



CRANE VALLEY PARTNERSHIP STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

FIRST ANNUAL REVIEW - 2025/26

September 2026

INTRODUCTION

The Crane Valley covers 125 km² of West London, consisting of around 65km of river corridor linking over 3000 hectares of green space, and is home to over 650,000 people.

The Crane Valley Partnership (CVP) was set up in 2005 to help protect and enhance the community and environmental value of the rivers and open spaces of the Crane Valley. There are eight (generally landowning) core partners – five West London Boroughs (Harrow; Ealing; Hillingdon; Hounslow and Richmond); Heathrow Airport Ltd; Environment Agency and Thames Water in a larger partnership of organisations with a key interest in the Crane Valley and linked to a network of over 90 local community groups.

The work of CVP has been greatly enhanced over the last six years by the Smarter Water Catchment (SWC) programme – the Crane Valley was selected by Thames Water in 2020 as the urban pilot SWC catchment. This programme has provided funding for project development and delivery that has led to further investment by many third parties, as well as an increased appreciation of the value of the catchment from key stakeholders and the wider public. The SWC programme has recently confirmed funding until March 2030.

The SWC programme is being delivered in the Crane Valley across five Themes – Water Quality; Biodiversity; Community and Access; Geomorphology and Flooding – and a lead organisation has been appointed to each of these themes.

The latest catchment plan for the Crane Valley <https://www.cranevalley.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/River-Crane-Catchment-Plan-2025-2030-First-Edition.pdf> covers the period from 2025 to 2030 and includes six strategic objectives as follows:

- Achieve Good Ecological Status
- Deliver the Crane Valley Trail
- ‘Slow the Flow’
- A Home for Water Voles
- ‘A River Runs Through Us’ – increase public awareness of the river and open spaces
- No Orphan Stretches

In each case these are ‘headlines’ that support a broader set of aspirations. For example the ‘Home for Water Voles’ objective also has an aspiration for broader improvements in priority species and habitats.

The catchment plan also sets out Key Performance Indicators (KPI’s) to assess progress against these objectives and links them to the “35 targets to 2035” as set out in the second “State of the Crane Environment” Report (February 2025) <https://www.cranevalley.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/State-of-the-Crane-Environment-Report-February-2025.pdf>

One of the key measures of success for the SWC programme is the progress against these six strategic objectives. This report provides a review of progress for the period to the end of March 2026 and opportunities for the next year. As it is the first of a planned annual series, the document also sets out a broader context of progress over the last five years as a baseline for future reviews.

Each Objective has a lead organisation – although the report includes work led and delivered by other Partners. Note that the future opportunities against each Objective should be considered more as a menu of options than a list of requirements.

This is the public facing version of the report and follows a review of the draft by all the Theme Leads.

ACHIEVE GOOD ECOLOGICAL STATUS

Lead Organisation: Zoological Society of London (ZSL)

1.1 Information and progress review

Good Ecological Status (or Good Ecological Potential if appropriate) is defined and assessed by the Environment Agency for each designated water body as part of the Water Framework Directive (WFD).

There are four waterbodies in the ‘Crane Rivers and Lakes Operational Catchment’: Crane, Kempton Park East Reservoir, Portlane Brook and Yeading Brook, and three in the ‘Crane SWT Operational Catchment’: Longford River, Lower Duke of Northumberland’s River (LDNR) and Upper Duke of Northumberland’s River (UDNR). [N.B. CVP also has an interest in the tidal Crane although this is not formally included in the River Crane Catchment area. And the Portlane Brook is not actually located within the Crane Valley’s geographical boundary.]

The last full review of these water bodies was in 2019, although there was a partial review in 2022. A further review is due to be formally released in 2026. The Crane, Yeading Brook, UDNR, LDNR and Longford are currently classified as being at “Moderate Ecological Status”. As such they are in line with over 60 per cent of water bodies across England, with only 16 per cent classified as Good Status.

There is considerable additional information to consider beside the overall Status of these water bodies. A preliminary assessment of the EA data indicates that the main Crane waterbody improved considerably between the 2019 and 2022 reviews – when considering the main classification items – as summarised in Table 1 below:

Classification Item	2019	2022
Poor	2	1
Moderate	6	2
Good	1	3
High	2	5

Table 1: classification of overall WFD categories for the Crane Waterbody

A preliminary data release from the 2025 review indicates there have been further improvements for the Crane water body, with only phosphate remaining below Good Status, and this improving from Poor to Moderate. Note however that the Fish classification is only deemed Good by a fine margin.

These data provide a very encouraging direction of travel towards the Objective of Good Ecological Status for the Crane Waterbody. Note that this is the waterbody where the partnership has invested most in improving river condition.



