



The Duke's River:

Revitalising the link
between the River Crane
and the River Thames

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The project

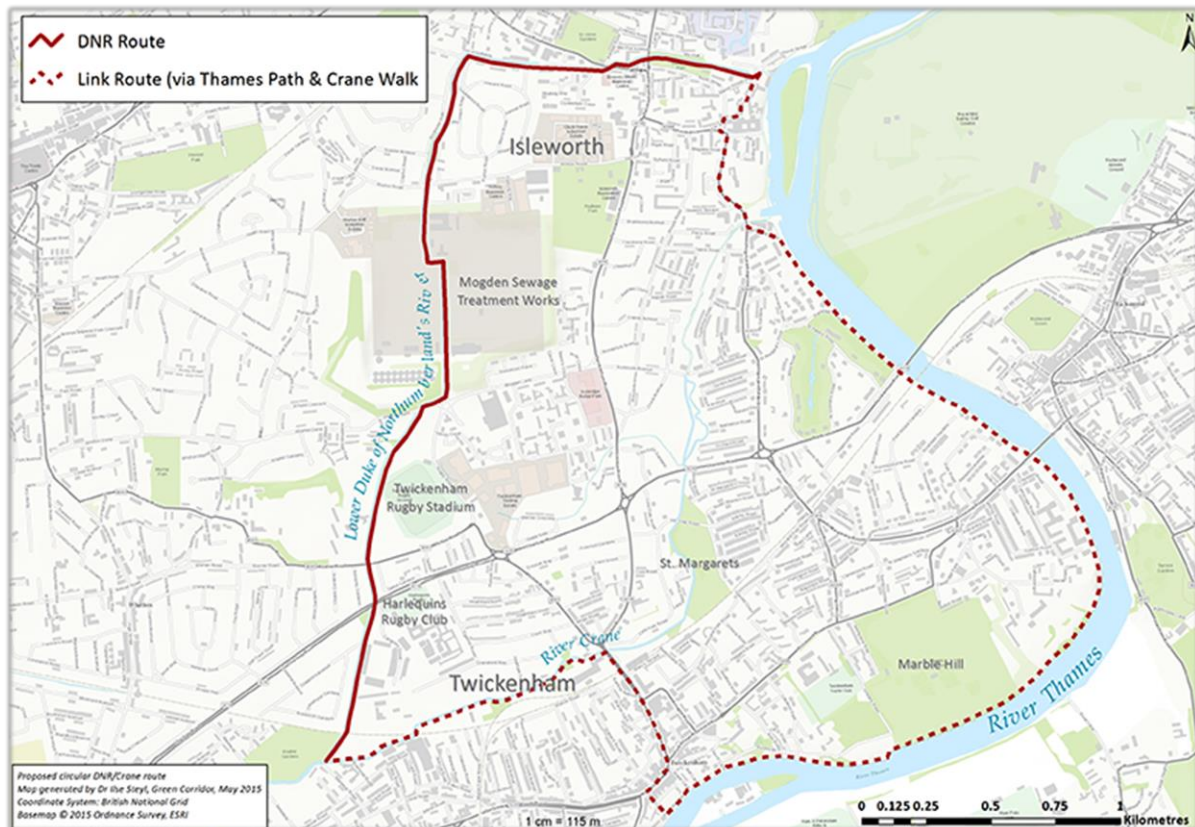
The eastern section of the Duke of Northumberland's River runs for approximately four kilometres, from where it leaves the River Crane in Kneller Gardens, Twickenham, to its confluence with the River Thames in Old Isleworth. The river channel was constructed as a mill stream and water supply in the 1500s and remains an important – if somewhat neglected – feature of the Crane catchment.

This project proposes to re-invigorate the access and environmental value of this part of the Duke of Northumberland's River (DNR) as a key link for wildlife and people between the River Crane and the River Thames, two of the most important green corridors in West London. This will be achieved through a series of co-ordinated projects, designed to create a newly coherent access and wildlife corridor for west London, promote its use and provide opportunities for training, education and voluntary work.



The DNR near Twickenham Stadium – a beautiful but little visited stretch of river

The link will also create a new 10km circular walk through Twickenham, Whitton, Isleworth, Brentford and St Margarets, and link together the Crane, DNR and Thames Pathways. This circular walkway already exists in principle – but in practice it is not used due to the poor condition of the DNR pathway and the lack of awareness as to its existence.



Map showing the DNR (solid red) and the linkages to the Thames path and Crane Walk (dashed red)

Approximately one third of the river is in LB Richmond and the remainder in LB Hounslow. The river bed is owned by the Environment Agency. Richmond Council owns the eastern bank through the borough and Hounslow Council owns various stretches of bankside and surrounding land. Thames Water owns the banks through Mogden Sewage Treatment Works, for which the river serves as a water supply.

This project will work on the land in public ownership and build upon the successful partnership between the planning and open space departments of the two boroughs alongside local charity and community groups such as Green Corridor, The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) and Friends of the River Crane Environment (FORCE); this was initiated through the Mayor of London's Priority Parks project in Crane Park in 2009 and continued through the first Big Green Fund project in 2012. The Isleworth Society, Environment Agency and Thames Water are also important partners in this new project.

