

Soar Catchment Partnership Workshop

2nd – 3rd July 2015 - The Dock, Leicester

Background

The WaterLIFE project, EC LIFE+ funded, is working towards healthy rivers for people and nature by bringing together communities, business and government. The project focuses on accelerating delivery of the Water Framework Directive in five catchments across England and Wales initially.

The Soar Catchment Partnership workshop brought together representatives from civil society and statutory bodies to discuss some of the work currently happening on the Soar catchment as well as what the focus should be over the next year. It is one of a series of WaterLIFE catchment partnership workshops.

The workshop

The workshop was held over two days in and around Leicester City. Its objectives:

- To provide an opportunity to bring the Soar Catchment Partnership together
- To highlight and raise awareness about some of the issues facing the catchment
- To demonstrate and discuss opportunities and ways to improve the catchment
- To identify ways of working together to improve the catchment

Day one's focus was 'community involvement, data gathering and site visits'. Its primary purpose was to show some of the work happening on the ground and the effect on the catchment. Participants spent the majority of the day out in the field visiting: River Soar in central Leicester, SuDs scheme at new supermarket development, Urban Willow Brook, Rural Willow Brook (Stoughton Estate).

Day two's focus was 'how integrated water management can benefit communities; a partnership approach'. Its purpose was to explore the value different organisations can offer to catchment management.

There was a range of speakers and presentations, including: WaterLIFE project (Rob Collins, Rivers Trust); Using Evidence and data to inform decision-making (Michelle

Walker, Rivers Trust); Reducing flooding risk (Jon Vann, EA); How recreation can engage communities (Chris Page, British Canoeing); Working with communities groups (Peter Flavell, Leicester City Council).

Participants

Members of the Soar Catchment Partnership were invited by Trent Rivers Trust, catchment host. The partnership includes Leicester City Council, Wildlife Trusts and Loughborough University amongst others. 41 people attended from 20 separate organisations. This diversity of attendance was certainly reflected in the level and quality of discussion and engagement.

“It was good to see a variety of measures used to improve the watercourses, and very useful to talk to others doing similar things. I found the use of mobile phones to collect data very interesting and will explore this further.”

Outcomes

The day was designed to raise awareness of the issue facing the Soar and some of the opportunities to challenge them. Over the course of the two days participants had lots of opportunity to ask questions about some of the work happening, the point of the partnership, opportunities for the future and what they should focus on over the next year.

There was high engagement among participants. The site visits prompted wide discussion about how projects had been started, the positive effects, any challenges that had been overcome. Similarly, the high quality speakers on the second day led to an equally engaged discussion, which continued well into lunch. There was a tangible buzz around the room.

“It has given me a greater knowledge of the issues within this area and enabled me to meet more of our partners”

Evaluation

Participants were asked to complete a short 5 question electronic form shortly after attended the workshop. The aim of this was to evaluate whether the workshop’s objectives had been met and determine next steps.

To provide an opportunity to bring the Soar Catchment Partnership together

Objective met. The workshop as fully booked, with representatives from a wide range of organisations.

To highlight and raise awareness about some of the issues facing the catchment

Objective met. **55%** of respondents found the session very useful, and **77%** left with a greater understanding of the issues as a result.

To demonstrate and discuss opportunities and ways to improve the catchment

Objective met. **91%** finished the workshop with more knowledge to support the delivery of the Soar's catchment objectives.

To identify appropriate ways of collaborating to improve the catchment

Objective met. The range of talks and site visits provided an overview of skills within the partnership and the potential value of certain activities – for example, engaging with recreational groups and volunteer groups to help improve the river, building capacity in citizen science techniques, engaging with local authority planning processes.

“Site visits to the rural parts of the catchment really highlighted the different issues within a relatively small geographical space. The use of citizen science in supporting the monitoring elements of Soar Catchment Partnerships is an exciting development.”

Next steps

Over the next few months, the catchment partnership will:

- Follow up with the individuals (**80%** of relevant participants) who expressed an interest in getting involved with a community group to monitor water quality within the Soar catchment.
- Take forward one of the opportunities/activities discussed in the workshop for the catchment partnership to focus on in the coming months.

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Gallery



River Soar in central Leicester



A new sustainable urban drainage scheme at a supermarket development



Urban Willow Brook



Potential SuDs site at Stoughton Estate