreading the word through:

- 2 Interpretation centres
- 4 social media platforms
- 1 website
- 20 newsletters
- 20 walk leaflets

6 areas improved for habitat, not including voles and fisheries



150 events to bring people closer to nature in their area



A positive impact on a 'hidden' landscape

The Colne Valley landscape is surrounded by people from major towns such as West Drayton, Uxbridge, Slough, Rickmansworth and Staines. Whilst some residents are drawn into the countryside on their doorstep, for many its natural beauty feels hidden. There are just a few areas where a tantalising glimpse of the wider landscape can be snatched from a thoroughfare.

Furthermore, within West Drayton, Uxbridge and Slough are some of the most deprived wards in the South East. There is a real opportunity for people in these areas to experience and enjoy all that the Colne Valley landscape can offer.

The wide-ranging Landscape Partnership Scheme was specifically designed to address these issues and opportunities, whilst beginning to bring this valuable, yet hidden, landscape back from decline.

With the support of the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the Landscape Partnership co-ordinated conservation work, and helped connect communities with their heritage; enabling them to understand and take greater responsibility for it.

"I knew nothing about the Colne Valley, I knew it was a thing, a place, but I didn't think much about it. It's only since I've seen this partnership in place that I've noticed how much work is being done, how many people there who are passionate about looking after the Colne."

River Ranger

Working for wildlife: Ensuring healthy habitats for a biodiverse Colne Valley Regional Park

Key to map showing our achievements



Removing invasive species

Non-native animals and plants often outcompete our own native species, and around 15% of them damage our wildlife.

We have been supporting landowners to control these invasive species such as Floating Pennywort that clogs up our rivers, and Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam that crowd the banks leaving little space for our own wildlife.

See page 19



Helping wildlife thrive

A wide range of animals and plants need help across the Colne Valley but Water Voles have to be one of the stars of the show. We have been tracking them down and making more of our waterways a place they'd like to call home.

Water Voles have now been found in new areas of the Colne Valley which is amazing news.

See page 20



Anglers for nature

The Colne Valley's passionate anglers have been brushing-up on their nature conservation knowledge.

Angling clubs have used their new skills to enhance fish stocks whilst making their fisheries havens for wildlife; from creating Kingfisher nest holes in banks to maintaining healthy wetlands.

See page 18



Restoring habitats

We have been working to improve the habitats so that wildlife can thrive – and cows have been helping out! Cattle have been munching on coarse grasses, nettles and other less desirable plants which has reduced the amount of nutrients, in turn, encouraging more wildflowers.

This is now increasing insect numbers, boosting pollination and creating more food for birds and other animals. And this is why we love cows.

