

Habitats & Heritage (H&H)

Evaluation of Crane Valley Community Fund

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With thanks to Groundwork, CVP partners and community groups who provided helpful insights into the Community Fund.

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1. Summary

This report is an overview of the Crane Valley Grant Programme Community fund 2022 – 2024. Data for this evaluation have been drawn from:

- Groundwork's information about grants made and reporting
- H&H's records of liaison with groups and partner organisations
- Nine case studies of projects completed or in progress, presented in the Appendix below

Themes from the data and key learning points include:

The Community Fund enables small community groups to enhance and extend their work, harnessing the commitment of communities to (or to develop the themes of the Crane Smarter Water Catchment) improving the environment.

The application process for the Community Fund is found to be generally simple and accessible. Any early difficulties in the operation of the fund have been effectively and positively addressed.

Capacity-building and communication between groups have been important in focussing projects on the Smarter Water Catchment themes.

The Community Fund can be a starting point for groups previously without funding and it can be a gateway to other funding within or outside the Crane Valley Programme. Signposting to alternative funding is also important.

There is continuing need to build the capacity of groups in relatively under-served areas of the catchment and neglected stretches of the watercourses.

2. Groups funded and grants made

A full list of groups funded with amounts and summary of activities is at the Appendix below.

34 grants to 30 different organisations

19 grants were made in year 1 and 15 in Year 2

The 34 grants

Richmond: 8

Hounslow : 15

Ealing: 2

Hillingdon: 2

Harrow: 3

Cross-borough: 4

Total disbursed in grants: £62,270

Minimum grant made: £1,053

Maximum grant made: £2,000

Total match funding: £3,460

The benefits of the 34 projects can be categorised under themes and some projects cover more than one theme:

- Promote public awareness, access, and participation: 18 projects
- improve water quality: 4 projects (including one water-saving project)
- enhance flood resilience: 1 project
- enhance biodiversity – wildlife and their habitats: 13 projects
- improve geomorphology – the river form: 1 project

3. Development of organisations and projects.

H&H has been engaged with community projects at all stages of Community Fund awards, from promotion of the scheme to delivery of funded projects and development of organisations' capacity for larger initiatives. The capacity-building and evaluation work are described under headings as below.

3.1. Engaging community groups

Contact with groups has been through newsletters and emails (seven in the year), social media and quarterly online community meetings. A database of groups is maintained and frequently updated to reflect changes in contact names and community groups newly coming to notice. There are currently 72 groups on the database (some are sub-groups of larger organisations), the number having grown from 63 at the start of 2023-24. Let's Go Outside and Learn (LGOAL) has contacted groups to update the database of groups providing stewardship in the catchment.

The aims of the quarterly online meetings are to share the vision for the Crane Valley amongst groups that may be focussed on a limited area or a particular site. They are an opportunity for groups to share information about their activities and to learn about others. Theme leaders have presented at the groups: Sustrans, Cartographer and ZSL (presentation forthcoming in February.) There was also a presentation from New Citizenship Project, helping to engage community groups in the project. CVP partners and representatives are invited and there is a useful dialogue between the small groups and the wider strategy of the partnership. Twenty groups have been represented at the meetings. A record of meetings and action points are shared with the full list of 72 community groups. Some issues arising are, for example:

- Access to funding, including the Community Fund
- Identifying and promoting best practice in nature conservation, improving access and amenity, user surveys and other activity.
- Access to skills and training, e.g. in geomorphology (Morph training), water quality and species monitoring.
- Awareness of other projects and how a small group can relate to a wider strategy.

- Areas of need and relative neglect and the scope for extending work to encompass longer stretches of the Crane or other rivers, e.g. the L B Ealing site north of Yeading Brook Meadows and the culverted stretch of the Crane north of Yeading Walk.

H&H supports groups in promoting their own activities through social media and by including notices in group mailings and newsletters.

3.2. Review of draft applications and project development

Groups have contacted H&H to discuss potential applications to the Community Fund, asking about eligibility, items that can be funded, timing and other questions. The queries have been shared and discussed with Groundwork where appropriate. As groups develop capacity they may progress from a Community Fund application to preparing for a larger project, possibly funded through the Project Fund. An example is Hatton Fields, which ran community and volunteer engagement events and progressed to a project including a biodiversity survey. H&H has been in contact throughout this development and helped with making links to skilled specialists and other organisations such as ZSL.

