

# Crane Valley Partnership

## *Strategy for the Crane Catchment 2018-2028*



Final report, 9<sup>th</sup> March 2018

*Disclaimer:*

*The views and opinions expressed in this Strategy represent a consolidated view of the organisations that are members of the Crane Valley Partnership and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any individual organisation.*

# Executive Summary

## Purpose

This Strategy has been prepared to give a clear vision for the Crane catchment and to guide the future development of the Crane Valley Partnership over the ten years to 2028.

It identifies the benefits that the River Crane and its wider catchment provide to those living and working in the Crane Valley and how they can be enhanced and maximised for the benefit of all.

It reviews the pressures and drivers of change that will affect the catchment and sets out the Partnership's Vision of what the catchment could be like in 2028 and the Ambitions of the Partnership to achieve this Vision.

Finally, it develops a set of Themes and Actions to guide the work of the Partnership in the period to 2022.

## Methodology

This Strategy was prepared between August and December 2017, facilitated by independent consultants (Rural Focus Ltd). Evidence was gathered from a review of the Partnership's achievements; spatial analysis of the catchment's natural environment; from workshops held with Partnership members; and through consultation with key partners and other organisations.

The concepts of natural capital and ecosystem services are used in this document to describe what is valuable about the catchment and the benefits it provides to society.

## Achievements to date

Since its establishment in 2005, the Partnership has become a well-regarded and effective group of 24 organisations supporting or overseeing the delivery of a range of projects covering activities such as enhancing biodiversity, improving water quality and involving local people in environmental conservation.

In the last five years, since receiving £400,000 in core funding through the Thames Water Compensation Fund, a further £1 Million of funding has successfully been generated.

Successful activities, tackled with partners, have included:

- Involvement of volunteers
- Sharing of information
- Improving heavily modified river channels
- Identifying causes of pollution
- Improving access to rivers
- Tackling invasive species

Ongoing challenges have been identified as:

- The uneven spread of opportunities/ activities along the river
- A focus on the river corridor to the exclusion of issues in other areas
- A low profile of the Partnership amongst decision makers
- A relatively narrow geographic and demographic base amongst volunteers
- Tight budgetary constraints on partners, particularly the Borough Councils

## Valuing the catchment's natural capital

The concepts of natural capital and ecosystem services provide a good framework for thinking about what is valuable in the catchment, and what the future priorities for protection, conservation and enhancement should be.

The catchment contains an extensive network of natural capital occupying well over half of its area, including nearly a quarter which is publicly accessible greenspace. This network collectively provides a wide range of services and benefits to the people who live and work there, as well as to wider society in London and beyond. Taken together, this natural capital is a hugely significant social and economic, as well as environmental, asset.

Much of the natural capital is clustered along the river corridor, which provides the central thread connecting up and reaching out to green space across the catchment.

Some of the value provided by natural capital is indispensable and irreplaceable, meaning that the highest priority must be given to conserving these sites. In other areas, the natural capital, and the benefits it provides, may be renewable, allowing more flexibility over its location. This offers opportunities for engaging with planners and developers over the role that green spaces and natural capital should play in the future.

### Future drivers of change

The catchment will be affected by a number of important external pressures. For instance, London's growing population which will require major investment in water treatment, measures to address pollution from transport and increases in the quality and use of green spaces to accommodate and serve local communities.

The changing global climate will require action in the catchment to strengthen the resilience of nature to change, as well as using of area's natural capital to raise awareness of what can be done to reduce climate change.

The slow economic recovery from the period of austerity will continue to affect public funding available for catchment work, continuing the need for resources from local communities, businesses and the charitable sector.

More broadly, wider technological and social change could see increased demand for recreation and volunteering in the natural environment.

These drivers of change present a number of **Opportunities for the work of the Partnership:**

- Influencing planning policy to protect and enhance natural capital.
- Shaping environmental mitigation work arising from any third runway at Heathrow.
- Engaging with Thames Water's proposed Smarter Catchments Pilot Project.
- Helping to deliver aspects of the Mayor's Environment and Transport Strategies.

### The Vision for 2028

The rivers and waterbodies in the catchment are widely **recognised and valued** as the '**central spine**' that links together the natural environment around the north-west edge of London. This corridor of natural capital is recognised as being essential to the areas prosperity, health and wellbeing.

Those **living and working** in the catchment can easily access the length of the rivers, waterbodies and surrounding greenspaces, where the wildlife and biodiversity are thriving, and pollution levels are low.

Local residents, businesses and policy makers understand the way that **natural capital enriches people's lives** and the **interconnected nature** of the catchment. They understand the way that their actions affect it and the benefits that it provides.

People and organisations that represent the diverse makeup of the catchment are **actively involved** in caring for, and improving knowledge about natural capital and feel a shared sense of responsibility to look after and ensure that it thrives in the future.

The needs of natural capital are **prioritised in decision making** at all levels and by all bodies, and resources are allocated to ensure action is taken.

### The Ambition for 2022

The primary role and justification for the Partnership is that it will fill gaps and add value to the work done by its partner bodies. It will do this in three ways, by becoming:

- **The champion for natural capital** in the catchment, taking a strategic role as an influencer and enabler.
- **The gateway for public understanding and participation** in caring for natural capital, co-ordinating and promote activities by its partners and others.
- **The conduit for funding** to enhance and extend natural capital, providing the administrative facilities and shared identity for programmes of work involving partners and others.

The Vision and Ambition will be delivered through three themes of activity.