WFD data for the Yeading Brook Waterbody (upstream of the main Crane waterbody) are set out in Table 2 below. These indicate that this waterbody is in a much worse condition than the downstream Crane – although there has also been a minor improvement from 2019 to 2022 (as phosphate went from Bad to Poor).

Classification	2019	2022
Bad	2	1
Poor	3	4
Moderate	-	-
Good	1	1
High	2	2

Table 2: classification of overall WFD categories for the Yeading Brook Waterbody

The WFD data for 2025 have not been reviewed yet for this waterbody.

The Crane and Yeading Brook waterbodies are where most work has been delivered by the Partnership to date. The remaining four waterbodies are all artificial and are therefore not considered in the same way by the WFD process – with only chemical classifications considered along with broad characteristics. In addition, there was not much data analysis carried out by the EA for these waterbodies in 2022. At this stage therefore the main focus regarding this Objective will be on the Crane and the Yeading Brook Waterbodies.

These waterbodies are also where the monitoring sites for our Citizen Crane initiative, which started in 2014 and continues to the present day, are based. The initiative works with citizen scientist volunteers to analyse data on ammonia and phosphate as well as collect monthly ecological data (using the River Monitoring Initiative – RMI method) at between 12 and 18 sites along the main river corridor. Annual Citizen Crane reports review these, along with wider data sets and other findings, to assess the river condition and key concerns and opportunities. The main findings to date are as follows:

1. The poorest water quality and overall river conditions are in the upper catchment (ie the Yeading Brook waterbody).
2. Conditions improve downstream and there is also an improvement in ecological value (as measured by the RMI data) below the confluence between the Upper Duke of Northumberland's River (UDNR) and the main Crane.
3. There are reaches of the river corridor where the loadings of ammonia and phosphate reduce with distance downstream – indicating that, given the right conditions, the river is capable of cleansing itself of organic pollutants – by sedimentation, absorption by plants and algae and/or aeration.
4. The trends in ecological value over the last 11 years (as measured by the RMI data) provide indications of an overall improvement in river condition, though this is not universal across the catchment. Note that the RMI data for 2025/26 have not yet been analysed and will be included in the Citizen Crane Year 12 report, due in autumn 2026.

5. The Thames Water Surface Water Outfall Programme (SWOP) has removed hundreds of misconnected properties from the surface water drainage network over the last ten years. This has clearly improved the condition of the river compared to where it would have been.
6. However, the evidence from the Outfall Safaris (assessments of the condition of outfalls) carried out by Citizen Crane teams every few years since 2016 indicates that the overall condition of these outfalls has not improved significantly (with only minor reductions in the outfall pollution recorded on each survey). This suggests that many new misconnections may also have been added over the last decade.
7. There is some evidence that the upstream and poorest quality parts of the river (Yeading Brook East and Yeading Brook West) have been improving in quality over the last few years – albeit from a poor base (see Citizen Crane year 11 report for the latest RMI data review). This could be due to a combination of – major wetland projects completed on both tributaries by LB Harrow; a focused TW SWOP programme in the upstream areas; and a major joint programme by TW, EA, LB Harrow and local community groups to resolve a variety of long standing pollution issues on the eastern arm of the Yeading Brook. This work has revealed the complex and long standing nature of urban pollution issues and the need for partnership based approaches over an extended period to help resolve them.
8. Major wetland schemes have been constructed on the upper reaches of both the main river tributaries over the last five years. These have been monitored throughout this period – including using new and innovative methods for urban wetland monitoring developed through this programme. The monitoring has identified considerable ecological benefits in the wetlands themselves as well as minor improvements to water quality in the tributaries that flow downstream of them.
9. River restoration schemes, including new backwater channels and marginal wetland planting, are starting to be delivered at scale across the catchment. It is anticipated that these schemes will be effective in improving the ecological condition of the river and removing organic pollutants in particular.

The Partnership has been monitoring the impact of these river restoration schemes for the last few years (using MORPH and other techniques) and the data so far indicate significant benefits to the ecological and geomorphological value of the river corridor – at least at a local level. Note that RMI scores at these sites have improved significantly (typically from 2 or 3 to 6 to 8) in the first year or so following installation.

10. The Partnership has started to deliver a catchment based approach to managing and removing Invasive Non Native Species (INNS). The initial priority species are Giant Hogweed and Floating Pennywort, followed by Himalayan Balsam and Japanese Knotweed. Initial co-ordinated removal works have started on the ground, generally working from upstream to downstream, and it is anticipated that Giant Hogweed can be eradicated from the catchment over the next four years and the other three priority species much diminished. The work is being done in combination with the planting of native flora in the cleared areas. This will be a significant benefit to the morphological aspects of the WFD assessment as well as the overall ecological value of the corridor. Giant hogweed removal also deals with a significant public health risk.