3.3. Community Fund Application process.

H&H has promoted the Community Fund through the quarterly online Community Meetings and email newsletters; also through a wider H&H newsletter to Friends groups in Richmond and Hounslow.

Groups occasionally have had problems with access to the Crane Valley Grants website and have contacted H&H for support or advice. All queries have been simple and either easily resolved or quickly forwarded and resolved by Groundwork. Groundwork helpfully highlighted the grant condition about number of applications per group by re-stating this on the first page.

In the early months of 2023-24 there was a delay in funded groups receiving the awarded funding which was a problem for projects dependent upon early delivery. H&H was able to offer a solution of bridge-funding for particular cases, which helped to allay concerns, but in the end this was not necessary. Groundwork responded very positively to these concerns.

In collating case studies for the evaluation of the Community Fund some groups noted that it could be helpful to have more opportunity to report on progress in a 'free text' format as well as to specific less open questions, as this may reduce the need for subsequent queries from Groundwork. Groups appreciated the opportunity to provide detailed narrative about their projects through the case studies and some said this would be a helpful aspect of routine monitoring of the fund and their work.

H&H and LGOAL have served on the assessment panel for the Community Fund and handled queries in liaison with community groups and advised on delivery.

3.4. Banking arrangements

Some community groups do not yet have their own bank accounts. H&H offers a facility without charge to the group of holding funds on their behalf. We make payments against invoices relevant to the Community Fund projects and to the charitable objectives of H&H and provide updates on account movements. Groups included the Tidal Crane, Friends of Hampton Heath, Hatton Fields and Hatherop Park and Oak Avenue.

3.5. Visit to projects and support to projects on site

Visits have been important for the profile of the work of community groups as well as offering an opportunity to share information between groups and generate ideas for solving problems and investigating further work that may be funded through the Crane Valley Grant Programme.

H&H worked with the Friends of Yeading Walk to organise a site visit, inviting groups along the length of the Crane Valley. Seventeen people attended representing six different community groups as well as the CVP. The main aim of the visit was to raise awareness between groups of different stretches of the valley and River Crane, given that many groups work on particular sites. H&H has also been represented at site visits and events for Sunshine of Hounslow, Friends of Yeading Brook, Friends of Kneller Gardens, Friends of Hatton Fields and Harrow Nature Conservation Forum.

H&H helped to organise and run bat walks at Hatton Fields and Headstone Manor.

We worked with ZSL, Friends of Hanworth Park and Richmond Biodiversity Partnership on data collection for bats with Anabat detectors at Hanworth Park. LGOAL has worked with Creative Spaces and with Gurseva on tree-planting.

3.6. Project delivery and funding leverage

H&H has collected case studies (below) and has received feedback from projects about delivery.

Feedback has been generally positive. Occasional barriers worth noting are:

The rapid price-inflation experienced in 2023-24 affected plants and trees particularly and one project, Gurseva (case study below) obtained top-up funding to complete the project.

One project, Friends of Kneller Gardens, faced difficulty obtaining permission to install the funded defibrillator and this project has been delayed. The learning from this is that the tight timescale of the project requirements doesn't always work.

Further work is needed to give an over-all picture of delivery through Groundwork's process to confirm delivery across all grants due to be completed by now.

Six organisations reported match funding to a total of £3,460. This funding was in form of specific grants and staff time already funded. Groups have reported the Community Fund as a gateway to other funding sources: one successful grant raises confidence of other funders.

We worked with Groundwork and CVP to make it clear that only one application per group per year is accepted for the Community Fund. For some groups the project fund was more suitable and we have encouraged them to apply for this after their application has failed. There will be continuing need to provide groups with information about other funding opportunities to ensure that they do not become reliant on the fund.

