

Funding strategy

Rediscovering the River Colne

September 2020



Presented by
The Colne Catchment Action Network





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Introduction

Fundamentally the work planned across the Rediscovering the River Colne project is environmental in nature including both physical improvements and also community engagement, stewardship, care and use all of which are essential to the success and sustainability of the project. However, the diverse range of activities planned provides scope much beyond purely environmental benefit and as a result the project has a wider range of potential funding sources than might traditionally have been available to a “purely environmental” project. This could include funds focussed on: education and training, working with marginalised or vulnerable groups, health and wellbeing etc.

Creativity will be key. Opportunities will often come up with short timescales for action and it is important that the funding plan is dynamic, agile and flexible to meet needs and opportunities as they arise. This is particularly the case with the current changes in the funding environment due to the pandemic. Many funders have changed the focus of their support to assisting with Covid recovery or closed them during this time and the situation changes daily as new opportunities arise. For example, DEFRA has announced a large-scale Green Recovery Challenge Fund that will be launched the week of 14 September 2020 with a very short application timeframe.

The project should benefit greatly from the range of partners involved who bring the skills, knowledge and resources to make the most of a wide range of opportunities as well as officer time to enable the plan to be nimble and creative. Already this has secured the offer of £100k of funding as well as one partner, Affinity Water, already undertaking identified habitat improvement works on a piece of their land adjacent to the river.

The plan

Typically, such a plan would identify fundraising targets for the first few years of a programme which in a project of this scale would be five years. These targets would be updated annually to reflect the work already completed and any changing priorities and focus amongst the partners and funders. It would also identify a split of funding sources and the estimated proportion coming from each potential source which would show, over time, a move from public sector to a greater proportion of charitable funding as the community engagement and ownership grows.

However, as referenced above, with the current Covid-19 pandemic the funding situation is constantly changing and so is difficult to predict and consequently a different approach is recommended identifying short term actions at this time. The longer-term plan however could be developed as originally intended once the situation becomes clearer at a later stage. The list of potential funders at Appendix 1 will support this at whatever point it is undertaken.

For the short-term, greater consideration must be given to aspects of the programme that will assist in recovery from the recession as we come out of the pandemic as well as the environmental elements. Myriad factors affect recovery from a recession and as things return to normal activities that champion and promote the outdoors will be highly sought after. The role of the outdoors in good mental health has long been known and following this period of reduced travel and isolation the facilities and activities offered through the project can have an important role. Such community engagement will ensure that the project capitalises on the environmental gains made by the physical elements of the project. From another angle the long-term unemployed will face new barriers to employment as more skilled people are made unemployed by the pandemic and the opportunity to provide experience and training through implementation of projects could provide an important local opportunity.

Overall, the varied elements of this project can be used to meet the varied, changing needs resulting from the epidemic. As such the Rediscovering the River Colne project can help develop and implement a green recovery strategy.

Short term activity is identified as the following.

- DEFRA/Environment Agency – the Green Recovery Challenge Fund is expected to be announced the week of 14 September 2020 with a very short application window and this project is likely to be a close fit to what is required – strong partnership, plans well developed etc. It will also be important to build on the existing links with EA to secure additional funding on top of the £50,000 agreed to date
- Water companies - as well as consideration of specific project bids for support, the companies should be approached at a senior level for wider support of the whole project for a number of years. Possibly via a presentation to be made by the Mayor alongside project partners we can demonstrate how the activity can help them meet their own business plan targets as well as be seen as a supporting corporate partner. Both water companies have already expressed their interest in the project with Affinity Water identifying £50,000 potential funding for 2021-22 financial year
- Watford Borough Council (WBC)
 - internal bids for support are planned for September 2020 and this support will be needed to release the support of other partners such as the Environment Agency and the water companies.
 - A review of any unspent/unallocated S106/CIL funds should take place and approaches made to Hertfordshire County Council and potentially adjoining local authorities to identify any opportunities.
 - Key for the success of the project is the need for the project to be high in the awareness of all departments of the Council but particularly the planning department at WBC to identify opportunities for S106/CIL and also biodiversity net gain within new developments. A presentation by the partners could be held to support this if required.
- Lottery – a meeting with Lottery is proposed to discuss how they feel the project best fits their new funding opportunities which have been amended again over recent months to support organisations through the pandemic. They will be administering the Green Recovery Fund.