11. One of the main sources of metals and hydrocarbon inputs to the river is road run-off. The project team has been engaging with Highways England and Transport for London to create schemes to intercept and treat road run-off using nature-based solutions. No schemes have been implemented as yet but two are in development.

In summary:

- There is an encouraging trend of improvement towards Good Ecological Status in the Crane Waterbody
- The status of the Yeading Brook waterbody has also improved slightly – although this remains far from Good Ecological Status
- The other water bodies are artificial and have not been the focus of Partnership work to date
- Works have been delivered, and others are in development, that seek to improve the water quality in the river through intercepting and treating pollutants using nature-based solutions – primarily through wetlands and river restoration schemes
- There is evidence from pre and post monitoring of these schemes that they are providing benefits - at least at a local level

It is important to note that achieving Good Ecological Status for an urban waterbody is very difficult – and the Partnership is not currently aware of any other urban water body that has achieved this Status. Also - this objective is one of many where the link between actions and effects can be inferred but may be difficult to prove.

2. Potential next steps

This list is for discussion and development with the project team leading the delivery of this Objective. In no particular order:

1. Scale up delivery of river restoration and wetland schemes – along with strategic pre and post monitoring with assistance from citizen scientists - to evaluate their impact.
2. Maintain existing Citizen Crane monitoring and expand with the roll out of standardised river restoration and NBS monitoring protocols.
3. Continue to work with partners on removing pollution at source: SWOP, Highways and removal of network defects.
4. Review the full 2025 WFD data set on publication.
5. Produce the Year 12 Citizen Crane report for 2025/26.
6. Review key data regarding the WFD failures to meet Good Ecological Status for the Crane and Yeading Brook Waterbodies – having an initial focus on phosphate data – with a view to understanding the phosphate reductions required to meet Good Status for the Crane and the relative merits of various approaches to achieve them.
7. The approaches to phosphate could include:
 - Waterblitz approach to identifying and quantifying pollution sources and sinks

- Further work on misconnections and sewer blockages (including publicity through the wider partnership of how local communities can help to avoid these)
 - Evaluating the water quality and ecological benefits associated with river restoration work – including through ongoing monitoring at restoration sites and potential research based work to assess the potential benefits of delivering at scale
 - Phosphate removal schemes for STWs in the Colne catchment – that reach the Crane via the UDNR
8. Comparison between WFD data for the Crane Valley and other urban catchments – including trend data and identifying whether (and then how) other urban catchments may be at or approaching GES.
 9. Continue to deliver river restoration and wetland schemes – along with strategic pre and post monitoring with citizen scientists to evaluate their impact.

These opportunities can be discussed and developed over the next year.

DELIVER THE CRANE VALLEY TRAIL

Lead Organisation: Crane Valley Community Interest Company



2.1 Information and progress review

The Crane Valley Trail project seeks to create a continuous walking and cycling route of around 32km from near the river's source in Harrow, to the Thames at Isleworth. The trail has existed as a potential route for many years. Note: FORCE carried out their first walk along the route in 2003. However, it has previously been unnamed, difficult to follow and of variable quality. Developing the trail as an accessible and legible route will provide an asset for the whole Crane Valley as well as a very tangible link between the communities along it.

Several improvements were delivered to walking routes through the Crane Valley over the period to 2020 – including new paths in Hounslow along the Lower Duke of Northumberland's River and Crane Park, and boardwalks through Donkey Woods and Crane Bank Meadows. Two new riverside routes were provided in LB Richmond as planning gain from development.

With the start of the Smarter Water Catchment (SWC) programme in 2020 there was the opportunity to consider access at a more catchment based level. One or more routes for the trail have been mapped over the first five years of the Smarter Water Catchment programme and a brochure was produced in 2022 <https://www.cranevalley.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Crane-Valley-Trail-Brochure-October-2022.pdf>. The entire route was subsequently surveyed by Sustrans. More delivery work has continued – particularly through LB Hounslow – which has to some extent been a pilot for the delivery of the overall trail.

Parts of the trail route are well used by local people, and also form parts of larger and regional routes, such as the London Loop and Hillingdon Trail. There are also several Park Run circuits either along or local to the route. Other parts are little used and neglected, with no signage or formal pathways.