3.7. Case studies

H&H has contacted funded groups to ask about delivery of Community Fund projects and their experience of the Fund. Groups respond enthusiastically and we obtained detailed case studies from FORCE, Friends of Heathfield Recreation Grounds and Environs, Gurseva, Sunshine of Hounslow, Friends of Hatton Fields, Crane Park Island Volunteers (London Wildlife Trust) and Whitton Community Association. Themes of the reports are summarised in H&H's Evaluation Report for the Community Fund. A very encouraging point is that the Community Fund can be a gateway to other funding sources: one funded project encourages other funders.

4. Appendix: Crane Valley Grants Community Fund. Summary of grants made

Organisation	Project Title	Borough	Year	Short description of activity or items	Themes	Grant
C-Change West London	Crane Valley Community Consultation Event	Hounslow	1	Community consultation: Cranford and Hayes	Access and participation	£ 2,000.00
Cranford Action Group	Cleaning and greening the River Crane environment Cranford	Hounslow	1	PPE and consultation to engage volunteers in maintaining planters and litter picking	Access and participation	£ 1,500.00
Creative Spaces London	Community Consultation Event	Hounslow	1	Women;s safety awareness	Access and participation	£ 1,430.00
Direction and Development 4 Youth (DADY)	Community Cohesion	Ealing	1	Engage young people through football training	Access and participation	£ 2,000.00
Friends of Hanworth Park House	Community engagement related to biodiversity studies on Hanworth Park and the Longford river	Hounslow	1	Community engagement to extend biodiversity monitoring	Access and participation	£ 1,999.18
Friends of Hatton Fields	Connecting the Community	Hounslow	1	Community engagement and volunteering sessions	Biodiversity	£ 2,000.00
Friends of Heathfield Recreation Ground and Environs	Battery powered mower which is able to mow large areas, and water carryiers on wheels	Richmond	1	Lawn mower	Biodiversity	£ 1,114.95
Friends of Kneller Gardens	Defribillator for Kneller Gardens	Richmond	1	Install defibrillator	Access and participation	£ 1,971.99
Friends of the River Crane Environment (FORCE)	FORCE carved benches	Richmond	1	Install carved benches	Access and participation	£ 2,000.00
Friends of Yeading Walk	Replacement trees and Riverbank renewal	Harrow	1	Tree planting	Biodiversity	£ 2,000.00
Gurseva	Greener spaces for Cleaner Air	Hounslow	1	Planting trees	Biodiversity	£ 1,850.00
Hampton Heath Friends	Reptile/Amphibian Habitat Enhancements, (ponds project) Hampton Heath	Richmond	1	Digger hire as part of site management plan improving habitat	Biodiversity	£ 1,941.50
Hounslow Heath green gym conservation volunteers	scything and raking for meadow conservation. litter picking, liabilty insurance, premium for two years from may 2023 from may 23.	Hounslow	1	PPE and tools	Access and participation	£ 1,384.00
London Wildlife Trust	Tools for Crane Park Island volunteers	Richmond	1	Waders, strimmer and other tools	Water quality, biodiversity	£ 1,425.00
Sunshine of Hounslow	Crane Valley cleaner and greaner	Hounslow	1	PPE and litter picking equipment	Access and participation	£ 2,000.00
Support for New Life	viva project	Ealing	1	Wellbeing activities for elders and vulnerable people	Access and participation	£ 2,000.00
Tidal Crane Association	Removal of fallen tree branch over River Crane by Talbot Road bridge	Richmond	1	Remove fallen tree	Biodiversity, water quality	£ 1,053.60