Funders more generally

Appendix 1 provides detail of the wide range of current national and local funders identified who could be targeted to help fund elements of the project. As stated earlier these will change in the short term but overall there are many potential sources of financial support to help in the delivery of the project.

WBC has been, and will remain, the lead for the project and an informed and knowledgeable funder over the lifetime of the *Rediscovering the River Colne* project. The basis of the local authority funding will also allow other funds to be attracted to the work and the project is likely to remain reliant on an element of local authority managed funding throughout, such as: parks, Section 106/Community Infrastructure Levy, Mayor's small grants, locality budgets etc. However, it is understood that local authority funding will not be available until 2021-22.

An initial phase of ambitious, large scale applications such as those to the water companies, Environment Agency, charitable trusts, foundations and the Lottery is anticipated and will continue to be important sources of income over the lifetime of the project. ColneCAN members already have strong relationships and knowledge of a number of these sources and

processes and are well placed to front or support a number of these. The water companies both have funds that can be bid to, with larger sums available from Thames Water, but individual approaches about the wider project as a whole, potentially over a period of time, should also be considered. Both Thames Water and Affinity Water have been approached about the project and are excited to be involved. Bids to the Lottery can be reviewed and prioritised once the focus of delivery has been decided but as the processes are long these should only be considered on a large scale.

Community involvement in many of these applications will be vital to their success and in future the community having a degree of fundraising responsibility is anticipated which could be delivered through a number of mechanisms such as a 'Friends of the River Colne' membership scheme or a local community-led sub-group of the Colne CAN. Members of such a group are likely to require training to ensure that they have the skills to undertake this activity but WBC and Colne CAN members are well placed to provide this. Such a role supports the proposal for a river officer to lead the project as referenced in the monitoring and engagement reports, potentially for at least the first three years. Funds for such a role could be part of this funding strategy.

As the project continues a shift from the larger application-based funding sources, including WBC, to more locally-based fundraising that engages with and is led by the community is anticipated. In part this is because the larger scale environmental and access improvement works are due to happen in the earlier stages of the project where in later years activities are increasingly focussed on monitoring, community engagement and maintenance.

Local income streams however will only be successful if the project gains recognition and awareness and engages local people willing to be involved in the longer-term as volunteers and/or donors. It is therefore vitally important that the project is well promoted via social media and more traditional mediums, that we use consistent branding and messaging (as has already started on the project website) and that we have a process in place, across all partners, on how those people interested can be appropriately engaged and supported. The development of a marketing plan and a volunteering procedure is strongly recommended to ensure a quality experience for all those engaging with the project. As referenced elsewhere in the report this local engagement is much more likely to be successful if a designated officer is in post to lead this work. The funding for such a role could be part of funding bids to a number of sources identified if required.

Generating interest from corporate supporters can be undertaken in a number of different ways and it is likely that a blend of these approaches will be used to establish initial engagement and this is referenced in the engagement project action plan. These include:

- Team-building / volunteering opportunities
- Community conscience / environmental responsibility (CSR approach)
- Helping address a business challenge or issue (eg pollution)
- Through the planning process – there now exists a requirement for biodiversity net gain within developments and if it is not possible for improvement to be provided within the development then the developer can fund the improvements to be made elsewhere. A non-technical summary of this project can provide the authority with a saleable 'product' to offer to developers when required.
- Again CIL/Section 106 opportunities apply to corporate links
- WBC already has strong links with a number of local corporates including Veolia who run contracts for the authority and are keen to support wider environmental initiatives

Initially business engagement will target those locally based organisations in the Watford Business Improvement District (BID) and those with premises adjacent to the river. A list of these companies is shown within the community engagement plan report.

Other opportunities

As well as direct financial support to assist in delivery of the project as identified above a number of other avenues are available including volunteering – local and corporate, planning gain via local developments and working with partners who are already delivering or planning work or activity in the area. For example Affinity Water, Thames Water and Veolia are all active locally with communications to residents and corporates which the project can ‘piggy-back’ on where appropriate. The strength of the partnership delivery will again allow the opportunities to be maximised.