The following are the key activities and achievements towards delivering the trail route over the first year of the catchment plan (to March 2026):

1. Continued work to re-open a riverside route linking the A4 to Waye Avenue Open space. This has included legal work by the council (LB Hounslow) to respond to boundary extensions adjoining the public open space – which could provide a useful template for other areas.
2. Contract let for an improved route through Brazil Mill Woods. This includes river re-alignments and the creation of new dog dips designed to reduce dog erosion along the Path. Note: the first dog dip in the Crane Valley was installed at Kneller Gardens in LB Richmond in 2025.
3. Near completion of the 'Take Me to the River' project, which engaged local communities across LB Hounslow with the value of the river corridor for green travel and recreation. Consultation for this project found that 45% of the 320 people who took part had never visited the River Crane, most who do visit go there monthly (21%) or annually (19%). Those consulted were

keen to see better paths and waymarking and improved accessibility. The remaining capital funded access works for this project are expected to take place in 2026/7.

4. Production of new and improved digital maps that showcase the route through LB Hillingdon, LB Hounslow and LB Richmond.
5. Major funding secured from the GLA and LB Hounslow CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) to promote the route over the next three years and to improve access for all abilities – including the design and installation of new entrance gateways that allow access for all.
6. Ongoing usage surveys by FORCE in the lower parts of the Crane Valley (carried out twice a year since 2012) illustrate high levels of usage of the route and associated pathways, particularly in LB Richmond. Usage numbers of 1000 plus per day were recorded summer and winter at the Meadway crossing into Crane Park with 500 to 700 recorded on the new riverside paths installed downstream near to Twickenham Station. This contrasts with the low levels of awareness reported in parts of the route in LB Hounslow upstream (as per 3 above).
7. A three day survey of the entire route in June 2025 provided a baseline condition assessment and levels of usage along the whole length. The intention is to repeat this every two years to track both the condition and usage.
8. Meetings and workshops with representatives from all five boroughs and Heathrow Airport Ltd, leading to the set up of a steering group, to discuss the potential of the route and the means of delivering improvements.
9. Investigation of the feasibility and first order costs of providing a new crossing of both the A30 – currently the largest severance to the route – and the Staines Road crossing (both in LB Hounslow).
10. Improvements to facilities planned and/or delivered at several nodal points along the route including – Roxbourne Park; Cranford Park; Minet Park; Avenue Park; Hounslow Heath; and Northcote Nature Reserve.

These works have helped to provide considerable improvements to parts of the route and raise awareness more generally. A total of 45 community meetings were attended in LB Hounslow promoting the route as part of the pilot project work.

The June 2025 survey (see 7 above) indicated that parts of the upper and the lower route were in good condition, and fairly to very well used, whereas much of the central part of the route remains in relatively poor condition, with few people using it.

2.2 Potential next steps

This list is for discussion and development with the project team leading the delivery of this objective. In no particular order:

1. Rebrand/rebadge the 'Crane Valley Trail' as the 'Crane Valley River Path' (based on feedback received through consultation)
2. Continue delivery of the pilot works across LB Hounslow and showcase these to other partners.

3. Use current funding to remove all unnecessary barriers to access and replace them with welcoming/accessible entrances for all.
4. Cost the delivery of improvements to the wider route and identify funding streams.
5. Continue with surveys of public usage and promote the use of surveys by other partners to provide comparable usage data across the route.
6. Investigate opportunities to link the route with other initiatives such as – circular walks; links to major population centres; London LOOP and Thames Trail; other river walks along the Colne and Brent to the west and east.
7. Develop maps and interactive approaches to promoting the route.
8. Investigate running events to promote the route. These may include further Park Run circuits, as well as 10km and half marathon runs, potentially building to a Crane Valley marathon along the route.
9. Support the development of nodal points along the route– including café facilities, information boards and toilets.
10. Develop an interpretive style for the route which promotes legibility for all users and install clear waymarking.
11. Install more benches and bins.
12. There were several recommendations as a result of the Take Me To The River Project - including the provision of disabled parking and the creation of volunteer path wardens.

These opportunities can be discussed and developed over the next year.

‘SLOW THE FLOW’

Lead Organisation: Metis Consultants Ltd



3.1 Information and progress review

This objective seeks to reduce the overall flood risk to the catchment by slowing the flow of water to the river and drainage systems, attenuating rainwater and urban run-off via wetlands and SuDS (sustainable drainage systems) and reconnecting the river with its floodplain. This is essentially creating a more water-retentive “spongy” system to hold and slowly release water, reducing local and downstream flood risks, with associated ecological and amenity benefits.

It is important to note that the main responsibility for flood risk has until recently sat largely with Lead Local Flood Authorities (LLFAs) and the Environment Agency. Historically (with the exception of LB Harrow where the links have been strong) there has been little connection between the LLFA role and the catchment partnership. We hope this will change in the future with a plan to allow other parties to develop flood management schemes, as well as proposals through the London Surface Water Strategy for a catchment based approach to flood management. The full implications of these changes are not yet known.