Organisation	Project Title	Borough	Year	Short description of activity or items	Themes	Grant
Whitton Community Association	Creating a Community Garden	Hounslow	1	Community garden restoration	Biodiversity	£ 1,856.80
Yeading Meadows 6	Hollows Backwater Creation	Hillingdon	1	Feasibility of backwater creation	Geomorphology, flood resilience	£ 2,000.00
Bedfont Lakes Conservation Volunteers	Meadow Scything and restoration	Hounslow	2	Volunteer nature conservation	Biodiversity	£ 1,925.38
Butts Farm Working Together Group	Repairs and improvements	Hounslow	2	Repair oven and furniture in community space	Access and participation	£ 2,000.00
Carib and Co Brunch Community Interest Company	Carib and Co Crane Valley Walk & Brunch Event	Cross-borough	2	Walks and access for Black and Minority Ethnic people with disabilities	Access and participation	£ 2,000.00
Faith Associates CIC	Water usage and preservation by Crane Valley Mosques	Cross-borough	2	Saving water in Mosque religious practice	Water saving	£ 2,000.00
Friends of Hanworth Park House	Community engagement on Hanworth Park relating to the Longford river and the park: Hanworth Park Biodiversity Project	Hounslow	2	Biodiversity monitoring workshops	Biodiversity	£ 2,000.00
Friends of Roxbourne Park	Insulate our sea container tool store - to prevent tools rusting.	Harrow	2	Insulate equipment container	Access and participation	£ 2,000.00
Gurseva	Greener spaces for Cleaner Air	Hounslow	2	Planting trees	Biodiversity	£ 1,530.00
Harrow Heritage Trust	Community Based Meadow Management	Harrow	2	Meadow cut with volunteers	Biodiversity	£ 1,832.36
Hope Through Music	Environmental Ambassadors Youth Panel	Cross-borough	2	Training Young People to promote sustainable environment	Access and participation	£ 2,000.00
Hounslow Heath Conservation Volunteers	Meadow Scything and restoration	Hounslow	2	Meadow scything	Biodiversity	£ 1,712.55
London Wildlife Trust	Repairing main hard path and steps on Crane Park Island Nature Reserve	Richmond	2	Upgrade path and steps	Access and participation	£ 1,832.00
Pevensey Road Green Gym Rangers	Orchard Maintenance and Apple Harvesting	Richmond	2	PPE, apple press, litter pickers and other equipment	Biodiversity	£ 1,961.13
Sion to Care	Access Nature	Cross-borough	2	Visits and access for people with disabilities	Access and participation	£ 1,970.00
Sunshine of Hounslow	Sunshine of Hounslow Community Garden	Hounslow	2	Tools and equipment for volunteers	Access and participation	£ 2,000.00
Woodlarks & Waders	Replacement tools for waterway and surrounding area maintenance	Hillingdon	2	Waders and equipment	Water quality, access and participation	£ 1,980.00

5. Appendix: Case studies

The case studies below have been written by the groups themselves and edited by Habitats & Heritage; or written by Habitats & Heritage from notes taken in meetings

5.1. Friends of the River Crane Environment (FORCE)

FORCE carved benches project funded by the Crane Valley Community Fund The Crane Valley Community funding that was awarded to FORCE in January 2023 was used to design, create and install two new carved benches in Crane Park, bringing the total number of carved benches to twenty.

A water vole bench was installed at the Hounslow entrance to Crane Park on Hanworth Road, opposite the Pevensey and Little Park entrances. This motif was chosen to highlight the riverside habitat improvement works that have been taking place in Little Park over the past few winters to create suitable water vole habitat ahead of a re-stocking programme planned for later this year. A second, shire horses, carved bench was installed at the Mill Road entrance to Crane Park, at the end of the meadow under the fruit trees facing Mill Road allotments. This motif was chosen as shire horses have been used to cut Crane Park meadows, including the meadow at Mill Road, twice a year, in April and October, for the past six years. Shire horses can access some of the hard-to-reach places and avoids the use of heavy machinery helping plants and wildlife to flourish. It is quite something to see this centuries-old rural tradition in Crane Park.

The two new carved benches were installed a year ago, at the end of January 2023. To celebrate 20 years of the founding of FORCE, three 'carved bench' walks were carried out in April of last year, to explain the background to the motifs on the benches. All of the carved benches are well-used and loved and the water vole and shire horses benches are great additions!



Friends of the River Crane Environment Registered Charity No. 1155971 Registered Company No. 08383410

5.2. Friends of Hatton Fields

Friends of Hatton Fields are an active group of residents who aim to protect and enhance the large grasslands area on the edge of the Duke of Northumberland's river near Hatton Cross and London Heathrow Terminal 4, classified as Green Belt land. Friends of Hatton Fields used funding from the Crane Valley Community Fund to set up a six-month project to promote volunteering and increase community engagement within the area. This was achieved successfully through events such as an Easter egg hunt, organised dog walks, a bat walk, monthly litter picks, a children's sports day, and a local Scout group nature walk. In the future, Friends of Hatton Fields hopes to work with several local schools and children's community groups, to increase younger generations' appreciation of the grasslands and to continue to expand their network. They are also developing a new project, which will involve factually understanding the local habitats in Hatton Fields with support from a professional ecologist.