See page 19

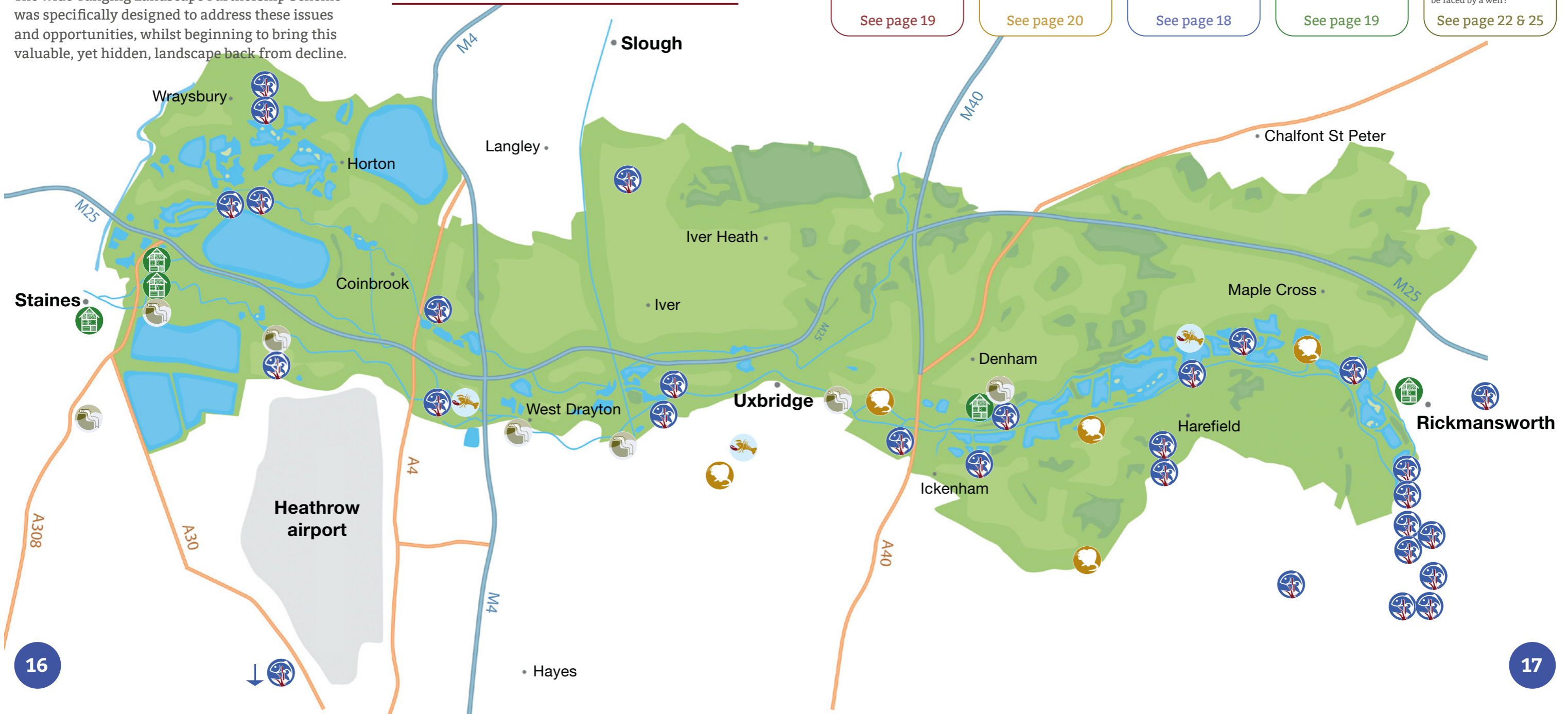


Improving our rivers

The Colne Valley Park has over 200km of river and canals with over 60 lakes – all show the scars of human activity which we have begun to reverse.

For example, we have restored the natural flow of the River Ash and re-connected it to the floodplain - creating a vibrant wetland habitat. Elsewhere we have made changes to man-made river structures that are obstacles to migratory fish. Before this work they might have travelled 5,000 miles to get to the Colne Valley, only to be faced by a weir!

See page 22 & 25



The Scheme has contributed towards better management in a range of ways:

- Strengthened connections across land owned by different organisations and individuals has led to greater collaboration, sharing of good practice, mutual understanding and follow-on projects
- Professional development opportunities and training have led to higher levels of knowledge and skills to deliver better and more consistent management of heritage
- Owners and managers of the Colne's patchwork of green and blue spaces have been supported to develop robust, evidence-led management plans which has helped to bring more priority sites into positive management
- Infrastructure has been improved to help site managers deliver their work more easily
- Practical improvements to management have been put in place to help improve the value of habitats for people and wildlife, for example, setting-up conservation grazing of cattle at target sites

- A bigger team of people is now in place to manage the Colne Valley's heritage. For example, an expanded volunteering to help monitor and manage habitats
- A fuller evidence-base is now available upon which to base future decisions.

The ongoing benefits of improvement management are a core part of the legacy of investment in the Landscape Partnership, and will continue to make a difference to local wildlife, heritage, organisations and communities.

"We have restored areas of wetland, with new ponds and pools and bird species visiting the areas for the first time, which is fantastic. We planted up species in ponds, the habitat creation has been really effective and now it's up to us as landowners to keep that going for the future."

Internal stakeholder



A local Angler using his newly learnt conservation skill

Mini case study: Anglers for nature

The Scheme developed a support program for angling clubs and syndicate fisheries with waters in the Colne Valley Regional Park. This aimed to ensure fisheries are managed to protect and enhance fish stocks, restore biodiversity and enhance the angling experience.