The catchment, in common with many urban areas with large amounts of hard standing, has significant flood risks from rapid surface water run-off responses to storm events. These can also cause sewer surcharges and overwhelm the storage at Mogden Sewage Treatment Works, resulting in sewage outflows into the tidal Thames downstream. River and groundwater flooding present further risks to properties in the catchment.

The flood risks have been collated by the Partnership and a mapping exercise completed to understand where new wetlands and Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) implementation could provide the most overall benefit.

The major wetland and flood storage scheme at Headstone Manor Park, completed in 2021, has been shown to be effective in reducing flood risk to the downstream urban centre of LB Harrow. A second scheme was completed on the other main tributary in Newton Park (also in Harrow) in the following year.

Several new wetland schemes are in various stages of development but no large new schemes have been delivered in the last few years. Eight new SuDS schemes were implemented in LB Hounslow during the last five years, creating around 2000* cubic metres of flood storage.

The Partnership has helped to deliver six major river restoration projects over the last two years, alongside three significant maintenance and enhancement projects, covering a total of around 2.5km of river corridor. In addition to their biodiversity and community benefits these schemes have created around 4000* cubic metres of additional flood storage within the flood plain.

Many river channels in the catchment are ‘over deep’ and disconnected from their floodplain as a result of past channel ‘maintenance’, river-bed incision by flashy urban runoff, and the widespread

presence of built up made ground along river margins. Innovative river restoration is seeking to resolve these issues by creating an enlarged river corridor to accommodate flood water, which contains a smaller, more natural, dynamic and physically complex river channel. Such designs are enhanced by working in sympathy with existing riparian vegetation and incorporating well-designed in-channel Natural Flood Management features.

*All figures subject to review

3.2 Potential next steps

This list is for discussion and development with the project team leading the delivery of this objective. In no particular order:

1. Engage with the LLFAs to explore how the new catchment based flood management team (as proposed by the London Surface Water Strategy) might integrate with the Catchment Partnership.
2. Review the quantification of flood benefits and cost benefit analysis from the schemes delivered to date – and follow up with consideration of the flood benefits of potential future schemes.
3. Quantify the potential of schemes delivered at a catchment level to manage flood risk.
4. Engage with the TW teams leading the Drainage and Wastewater Management plans (DWMP) to identify schemes that can meet TW drivers as well as one or more of the Partnerships' key Objectives.
5. Develop a community based approach to long term monitoring of the effectiveness of SuDS schemes linked to the Citizen Crane initiative.
6. Support community based engagement to deliver water butts and front garden management schemes to reduce peak flood flows – for example the work being promoted by the Heston Action Group and Thames 21
7. Deliver new SuDS and related schemes in partnership with the DWMP team.
8. Develop new opportunities for wetland schemes that will reduce flood risk as well as provide other benefits.
9. Continue to deliver innovative river restoration projects at scale with associated benefits for flood storage.

These opportunities can be discussed and developed over the next year.

A HOME FOR WATER VOLES

Lead Organisation: Zoological Society of London (ZSL)



4.1 Information and progress review

The Objective is to create and maintain high quality habitat that can support water voles and thereby also support many other species. One of the first tasks under the SWC programme was to investigate and map the priority species and habitats for the catchment. In addition to water voles the key species include kingfishers; 15 species of fish; eight species of raptor and seven species of bat. Key habitats include wet woodland; reed bed; neutral and acid grassland; and heathland.

The Crane Valley had been one of only a few rivers across Greater London with a population of water voles until several years of mink activity helped kill off the last of them around 2021. The SWC programme targeted the return of a thriving water vole population as one of its key Objectives.

The Partnership team is working closely with the Waterlife Recovery Trust, who have been rolling out a national programme of mink eradication, starting in East Anglia and working westwards. The team started putting out mink traps in the Crane catchment from around 2020, and at the same time worked to enhance the river and channel habitat in and around Crane Park Island, which had previously been a stronghold for water voles.

By 2024 the team were sufficiently confident to release 137 water voles into a 1000 metre section of the river in and around Crane Park Island in LB Richmond and LB Hounslow. A detailed monitoring programme has been developed with volunteers to record the presence of water voles. By early 2026 it appeared that they were becoming established within and upstream of their previous stronghold.

At the same time the team has been rolling out river and backwater improvements upstream and downstream of this core area as part of a plan for the water vole population to grow and expand over a much longer river corridor of five to ten kilometres.