The funds for the project are already in place. Following the public vote in March 2015, the Crane Valley Partnership's project proposal (submitted through Green Corridor) has received £157,500 from the Mayor of London's Big Green Fund, which is helping to deliver the All London Green Grid, the green infrastructure network for London. Section 106 funds from local developments in Richmond and Hounslow and monies from the Big Lottery Fund and SITA Trust for individual projects add up to a budget of over £400,000.

Access improvements

Built in the 1500s to provide water to mills in Isleworth, the DNR has operated ever since as a water supply and associated walking route, running four kilometres between Twickenham and Isleworth. It has the potential to link these areas and provide them with a valuable new asset and green route.

The project will help to link the areas of Twickenham, Whitton, Feltham , Hounslow and the wider Crane Valley at the south western end of the DNR with Isleworth and Brentford at the north eastern end along a green corridor of historical and environmental importance. This will improve links between communities that currently have limited connections, in part as they stretch across the borough boundary. The route has the potential to be used more for leisure, green commuting and school access but this potential is curtailed at present along parts of its length due to its condition.



The narrow unsurfaced path along the DNR near Kneller Gardens, Twickenham

We will enhance the value of the DNR as a walking route. In Richmond, the aim is to create a natural gravel footpath along the river to improve the physical state of the footpath. We will seek to make the path wider and safer where possible: for example, Richmond Council will be moving the boundary of its Central Depot in order to add a two metre strip of land to the DNR corridor, enabling the new path to be wider and slightly set back on this stretch. Minor tree works will be undertaken to increase head height and visibility.

In Hounslow there is already a surfaced route but the river and path are separate entities at certain points so the focus will be on improving the links between the two, opening up views, moving the path to follow the river's course more closely if possible, and improving the surroundings through Silverhall Park.

The project will also improve the signage along the river link and produce site mapping and leaflets to promote the route.

Environmental improvements

The DNR is also an environmental feature of considerable importance and potential, formally recognised as a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation at a borough level in both Hounslow and Richmond. The DNR supports fragile populations of water voles and kingfishers. This project can help to support and enhance these populations, a source of great pleasure for local visitors.

It will be essential that the environmental value is protected and enhanced even as the route becomes better used as a green thoroughfare. This has been a central requirement of all the projects delivered by the partnership over the last five years. Specific projects have been identified to improve the habitat for water voles and the opportunity will be taken to create new nesting habitat for kingfishers.



Kidd's Mill weirs in Isleworth – a fascinating historical legacy for the area and a major challenge for fish and eel passage into the DNR and Crane

The project will provide key environmental improvements along the length of the river corridor including: selective toe board removal or in-stream works to enhance marginal vegetation and habitat; bat bricks under bridges and other structures for winter and summer roosting by bats; tree works to allow more sunlight into the river bed; and removal of invasive species such as Japanese knotweed and floating pennywort – the latter causing particular concern in this part of the river, not least because it is not present elsewhere in the catchment.

Furthermore the DNR has the potential to provide an important fisheries link between the River Crane and the River Thames – a link that may never have operated in the past due to the active presence of mills from the day the DNR was built and major weir structures that still act as barriers to fish movement even now the mills are long gone. Two new eel passes have already been constructed by the Zoological Society of London as the first part of this project and already eels are being found at monitoring points on the DNR.

Training, education and voluntary work

The different elements of the project and the site's heritage and wildlife will provide a valuable opportunity for learning of many different types.

The project will be linked into ongoing education projects, working with local schools to promote outdoor learning and to engage children and adults with their local environment, history and natural resources.

Green Corridor, supported by the Big Lottery Fund, will be training twenty hard to reach young people in practical countryside skills, seeing them gain qualifications and be employment ready.

We also expect to deliver around 500 days of volunteer and trainee time on the project to achieve all the planting and associated environmental works, and support contractors on the major construction work. This continues a successful delivery model developed first in the Priority Parks project – and which has seen the capacity of the local volunteer sector grow significantly as a result. TCV are already undertaking one or more volunteer days each week in the Crane valley in support of the Big Green Fund and other project works, and are currently surveying the DNR and clearing the river of unwanted rubbish.

Local people & groups

We will be keeping in touch with the communities and resident groups along the DNR throughout the project. From the successful public vote we know that many people are supportive of the project but it is important that we keep everyone advised of the details. We will maintain links with interested groups, use letterdrops to advise neighbours of particular works and keep updates and current contact details posted on the following websites:

www.cranevalley.org.uk/projects/lower-dnr-improvements.html

www.richmond.gov.uk/parks_and_open_spaces (go to the Latest information page)

There are several Friends and community groups already active along the DNR, including FORCE, Friends of Kneller Gardens, Friends of Silverhall Park and the Isleworth Society. TCV and London Wildlife Trust (LWT) are very active locally and support many of the existing volunteer activities. Green Corridor is closely linked with these groups through the Crane Valley Partnership. Green Corridor's native species nursery will provide locally sourced plants, trained staff and enthusiastic trainees to the project.

Efforts are already being made, working with the two boroughs and local councillors, to develop more local friends groups along the DNR and this project will support this process.

Timetable

The overall timetable is still taking shape but the main delivery of access improvements will take place in stages through to March 2016. Environmental works will start in the coming winter and continue throughout 2016.

Maintenance

The project works will be incorporated into the open space maintenance programmes for the two boroughs as the key landowners to ensure that the improvements are sustained.