This ground-breaking programme started with an AQA-accredited course including; surveying, ecology, fish anatomy, diseases and parasites, habitats, water quality, aquatic plants, enhancement and restoration, law concerning fisheries, land

management of marginal surroundings, and even how to make change happen in their club. Trained members were then supported to develop a long-term management plan, and work with their club to integrate it.

This work has contributed towards developing sustainable freshwater fisheries in the Colne Valley, which have a knock-on positive impact on the health of the downstream rivers. It has also developed a replicable model for equipping and empowering angling clubs to act for nature that can now be rolled-out across other areas.

"That level of cash [we received] has changed the face of our organisation. We are very conservation minded now, we have seen the positive effects to our fishing lake with our own eyes."

Angling club

The Scheme has strived to restore and strengthen the landscape character, focussing on key habitats intrinsic to the landscape. This has been achieved by an ambitious work programme, for example:

Reconnecting the flow - Humans have changed river systems for millennia, often adding man-made structures such as weirs and sluices. Whilst good for humans at the time, these are not so great for wildlife. These barriers stop local migratory fish, such as the critically endangered¹ European Eel, from making their way upstream at crucial points in their lifecycle.

The Scheme's co-ordinated programme of improvements has helped to reconnect the natural flow of rivers, and make them more resilient for the future. Weirs have been removed or adapted across the Colne Valley to help fish pass through, for example, at Kingfisher weir (River Colnebrook), Hithermoor weir (River Colne), Thorney Mill Road and the Denham eel pass.

¹ IUCN Red List

Tackling nature's invaders - Invasive non-native species are defined as animals or plant species that have spread outside of their natural range. Many of these have made their way into the Colne river catchment and are crowding out or out-competing local species. The Scheme worked to raise awareness of species such as Floating Pennywort, Himalayan Balsam and Signal Crayfish. An amazing team of volunteers has been out on local rivers surveying and reporting on non-native Invasive Species, as well as undertaking practical tasks to remove them.

"Great to look back through photos and see the fly-grazed, fly-tipped, poor access, poor habitat this area [Stanwell Moor] once was to where it is now with recovered wetland, recovering grassland in grazing agreement & access improvements & signage – all whilst supporting local groups joining in winter volunteer events."

Internal stakeholder

Mini case study: Cattle at work

Cattle do a fantastic job of keeping on top of long, coarse grasses, reducing nutrient levels and encouraging more wildflowers to flourish at special sites around the Colne Valley Regional Park. This encourages biodiversity and helps the local area be a better place for nature and people. Sites include Stanwell Moor (Staines) and Misbourne Meadow (Denham Country Park).

Local people have helped out by acting as 'lookers' to check on the cattle in these special habitats, and ensure they're safe and well.

"[The programme's greatest success has been] Conservational Grazing...engaging with the community, striving to increase biodiversity, adding an environmental aspect to managing land."

Internal stakeholder

"We, as a young family of 5, three children all under 12, are just super excited and thankful to be part of such a brilliant project and a wonderful cause. It's something the kids report back to school, friends, family teachers and everyone that hears about the cows are so intrigued and happy,"

Volunteers

HELP LOOK AFTER OUR GRAZING CATTLE

By simply going about your usual walk, you can play a vital role in keeping these animals happy and healthy whilst they graze our conservation sites.

We are looking for cattle checkers in Denham, Staines, Ruislip, and Ickenham to join our WhatsApp groups and report on the cattle.

For more information, and to book onto a training session, email: florence.cordner@groundwork.org.uk

Advert for community volunteers to support conservation grazing

The Scheme has been proactive in helping to build understanding of the heritage of the Colne Valley. This has been achieved by site surveying and historical knowledge, and has now been added to existing records.

Local volunteers have been particularly vital to helping identify and record the natural environment. This has helped to better understand health of wildlife and the habitats that support them and to track the effects of changes happening to them and around them.

Historical and cultural research has been an important first step in developing engaging interpretation to reconnect local communities with the heritage in their local area.



Volunteers learning about Riverfly Monitoring and kick sampling

Mini case study: Bringing water voles back from the brink

Looking back to the 1980s, water voles were an abundant species and a fairly common sight for those passing by our waterways.