The team has worked closely with LB Richmond to produce a habitat management plan for the Crane Valley through this borough. As well as river habitat improvements this has also encouraged the creation and maintenance of two kilometres of hedgerow; several hectares of neutral grassland meadow; and improved woodland management by the removal of invasive species and the planting of groves of native species as well as several small new community orchards. These sites are managed through a combination of contractor and volunteer based activities and are strongly supported by local communities. The team sees this as a valuable model for application to other parts of the catchment.

There are around a dozen grazing sites (for cattle, goats, horses and sheep) across the catchment. Partners have identified these and are working to link land managers together to better integrate, improve and extend grazing as an ecological land management tool.

Several fish and eel passes have been installed over the last few years – with the largest at Mereway Road Weir providing a link between the Tidal Thames and the main Crane Valley corridor for the first time in five hundred years. A feasibility study has also considered the opportunities to further enhance the links for fish and eels across the catchment. Various other species introductions and support activities are being explored and delivered such as:

- Harvest mice: initial introduction at Yeading Brook Meadows in 2024 and further sites being investigated in the lower and middle Crane Valley
- Kingfisher nesting banks: three installed in the lower Crane Valley in 2025
- Tower mustard: introductions proposed for Hounslow Heath and Home Park following the development of a nursery for seeds from Stain Hill Reservoir – one of the few sites for the plant in Greater London
- Black poplar: around a dozen standards planted in the LB Richmond and LB Hounslow parts of the valley over the last five years

The wider Partnership is also in discussions regarding opportunities for beaver introduction with partners across London.

4.2 Potential next steps

This list is for discussion and development with the project team leading the delivery of this objective. In no particular order:

1. Continue to restore natural river banks and protected riparian zones throughout the river corridor to develop and connect water vole habitat
2. Monitor the distribution of water voles with volunteers annually
3. Investigate the opportunities for satellite water vole release sites upstream and downstream of the main release area.
4. Identify further opportunities for habitat restoration and enhanced management – potentially using the LB Richmond plan as a template for other boroughs.
5. Work with local authorities to enhance the designation of various sites – with Local Nature Reserve and SSSI status under consideration for some key sites.
6. Improve linkages between grazing sites and develop the opportunities for active land management by grazing – including the use of animal collars for fence free grazing.
7. Explore the potential for a beaver release as a trial for land and water management.
8. Extend the number and coverage of kingfisher nesting banks – subject to an assessment of the river's carrying capacity
9. Provide fish passage throughout the Crane Valley.
10. Create low flow resilience – particularly in the lower Crane – by modifying low flow channel capacity

These opportunities can be discussed and developed over the next year.

‘A RIVER RUNS THROUGH US’

Lead Organisation: Let’s Go Outside and Learn CIC (LGOAL)



5.1 Information and progress review

This Objective is to increase public awareness and appreciation of the Crane Valley’s rivers and associated open spaces and encourage action to protect and enhance them. There are over 650,000 people living within the Crane Valley catchment and at the start of the Smarter Water Catchment programme the team carried out a public survey which indicated that a large percentage (around 90 per cent) were not aware of the river(s). Given that public engagement is critical to the success of the programme the team has increased its focus on how to inform the wider public of the value of their local green and blue spaces, encourage them to visit for recreation and then migrate them towards more active involvement through volunteering.

One of the challenges of catchment-based work is its complexity, with multiple partners and many different issues and challenges to address. The team engaged expertise in creative facilitation to help develop a “Story for the Crane Valley” which cuts through to the essence of this work and this resulted in “A River Runs Through Us” – a story of how community rooted partnership can transform the value of this matrix of blue and green spaces in an urban setting.

The approach is being developed through the lens of this story and the team is engaging with all partners to create interesting and engaging content from the many activities that are already taking place across the catchment.

The many communities of the Crane Valley are from varied cultural backgrounds and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) is a key part of the programme. The wider team has recently been awarded funding from the National Lottery to further develop this part of the programme.

The amount of volunteering in the Crane Valley has grown over the years as shown in tables 3 and 4 below:

Year	volunteer hours
2009	2300
2019	13000
2025	25000

Table 3: estimated volunteer hours per annum across the Crane Valley: FORCE data (2025)

Year	Number of volunteers
2022	940
2023	1100
2025	2000

Table 4: estimated number of volunteers in the Crane Valley: data from LGOAL/H&H report to the State of the Crane Environment (2025)

Whilst it is difficult to verify the numbers of volunteers participating across over 90 different community groups, both data sets indicate a strong positive direction of travel. This growth has enabled Partners to deliver far more projects and to help ensure the projects are sustainable and rooted in their communities. The Partnership has a target to further increase volunteer hours to 50,000 per annum by 2030.