5.3. Whitton Community Centre

Grant Title: Create a Community Garden

Using your grant of £1,857 we have purchased 10 raised, accessible beds, 3 garden benches, 10 pairs of gardening gloves, 10 trowels, compost and seeds.

April 2023: Started running weekly Duke of Edinburgh (DofE) volunteer sessions with 4 pupils from Twickenham school. The school pupils are building the raised planters and seats, creating a wild flower area, composting, planting vegetables and generally maintaining the area.

The pupils are learning about growing for wildlife and food, whilst learning skills such as open composting and its advantages for wildlife, use of gardening tools, and tools you use to build items.



Vegetable growing. Flower Area; Wildflower apple orchard sown. Planted 2022 by community

6 planters are built, lined and ready.

All seats are built and being used.

The DofE weekly sessions will continue until 14th June when these pupils complete their bronze award.

We will offer more DofE volunteer sessions on a yearly basis.

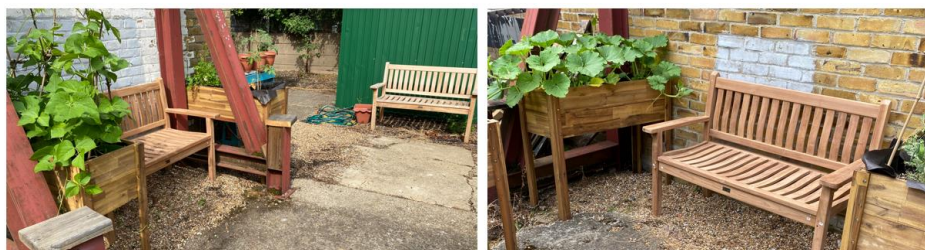
As we now have accessible planting and seating in the community garden due to your grant, our bi-monthly supervised community gardening sessions will restart through out the year. The community gardening will be expanded to include such activities as painting a mural for the wall, guest gardener talks, specialised growing such as clay / shady areas.

Our community gardeners will expand the growing area to two other plots.

Some of the planters will be positioned in the outdoor area of the community centre's friendship cafe.

In July / August the garden will again be made available to the National Citizen Service program.

A project like this is never completed of course as we develop the space, and what we do in it, but we are on target to be using all the equipment provided by your grant by end of July 2023.



Places to sit in the greenery

5.4. Gurseva

Gurseva is a charity which strives to promote wellbeing and prevent poverty. They applied to the Crane Valley Community Fund to plant trees in Leitrim Park, Hounslow, with the aim of increasing community engagement and improving natural habitats.

Satinder Luthra, the Chair of the charity, found the application process easy and straightforward. He learned about the fund through Hounslow Council newsletters.

Initially, this project struggled with costs due to inflation. Their initial application did not cover the cost of tree posts and watering sacks, or the amount of trees they wanted. Gurseva therefore submitted a second application which reflected these extra costs. The new application was accepted and, along with extra funding from the Hounslow Council tree team, they were able to cover the costs for 15 trees, tree posts, and water sacks.

Planting was done between November 2022 and May 2023. The project extended the existing tree line at Leitrim Park, beautifying the plot and guiding people through the park's paths. Arboriculturalists from Hounslow Council helped to ensure that the tree species planted were suitable for the area. Along with Gurseva's own 100 volunteers from West London, they were able to engage more volunteers by publicising the project on council newsletters and social media accounts.

They found the webinars for the Crane Valley Community Fund useful for getting in touch with different groups and organisations. For example, they got into contact with National Park City who advertised their project on their website. Gurseva worked on the project in collaboration with Hounslow Council, Habitats & Heritage, and Friends of Pevensey Road.

So far, feedback from local community groups and residents has been positive, with the park being a popular spot for dog walkers. Gurseva have now been accepted for further funding from the Crane Valley Community Fund. This funding will be used to set up more tree planting sessions, hire a part time person for tree maintenance, and gain more feedback on the project.