They play important roles as 'gardener' within our freshwater habitats; their grazing helps control vegetation, making room for wildflowers and native grasses to grow around the water's edge.

However, the water vole is now the UK's fastest declining mammal with up to 90% loss in the past 50 years², due to habitat loss and the species falling prey to non-native American mink, which were released from fur farms in the late 1960s.

The Scheme took action to begin to reverse the water vole's slide towards extinction by taking positive action for its conservation. The work of staff and volunteers surveying sites for tracks and signs of water vole and mink, and undertaking research has enhanced the knowledge base by providing vital information on which to base next steps. This greater understanding of this endangered species within the Colne Valley has led to a better chance of survival - this data has helped inform a safe release site for water voles where they can hopefully begin to thrive again.



Water vole grazing

The Scheme has helped to reduce negative environmental impacts on the Colne, and in particular its watercourses.

For example:

Ecosystem services - increased benefits local people get from their natural environment, including contributing towards reduced flood risk; better water quality; increasing quality habitat for pollinators; more and better space for nature; easier access to green and blue spaces for leisure, learning, and wellbeing

Biodiversity - enhanced, with increased occurrence of national and local priority species, and a reduction in harmful Non-Native Invasive Species

Reduced resource use - e.g. advice from the project has helped land owners and managers decreased resource use and re-think existing management techniques. Water-saving advice has helped home owners reduce water usage and also reduce cost.

Climate resilience - increased resilience of habitats to climatic change by improving their condition and reducing the impacts of events such as flooding.

"[The Green Infrastructure Strategy has] set-up some priorities and highlighted key areas where funding could be directed. It raised awareness of things – whether it is implemented will influence if the landscape improves."

Contractor



Mini case study: Tackling the big issue

The Colne Valley's growing population and multiple major national transport projects make pressure of development one of the most pressing issues for the heritage of the Colne Valley.

The Colne Valley Regional Park straddles 8 Local Planning Authorities; making it rare that the future of the Valley is considered at a landscape-scale. The partners identified a need to find a collective voice with which to influence change with a shared understanding of assets, clear priorities and a common approach to planning policies across boundaries.

In response, the Scheme has commissioned a Green Infrastructure Strategy (contractor: ARUP) covering both the Colne and Crane Valleys. This landmark forward-thinking document is a framework to inform developers' design of proposals and Local Planning Authority's responses, and any required mitigation measures. In particular, to ensure nature's recovery is supported and the Colne Valley's green and blue assets are not just protected but enhanced.

"We are determinedly pro-countryside. That means we will always make the strongest possible case for its protection. We are not antidevelopment, but fiercely champion the best interests of local communities wherever they face developments 'in the national interest' that rob them of green space that is so vital to health and well-being."

Internal stakeholder

From the roots upwards



800 local people have contributed over 8,000 hours of their time to survey, conserve, improve and share the special heritage of the Colne Valley.

The volunteers have spent time training and developing new skills for their roles including; river fly surveying; river monitoring; cattle checking; non-native plant species training; water vole surveying and mink raft monitoring; undertaking practical tasks, as well as helping to deliver education sessions, community events and walks.

Whilst supporting the aims of the Scheme, volunteering has also been impactful for individuals involved including supporting wellbeing; enhancing employability; meeting new people locally; taking action for nature and climate in their own communities.

In summary, the Scheme has created more opportunities for engaged communities to play a bigger role in the management of the landscape, and to become passionate ambassadors for their local heritage.

“For mental health, its essential. We have set up a walking page with friends and a wildlife page too. The volunteers share it and we share the for physical and mental health benefits.”

Volunteer

“The Prime Minister even mentioned all the volunteers working in the Colne Valley in Parliament”

Internal Stakeholder

“This volunteering was really helpful and as a result from that, I got a job with a [] Wildlife Trust about a month ago. They were impressed with my volunteering work in the project.”

Volunteer

Mini case study: The rise of the River Rangers

Over 100 local people were inspired and have rallied to volunteer as part of the highly successful River Rangers programme. They have been avid contributors in surveying, conserving and championing their local water courses.

River Rangers have played a key role in supporting projects from surveying for non-native invasive species and riverbank clean-ups at litter hotspots to engaging local residents with the river on their doorstep.