Social media has an important role to play in engaging a wide local audience in the value and opportunities of the Crane Valley. Most of the local community groups and all partners (including theme leads and local authorities) have a social media presence and between them they are likely to engage at some level with a large percentage of the total catchment population. A typical social media story from a community group like FORCE may receive a few thousand “views” but some have 50,000 “views” or more.

Newsletters typically reach a few hundred people but can provide a more in depth story. The quarterly Crane Valley Partnership newsletter for example has a circulation of around 300 but offers much more information on the work of CVP and opportunities for engagement. Websites are landing places that hold large amounts of information and signposts for people to get involved.

Lets Go Out and Learn CIC (LGOAL) have led the development of active engagement with several different audiences with the aim of raising awareness and encouraging engagement in the initiative.

- A community event held at Spider Park in 2025 attracted well over 500 local people, many of whom were previously unaware of the SWC initiative. Some were not aware of the river
- A programme of 12 family learning activities based in 6 parks in LB Hillingdon and LB Hounslow with a total of 146 attendees
- A programme of engagement with young people. LGOAL partnered 4 local secondary schools with 4 community groups who work in the green spaces of the Crane Valley to improve the rivers and green spaces for people and wildlife. The young people took part in a practical session in a park with the community group and then a workshop to explore the role of blue and green space in climate resilience and adaption. Comments and feedback from both students and community members are included in a visual record of the joint activities. Schools and communities have been encouraged to continue to work together in green spaces and the activities will be repeated in 2026/7 with additional schools and community groups
- Promotion to health and wellbeing organisations and professionals about the opportunities and benefits of engaging with the initiative. LGOAL attended 5 events in 2025/6 and have promoted “12 things to do in the Crane Valley” to health professionals including GP link workers
- Regular attendance at community events across the catchment to promote the opportunities and benefits of engagement in the initiative in line with the Public Engagement Strategy
- Showcasing the ongoing work of community groups in the Crane Valley through case studies and blogs written by Habitats and Heritage. These highlight good practice and how the groups

are able to achieve more through funding from the Crane Community Fund. Over 50 local small grants (up to £3000) have been distributed through this process so far

It is through this blend of active engagement and wider communications that we are helping more people to become aware of the benefits of the Crane Valley and take a more active role in both using and enhancing them.

5.2 Potential next steps

This list is for discussion and development with the project team leading the delivery of this objective. In no particular order:

1. Engage with all community groups and partners to provide advice and training to enhance their social media, websites and newsletters – including how to share information and posts and grow followings.
2. Continue to promote volunteer based activities and develop their scope and value – including training and education opportunities – also leading to employment.
3. Further capacity building and developing social capital for community groups to ensure the long term sustainability of the initiative.
4. Reach out to different communities across the catchment to assess their interest (and concerns) in being more engaged with the opportunities along the Crane Valley – particularly in areas with no community stewardship at present.
5. Trial a wider communications programme to build community engagement and support.
6. Develop a community facing website that complements the existing Crane Valley Partnership site (which has a technical focus).

These opportunities can be discussed and developed over the next year.

NO ORPHAN STRETCHES

Lead Organisation: Let's Go Outside and Learn CIC (LGOAL)



6.2 Information and progress review

This Objective seeks to create and support community based organisations as custodians for each stretch of the river corridor, acting to protect and enhance the value of each river reach and open space in partnership with the relevant local authority and other interested parties so that there are no unadopted or 'orphan' stretches.

The Partnership recognises that community engagement is essential to maintaining and enhancing the value of the rivers and open spaces of the Crane Valley for several reasons:

- Most of these spaces are in the public domain and schemes need to be appreciated by the local community or they will inevitably degrade and lose value – despite all the best efforts of councils, regulators and other parties
- The public are out and about in these spaces every day and are the eyes and ears of the Partnership – reporting issues as well as encouraging others to visit the places they enjoy
- Volunteer activities are essential to maintaining and improving these spaces – not alone but in partnership with land owners, contractors and technical experts. The improvements of the last five to ten years could not have been achieved and maintained without active volunteer inputs
- The communities are a major beneficiary of high value public open spaces and derive social, health, education and financial benefits from them – it is therefore very much in the communities' interests to be actively engaged

At the start of the SWC programme in 2020 the Partnership team was aware of around 30 different community based groups with an interest in one or more parts of the Crane Valley - from the Friends of Headstone Manor at the river's source to the Tidal Crane Association at the base of the river where it meets the Thames.

In the first year of the SWC programme the lead partners engaged widely across all the communities of the Crane Valley and by the end of this year had identified around 60 community groups with an interest in one or more of the rivers and/or open spaces of the Crane Valley.