Before and after. Tree planting at Leitrim park

Images: Satinder Luthra, Chair of Gurseva

5.5. Friends of Heathfield Recreation Grounds and Environs

Friends of Heathfield Recreation Grounds and Environs, located in Whitton, used the Crane Valley Community Fund to purchase a large battery-powered lawn mower and a water carrier. Their objective was to decarbonise the group's maintenance work by replacing their old petrol lawn mower with a non-polluting and quieter solar-powered battery mower. The water carriers would also enable them to transport water during periods of low rainfall, expanding their area of work.

Since receiving their funding, three areas of planting have been improved. These include the creation of a meadow and scrubland on 2 green areas and containers planted at a tarmacked entrance to Crane Park. The new lawn mower has been used for the general mowing of grass pathways and hay cutting that was carried out in Autumn. More hay cutting is planned to take place this Spring, 2024. Additionally, despite being a wet summer, the water carrier was used to water trees during a Let's Go Outside And Learn stag beetle loggery event at Jubilee Meadow.



Pathways maintained using the new lawn mower Water carrier used to water trees in Summer 2023
Images courtesy of Joan Gibson from Friends of Heathfield Recreation Grounds and Environs

The Friends Group found that the application process to the Community Fund was easy, and there was a good understanding of what environments community groups were trying to improve. However, the group encountered a few issues once their application was accepted. Firstly, they stated that payments were late and long winded, which limited the improvements they could make in the first year due to planting seasons. Secondly, they found that the website used for project reporting made it difficult to fill in the report, and some information was missed out on the form. This resulted in the group being contacted with many follow up queries once the project date had passed. Friends of Heathfield Recreation Grounds and Environs suggest that a free-form template for project reporting would resolve this issue.

In future, the Friends of Heathfield Recreation Grounds and Environs would like to keep expanding their environmental improvements on other green spaces in the borough. They have been asked to maintain new plants that the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames will install at the end of Powdermill Lane and Hanworth Road in 2024.

5.6. Cranford Action Group

Cranford Action Group are a grassroots local community group who perform regular litter picks to clean the green and blue spaces of Cranford. Their efforts have made these spaces more accessible to the local community. Cranford Action Group applied to the Crane Valley Community Fund to fund their continuous litter picking work in Cranford. The funding would also be used to purchase hi vis vests and summer caps for volunteers, signage deterring littering, public liability insurance, and promotional leaflets.

The group have successfully worked to remove 30 tonnes of rubbish in one year and installed 2 permanent CCTV cameras at Park Lane.

Cranford Action Group's active use of social media has helped them to document their success and engage the local community to take part in their litter picking work. It has also been used to raise awareness of problematic areas for fly tipping. Below are some images from their Facebook page demonstrating the work that they do.



5.7. Crane Park Island Volunteers

We were delighted to be awarded £1,425 from the Crane Valley Community grants, which enabled us to buy a variety of tools for our growing volunteering programme at London Wildlife Trust's Crane Park Island nature reserve. These grants make all the difference to small groups like ours.

In particular, we need to maintain the newly desilted internal channels (dredged in March 2023) as part of a larger project by LWT, London Boroughs of Richmond and Hounslow, and the Crane Valley Partnership to improve the habitat in preparation for a water-vole reintroduction programme this year (2024) on this part of the River Crane.

Crane Park Island used to support a thriving population of the nationally threatened water vole, but due to an episode of mink predation a few years ago, the population on the Crane had almost disappeared, with a small relict population on the island the only ones surviving the predation as of 2021, and even these we think have now disappeared.

With the grant, we have bought sufficient waders in various sizes to enable all our volunteers to help with the ongoing task of maintaining the channels at sufficient depth and preventing them closing up. We've already used the waders and long waterproof gloves many times: clearing banks after dredging and replanting saved plants. London Wildlife Trust gave us 550 plugs of waterside plants that water voles like to eat and we cleared the banks and channel edges and planted the plugs in September 2023 (using some trowels bought with the grant). The waders also enabled some of our volunteers to help Ian McKinnon, Richmond Borough Biodiversity's water-vole lead, with putting out rafts and monitoring them in autumn 2023 to look for signs of water voles.