River Rangers tackling invasive species – a rewarding day’s volunteering

“It feels good to know that I’m contributing in a positive way.”

Volunteer

“we received the leaflets last week and I’ve spread them out across the unit! It’s a really good read and very well laid out!”

Occupational Therapy team

At the heart of the Scheme was the shared ambition to make the character of this special, but somewhat hidden landscape, more visible; contributing the local sense-of-place.

Events, interpretation, trails and communications content have played a huge role in connecting more and a wider range of people with the heritage on their doorstep.

For example, event attendees felt that attending³:

- 95% said it helped them to take notice of what’s in their local area
- 88% said it helped or inspired them to learn about their local area
- 69% said it helped or inspired them to get active outdoors

- 69% said it connected them with others.

“It has raised awareness a lot, people have mentioned to me about the heritage they have learned about in the area. It has encouraged people to visit those heritage spots in their catchment area.”

Internal stakeholder

³ % of people attending Colne Valley Festival event who agreed or strongly

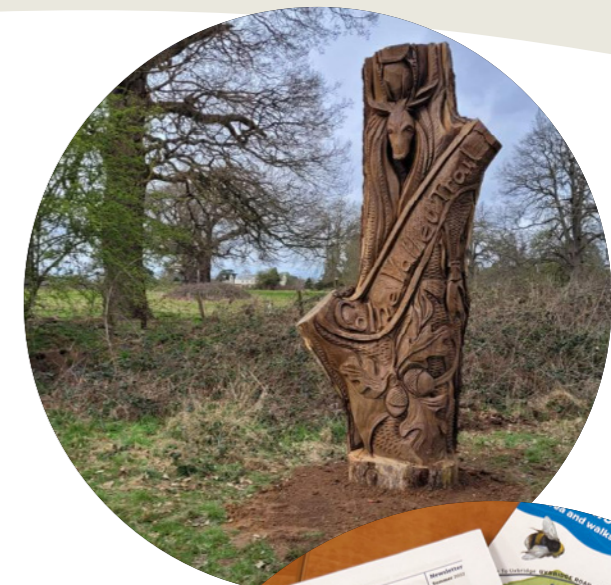
Mini case study: Revealing the landscape

The Scheme has improved physical access to the Colne Valley for local people to enjoy, revealing its stories in a range of ways, for example:

- Footpaths have been upgraded e.g. the scenic footpath from Iver to Farlowes
- Gateways into the Colne Valley created or upgraded e.g. at Denham Country Park
- Interpretation panels and audio e.g. a ‘talking’ bench at Lammas Recreational Ground
- Brass rubbing trail and family activity sheets e.g. at Batchworth Canal Centre, interpretation panels
- ‘Wow’s to talk to, for example, intriguing chainsaw sculptures of local wildlife.

“The new signage and styles, that really worked for post COVID as people were out in the countryside exploring off their own backs. People were more responsive to nature and wanting to volunteer, we were in tune with how the nation was thinking really.”

Internal stakeholder



Illustrating the Colne Valley to communities

“We created a diverse range of activities that enabled a diverse group of people to get involved. We had over 100 volunteers engaged in that time.”

Internal stakeholder

The Scheme has contributed towards local communities in a number of ways:

- **Raised the profile for the Colne Valley**, for example, 5.4million people watched the Colne Valley feature on Countryfile leading to a spike in over 5,500 web and social media visitors
- **More, and a wider range of people now recognise and appreciate the Colne Valley** and its natural and cultural heritage, for example, 15,000

Scheme newsletters were distributed to 310 tourism and hospitality businesses and community venues including targeting new housing estates

- **Reaching communities** who are often lesser-seen in nature
- **Better access to green and blue spaces** that are now nicer places in which to spend time
- **Local people have discovered local heritage**, for example, events provided a ‘gateway’ into the Colne Valley Regional Park; helping 52% of event attendees to visit somewhere new
- **Supported well-being** through volunteering and nature connection
- **Bringing people together to take action** for heritage in their community
- **Encouraging pro-environmental actions** through targeted programmes

- **Contributing towards the local economy** by using local suppliers, creating and supporting jobs, developing skills and adding value to the visitor economy.