Over the last five years this engagement has grown through a blend of:

- Active engagement with the groups – including regular meetings and newsletters to share ideas and opportunities
- Completion of Baseline mapping of community stewardship to show where regular environmental stewardship is taking place and where the gaps in the community engagement are currently

- The Community Fund – running for four years and providing over 50 small grants to community groups for activities in line with our Objectives
- The Citizen Crane initiative – working with citizen science volunteers to monitor more parts of the work programme. This work started in 2014 with water quality and ecological monitoring of the river and now also includes geomorphological assessments; water vole monitoring; urban wetland evaluations; outfall pollution surveys and fixed point photography
- Engaging community groups in larger enhancement projects – with all major projects having both citizen science and practical volunteer inputs
- Delivering community engagement events and walks to bring new people in
- Supporting the creation of new groups and the growth of existing ones to take on more activities and help to manage orphan open spaces

As a result of these activities and actions the number of active groups across the catchment has grown to over 90.

At the same time LGOAL has led the development of active engagement with several different audiences with the aim of raising awareness and encouraging engagement:

- a strategy to engage local communities in orphan stretches by holding regular activities for the communities with the aim of raising awareness of the river corridor and links up and downstream. Work in orphan stretches (e.g. Stonefield Park) over the last 4 years has meant the corridor along the Yeading Brook East is now regularly used and the river and banks are clear of decades of accumulated rubbish. A programme of community walks to other sections of the catchment have raised awareness of links up and downstream
- A business engagement strategy to encourage engagement and stewardship of more local businesses as active partners. This work started in 2024 and has to date engaged over 25 businesses – ranging from local operations to large multi-nationals – with opportunities for their staff to undertake volunteering activities and provide financial support for activities in their neighbourhoods. This work directly links to the whole catchment including those where stewardship already exists, giving additional support to the work of community groups and raising awareness of the leisure, health and wellbeing benefits offered by the river corridors
- Running in parallel a campaign linked to the orphan stretches has been launched to encourage businesses to 'Adopt an Orphan Stretch'. The aim of this campaign is to secure a more regular and focused offering from business, especially where they are neighbouring the Crane corridor
- LGOAL has produced a map which plots the interests of all the community groups and helps identify the orphan areas. This has led to more focused activities on these stretches – including community engagement events and enhancement work in Spider Park (Hillingdon) and projects along the eastern branch of the Yeading Brook.

In addition there are many individuals and loose groupings of people who contribute massively to the overall value of the Crane Valley through activities such as litter picks, walking groups, creating artworks and sharing photographs of local open spaces. We also seek to reach out and support these activities through engagement and publicity for example

6.2 Potential next steps

This list is for discussion and development with the project team leading the delivery of this objective. In no particular order:

1. Continue to support and grow the capacity of existing groups and encourage new groups to engage with the blue and green spaces of the Crane Valley.
2. Continue to deliver the strategy to raise awareness and develop community stewardship in areas of the catchment where there is no, or limited, community engagement.
3. Promote the opportunities for engagement projects with communities in these areas with reference to the Community Fund.
4. Continue to deliver the EDI strategy to encourage engagement with communities who rarely engage with conservation volunteering or green space
5. Continue to engage with local businesses – and continue to link these with community groups for mutual benefit.
6. Promote the opportunities for leisure, health and wellbeing, and links up and downstream, and develop a sense of community involvement across the whole catchment including the areas not currently under any community stewardship.

These opportunities can be discussed and developed over the next year, including through the review and development of the Public Engagement Strategy.

SUMMARY

This report considers the progress over the year to the end of March 2026 across the six Strategic Objectives set out in the River Crane Catchment Plan – produced in 2025. As this is the first of these reports there is also some background on the status of each Objective.

The report also sets out the potential next steps against each Objective and these will be reviewed and developed with the lead organisations and various partners over the coming year. These are to be considered as a menu for consideration and development as opportunities come forwards. The intention is to produce an update report every year moving forwards.

The report present significant and encouraging progress against each Objective. This is in large part a result of major funding through the Smarter Water Catchment programme since 2020. This has enabled the development of a strong and distributed network of partners delivering against these and wider Objectives through collaborative working on more than 100 individual projects and has led to the investment of considerably more funds through partners and third parties.

This network of technical expertise, engaged landowners (local authorities) and over 90 local community groups has helped to create a momentum for positive change which is starting to be understood and appreciated by the wider public as well as decision makers at a regional and national level.

It is this momentum, and the associated hope and expectation for further improvements, that is the most important and positive outcome of the Crane Valley Partnership's work to date.