## Theme 1: Thinking Spatially

Taking a spatial approach will help create a strong sense of place and strengthen the connections between the natural environment and the people who live and work in the catchment.

**The rivers and waterbodies form a central spine** joining together extensive areas of high quality natural capital through the centre of the catchment. The Partnership will work to promote and consolidate this network and carry out projects that enhance its value and the benefits it provides.

Many of the issues facing the river originate in activities taking place in **the wider catchment**. The Partnership needs to take a truly catchment wide-approach to tackle problems at source.

**The Portlane Brook** on the south-western edge of the catchment is not hydrologically linked to the catchment but is included within the Environment Agency's Crane operational catchment boundary. Further information is needed to understand its needs and challenges before a decision is made on whether to include it within the Partnership's remit.

The following actions fall under this Theme:

- **Review membership of the Partnership.** Identify where new partners might be involved to address spatial planning needs and respond to the changing funding environment.
- **Gather further information** to gain a better understanding of its needs and the challenges the Portlane Brook faces and whether the Partnership will be in the best position to adequately address them.
- **Seek to proactively influence development** taking place in the catchment to ensure it takes account and maximises benefits for the catchment.
- **Put together a portfolio of future projects** with outline costings, ready to take to potential funding partners such as the Borough Councils and Developers for early discussion.
- **Re-evaluate the All London Green Grid River Colne and Crane Area Framework (10)** projects relevant to the catchment and identify potential partners and mechanism that might deliver them.

## Theme 2: Involving Communities

Everyone living, working or just passing through the catchment benefits in some way, consciously or not, from the ecosystem services and benefits that the catchment provides. However, awareness of the catchment and the value it adds to people's lives is currently low.

Projects will focus on raising awareness and active engagement in the catchment. Signage, maps, information leaflets and events that identify and celebrate the River and all its associated natural capital are important first steps to increasing the number of people using and contributing to the improvement of the catchment. The role of the catchment as an educational resource in its own right will also be recognised.

It is vital that those living and working within the catchment understand how their individual and collective actions can impact -both positively and negatively- on their natural capital. The Partnership will continue to coordinate awareness and education campaigns that change people's behaviour and help them contribute to enhancing their local environment.

The following actions fall under this Theme:

- **Seek funding for a community engagement and education officer** to build links with all sections of the community.
- **Strengthen understanding of the communities** that make up the catchment, gathering evidence in order to build links and start conversations.
- As a Partnership, **discuss the need for a unified catchment 'brand'** and how and when this might be appropriate to use and outline what form the branding might take.
- **Identify and establish links with education bodies** and providers and expand and consolidate existing links with universities. Explore the appetite for using the catchments natural capital more extensively for education purposes.
- **Identify and prioritise water-based issues** that have their **root causes elsewhere in the catchment**, which could be tackled by changing individual's behaviour.

## Theme 3: Big Opportunities

The catchment sits within one of the most dynamic cities in the world. New development projects and innovative ideas for addressing its challenges create significant new opportunities for the Partnership. However, to take advantage of these and successfully operate in this new environment, the Partnership will need to adapt.

Since its creation, the legal status of the Partnership has been as an unincorporated association with no powers to act on its own account. Green Corridor has successfully hosted the Partnership for the last five years. The consensus amongst partners is that this arrangement is currently working well and will continue for the meantime. However, if this arrangement starts to limit the Partnership's work, either in relation to its scale or independence, the situation should be reviewed.

As funding opportunities become more competitive and organisations scrutinise their commitment to the Partnership, it will become increasingly important to maintain a high profile for the Partnership's vision and activities. Success should be celebrated through traditional media, social media, targeted correspondence and events.

As new agendas develop and opportunities appear, the Partnership will need to be agile so that it can respond promptly. It will be ready with prioritised objectives and 'oven ready' projects and will be proactive in identifying funding.

The following actions fall under this Theme:

- **High level launch for this strategy** – including press release in Partner organisations publications and external publications.
- Seek funding to **employ a communications officer** to focus on promotion and engaging/lobbying other organisations.
- **Develop and produce a communication Strategy** for the Partnership in order to share successes and raise its profile.
- **Measure and celebrate success** – set out a framework for collecting indicators of success and ensure this is publicised.
- **Put together a portfolio of future projects in the catchment.**

## Delivering change

There are a wide range of sources of funding available to take forward many of the actions in this Strategy, three specific delivery mechanisms are of particular note:

- **Thames Water's Smarter Catchments initiative.** This has the potential to provide a mechanism to help deliver many of this Strategy's actions. Thames Water will be starting to work together with the Partnership from early 2018 to develop the initiative to start with their new AMP7 period (2020).
- **Heritage Lottery Funding.** The Heritage Lottery Fund offers funding to projects which reconnect people with nature and the benefits it brings to their lives, health and wellbeing. This directly echoes the Vision for the catchment set out in this Strategy. The Partnership will look carefully at the available programmes (which are changing in 2018) and gather the resources needed to bid for those most suited to its objectives.
- **Developer-led investment.** This Strategy forms a starting point for identifying the activities and projects that hold most potential for development-funded delivery. The Partnership will identify the most significant development opportunities taking place in the catchment, what stage in the planning process they are at and where the opportunities for the catchment might lie.

This will involve working closely with the planning departments in the Borough Councils to ensure that developers' obligations and contributions are appropriately delivered. It will also involve liaising with developers and large businesses who may be interested in using the Partnership to help maximise the environmental and social value of infrastructure projects.

New opportunities are also emerging as a result of the Government publishing its 25 Year Environment Plan which strongly supports the catchment based approach and the role of Catchment Partnerships.