“We have seen a hike in customers who have visited from your advertising.”

Local business

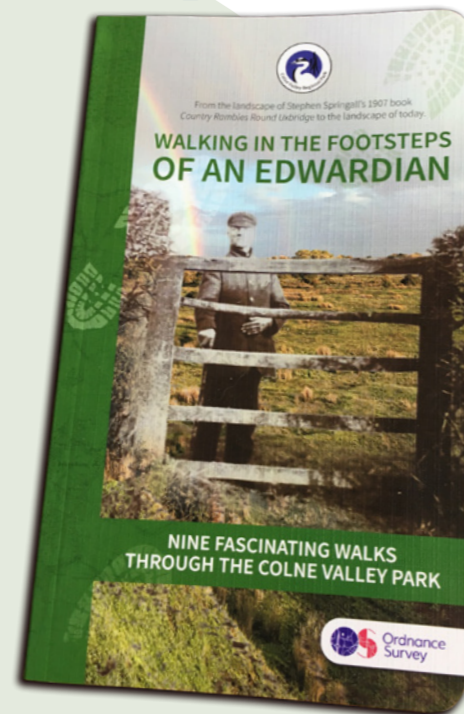


Local people eagerly await the Duck Race entrants to float past

Mini case study: Walks through a changing landscape

Helping to provide ‘ways in’ to the landscape has been one of the ways in which the Scheme has helped a wider range of people to discover the Colne Valley Regional Park.

One such way in is a new walking guide; ‘Walking in the Footsteps of an Edwardian’. This is based on Stephen Springall’s 1907 Country Rambles Round Uxbridge. This is particularly relevant to the context for the Scheme because it reflects on landscape changes in the past 100 years; from gravel extraction, motorways, and housing development – Springall’s landscape has changed beyond recognition in some cases. Local people and visitors can now see it for themselves by following nine fascinating rambles through the Colne Valley.



New walk book navigating 100 years of landscape changes

The Scheme has helped people to better understand the story of the Colne that has led to its distinctiveness, as well as the importance of conservation and positive management of local heritage.

In particular, a family summer school, schools programme and engagement with under-represented groups have helped people to deepen their learning about the Colne Valley and its heritage. For example, the Drip Drop summer school was developed as a hands-on way to inspire families to be mindful of water use.

“He really talked about it and understood it. He said things like “When I get older, I am going to solve the water problem”

Drip Drop summer school parent



Mini case study: Saving vital water

200km of rivers criss-cross the Colne Valley Park, and is studded by more than 70 lakes. They offer people a much-needed opportunity to explore their local waterways, and are a lifeline for wildlife.

In this area, our daily water comes from deep underground sources called aquifers – naturally formed subterranean spaces that store water. Our aquifers are vitally important. They re-fill our rivers, maintaining the natural equilibrium needed to support biodiversity and wildlife, including trout, herons and endangered water voles.

²Despite this apparent abundance of water, South East England receives half the rainfall compared to the rest of the UK.

This is juxtaposed against dense population with the highest daily water consumption rate per person in the UK – 152 litres per person.

The more water we use, the less there is for local rivers and wildlife.

Tackling these issues have been a priority for the Scheme. For example, Water Ambassadors was established in collaboration with Affinity Water. Local people can complete this free online programme at home in stages; learning about river wildlife and the changes we can all make to help ease demand on our water supplies. This can help residents save money whilst helping local rivers and wildlife.

Water saving advice has also been produced in 16 languages; helping to make it more accessible to the Colne Valley’s ethnically diverse communities.

“Water Ambassadors is a great interactive online programme, it’s fun, informative, easy to use, it only takes an hour or so and our children really enjoyed learning more.”

Participant

“It’s really sad to think of how many brooks, streams and rivers have dried up over the last few decades and we are on a mission to encourage as many people as possible to help protect them and keep our rivers flowing.”

Internal stakeholder



River Detectives

²Water usage in the home. Affinity Water statistics.

Colne Valley Regional Park

The Colne Valley Regional Park Managing Agent helps spread the word about the importance of the Colne Valley's heritage.

