

Saving Saffron Brook

A major project to protect and restore a major tributary of the River Soar in Leicester has been given more than £800,000 of the Government's Green Recovery Challenge Fund.

The "Saving the Saffron Brook River Restoration Scheme" hopes to improve the heavily-degraded river ecosystems along the whole course of the Saffron/Wash Brook which runs through the south of the city from neighbouring Oadby and Wigston. The money is planned to fund a programme of conservation, restoration and repair works along with community engagement designed to get local people involved.

The Saffron Brook and surrounding catchment area act as a key wildlife corridor in the region linking the centre of Leicester to rural Leicestershire and beyond.

Leicester City Council will work in partnership with Trent Rivers Trust through a programme of works to improve river banks, drainage and use natural flood management measures to encourage local wildlife by creating more green areas.

It will improve and restore around 2,300 metres of river habitat and over 500 metres of riverbank. Two hectares of woodland will be planted, to create 1.3 hectares of wetland and two hectares of species-rich grassland to boost local biodiversity.

The project will also create or improve up to 2,000 metres of footpaths to improve access along the river and bringing communities closer to nature.

Initially, it will focus on key areas around Knighton Park, Overdale School, the Washbrook Nature Area and Hughenden Drive. It will also be extended to connect to numerous existing Local Nature Reserves and Local Wildlife Sites to support vulnerable species of wildlife.

A programme of outdoor education sessions is planned. This will involve 10 schools and colleges located along the river. Weekly volunteering sessions are planned to get people involved in practical conservation tasks, access improvements and recording/monitoring wildlife.

Two new litter booms will be installed at pollution hotspots to keep the river clear of floating rubbish. There will be monthly outdoor skills training events for 16-24 year olds to be delivered by local special interest groups.

The £807,800 project builds on earlier work including the 2021 Leicester Biodiversity Action Plan and 2019 Leicester Riverside Environmental Strategy which supported the need for investing in work to restore the area.

"Saving the Saffron Brook River Restoration Scheme" is one of 90 nature-based projects across the UK to benefit from the second round of the Government's Green Recovery Challenge Fund designed to boost green jobs and nature recovery. It is being delivered by The National Lottery Heritage Fund in partnership with Natural England, the Environment Agency and Forestry Commission. The Fund is expected to support about 2,500 jobs in England.

Alongside Leicester City Council and the Trent Rivers Trust, partners in the project include Oadby and Wigston Borough Council, NatureSpot, Knighton Wild, Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust.