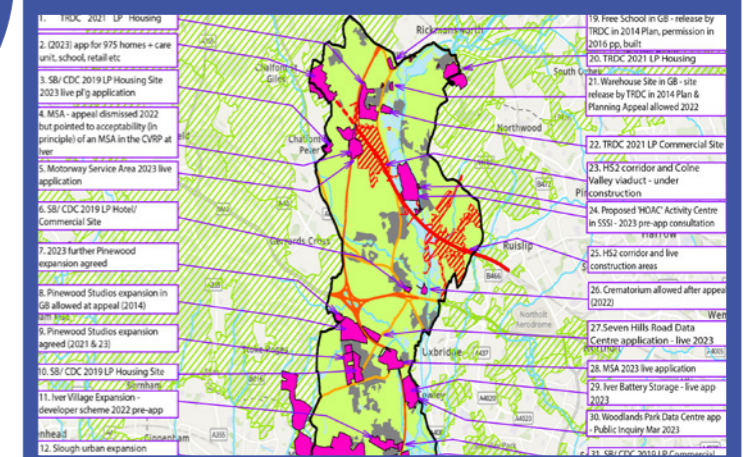


An updated survey has helped better understand the Colne's fantastic water birds

The Landscape Partnership has enabled the partners to come together, with focus, to tackle the issues facing the Colne Valley head-on.

As the funded Scheme drew to a close, it was important to think about preparing for the next phase of action.

To do this, the partners collaborated on a future plan. This has particularly focused on speaking-up for the natural heritage of the Colne Valley in the face of multiple development threats:



Mapping has helped visualise development threats

Tools for advocacy

- **Strengthening the evidence base:** for example, a newly commissioned water birds survey⁴ has updated the understanding of water birds across the Colne Valley and its national importance for them
- **Getting the message across:** the Scheme contributed towards a brief but impactful visual summary of document titled 'The case for the Colne Valley' – this highlights the value of the Colne Valley, encourages support, champions the need for some form of recognition or designation for Regional Parks
- **Visualising threats:** time has been spent in mapping the threats to the Colne Valley so the extent and location of current development threats can effectively communicated.

⁴ the last full survey was in 2008.

Speaking-up

- **Evidence-based advocacy:** team members (supported by an external consultant) embarked on a programme of advocacy designed to make the case for the Colne Valley to decision makers. They used the Green Infrastructure Plan as a basis of meetings with planning officers, councillors and influential groups - with the goal of the key points being incorporated into Local Plans, for example, in Spelthorne and Bucks
- **Engaging residents:** The Scheme has helped partners make strides forward in engaging a wider range of local people in speaking up and caring for their local heritage. Staff have been trained to create professional-quality designs in-house as well as continuing communications
- **Sharing learning:** knowledge exchange with other areas facing similar issues such as the West Midlands National Park Lab and the Lee Valley.

Every programme is an intense learning journey.

The end-of-scheme evaluation was an opportunity to reflect on what went well, what was challenging, why this matters and suggested actions for future projects and programmes as a result.

Four examples of lessons learnt are:

Untangling administrative complexity -

Area-based schemes are often complex due to their landscape- or townscape-scale, and the range and number of interventions they seek to deliver. The Colne Valley Landscape Partnership Scheme found that funding reporting and financial claim requirements were a significant drain on senior staff time which could be better used elsewhere to focus on deepening the Scheme's impacts and legacy.

Suggested action:

Allocate dedicated resource for financial administration and funder reporting and try, and simplify processes where possible.

"...I would have been more effective if I hadn't had to spend so much time doing the finances. The finance reporting was onerous and overly complicated."

Programme Manager

Enough time to get the right people on-board -

Planning, recruitment of quality candidates and procuring the right services from suitable contractors all take more time than had been allocated within Scheme plans. Once on-board, staff and contractors need time to orientate into the Scheme, work to be scoped and for relationships to develop if they are to be effective. Pay and contract fees also need to commensurate with the tasks required and level of responsibility and skill.

Suggested action:

Add more lead-in time before, and during recruitment and on-boarding of new project staff, and of procurement of services before delivery starts in earnest.

"The programme needs a longer run-up to recruitment, there are things that we could have procured better if we had more knowledge before procurement. We could have combined procurement, there could have been more efficiencies and coherence if we had a longer planning stage."

Internal stakeholder



An agile approach -

Whilst the programme was well-planned, the context and operating environment for the Scheme changed. For example, the pandemic, new development threats, Brexit, workforce shortages and the cost-of-living crisis have all impacted upon delivery. As a result, the Scheme team employed an adaptive management approach at both strategic and operational levels. This enabled the focus to be on the desired long-term impacts, and to adapt the journey to achieving them to ensure it stayed effective and efficient.

Suggested action:

Build-in an adaptive management approach to future programme design, ways of working and the culture of the partner and staff team.

"Time and again we see the immense value of adaptive management in keeping area-based schemes fresh, relevant and impactful. This Scheme is a great example of that."

Evaluator

Concerted effort can unlock 'hard-to-reach' organisations -

The Scheme has facilitated open working relationships with organisations previously perceived as 'difficult to access' such as: councils, corporate sponsors, or groups who seemed reluctant to change. The project team were able to demonstrate to those different groups that they share common goals, which contributed to significant outcomes for the project.

Suggested action:

Spend time throughout the Scheme establishing and revisiting shared goals, building understanding between partners and celebrating successes - it's rarely the focus of delivery but can pay huge dividends.

"The conservation and fishing one [project] is a good example where prior to the project there was a degree of suspicion among the angling and wildlife trust fraternities, one was always positioning itself against the other. But as a result of the efforts from a couple of individuals, that has been overcome and it has motivated more people from both sides to get involved."

Internal stakeholder

“Having people thinking about the Colne Valley and their future involvement in it, that’s the longer term legacy, now that it’s much more tied together or working in cohesion.”

Internal stakeholder

“We have seeded the Colne Valley now with enough people that have participated and are enthusiastic about it with ambitions to do more. It has the potential to be part of the conversation [] in and amongst groups and that [] is where the message will now get through to the decision makers..”

Internal stakeholders



The Scheme is leaving behind it a number of ongoing benefits, for example:

Sense-of-place -

A greater appreciation of the Colne Valley’s heritage, and a wider pool of people who are willing to work to protect it and amplify the message about its importance. In this way, the Scheme has helped to bring a spotlight to the Colne Valley’s constantly threatened heritage in a way that resonates with them and inspires people to explore and help care for their local heritage, particularly in their hyperlocal area. The festival has been an annual highlight of the Scheme and is set to continue.

The Scheme has begun to untangle how to navigate complex ownership, peri-urban pressures such as anti-social behaviour and fly-tipping, inspire local people to care for the landscape, and show an optimistic view of what the Colne Valley can look like.

However, the partners have always been realistic about the scale of impact that a short program like the Scheme can make. There is a significant ongoing need to protect and enhance heritage, the environment, people and communities, in the face of unprecedented pressure on the Colne Valley.

The Scheme has ‘pump-primed’ the area to respond to challenges old, such as sewage outflow in precious rivers, and new such as new development proposals for two motorway service stations, up to five data centres and the expansion of Pinewood into a visitor attraction.

Place-based action -

People will continue to be mobilised to help better record the heritage of the Colne Valley and work to protect it, for example through the River Ranger volunteering programme, Non-native Invasive Species removal and riverfly monitoring.

The war cry has not died down and the Colne Valley needs its communities and organisations to rally, now more than ever.

Portfolio of evidence -

The Scheme has created an evidence base and a suite of illustrative projects that practically show what the Colne Valley could look like. As a result, raising funding has been easier due to the Partnership’s track record of delivering this Scheme, and because of the increased level of awareness more generally.

“Creeping urbanisation is one of the biggest threats of the 21st century.

There is a real risk of a ‘death by a thousand cuts’ here: HS2 has already had a significant impact; Heathrow expansion would wipe out 900 acres of the southern end of the Park; we’re losing pockets of precious Green Belt right across the area; and there are plans for not only two Motorway Service Areas, but a colossal ‘screen hub’ theme park at Pinewood Studios, right next to Black Park.”

Internal stakeholder

Sharing the model -

The partners have been sharing the Scheme model and ways of working with other new and existing regional parks and other organisations such as the Angling Trust, to help inform and share practice, and increase the dialogue with areas facing similar challenges.



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colnevalleypark.org.uk