Other tools bought with the grant included a lightweight battery-operated electric trimmer, which has proved enormously useful in keeping paths open much more efficiently than before, thus freeing up volunteer time for other tasks. Green path maintenance is a major task for us in the summer as the reserve is much used by families with young children, so paths must be kept sufficiently wide and safe for them - a continual task which used up much volunteer time.

Thanks to a generous donation of wood planking from one of our volunteers, this summer we also started to repair the tapping rail at the edge of our hoggin path, which had disappeared in places. We used a small part of the CVP grant to buy stakes, nails, etc. for this task.

Challenges we face on this particular site are the usual ones for riverside sites of keeping invasive plants (pond sedge, Himalayan balsam, hemlock water-dropwort) under control where possible, and preventing reeds from the reedbed growing out into the channels. But now we have enough waders, we can maintain the channels more easily in the future.



Volunteers clearing channels; improving access to paths; planting holly; ground prepared for planting

5.8. Sunshine of Hounslow

Sunshine of Hounslow has been supporting local residents through health and wellbeing activities for more than a decade. As part of their community food-growing programme, a major extension to their site at Waye Avenue allotments in Cranford was officially opened on 28th October. Guests included twenty dedicated volunteers and the Leader of Hounslow Council Councillor Shantanu Rajawat; Seema Malhotra, MP; and Councillor Shivraj Grewal. Twenty-one new large raised beds and four flower beds are available for local people's use and the garden is already producing a harvest of herbs and planted with garlic, onion and other vegetables. Led by local resident Sharnjeet Bhalla and husband Kalwant Singh Bhalla the group also cares for the local environment. Grants from the Crane Valley Partnership Community Fund have helped them to develop their site and also to keep the Crane riverside free of litter, with local companies and volunteers. Wishing them bumper harvests and happy growers! More information: Sharnjeet, 07878 990874, sunshineofhounslow@gmail.com



5.9. Creative Spaces London: Consultation event days

Creative Spaces London (CSL) is a grassroots organisation providing weekly wellbeing and fitness sessions for women. CSL applied to the Crane Valley Community Fund to host a consultation event day. Having noticed that participants were less likely to engage in activities taking place around the River Crane, this consultation day would provide feedback on access, usage, and opinions of the River Crane in the areas of Cranford and Heston West. The event was aimed at local women and families, comprising of fun and interactive activities.

Whilst in the initial application the consultation event was to take place in one day, this was altered to two shorter consultation events. A larger, general community consultation was held in September 2023 and the other in July 2023, focusing on a smaller group to discuss ideas in depth. CSL worked closely with Let's Go Outside And Learn to deliver the consultation and collate ideas. They also shared their findings with C-Change and Hounslow & Richmond Community Healthcare Trust Walking Group.

The consultation events proved successful in understanding residents' relationships with their local green and blue spaces. The most popular parks visited by attendees are Osterley Park, Heston Park and Lampton Park. The main barriers to public use of the River Crane and local green spaces were fear for personal safety, lack of facilities including paths, benches and cafés, and inadequate or broken infrastructure. Attendees also mentioned that some of the parks are hidden and difficult to find.

The main activities that take place in parks include organised group activities such as conservation volunteering and litter picking, individual activities such as exercise or nature watching, utilising playgrounds, and picnics. When asked what activities people would like to do more of in green and blue spaces, the most popular responses were gardening and growing food, nature-inspired arts and crafts, and cycling.

These findings will be used in future to inform how local residents can gain confidence in utilising the Crane Valley's green and blue spaces. Below are some images of the activities that took place during the consultation events.



With thanks to Frances Bennet from LGOAL for providing the images and consultation results

5.10. Friends of Yeading Walk

The Friends of Yeading Walk received a grant of £2,000 for planting trees as part of a wide programme of work to care for Yeading Walk and Yeading Brook in North Harrow. Together with Habitats & Heritage the group organised a visit in July 2023 to see the work and discuss plans for the future. The group works closely with London Borough of Harrow officers on issues of amenity, access and ecology. They have raised funding for improvements to the environment including hedge-planting through Trees for London. On the visit, attended by sixteen people from areas up and down Yeading Brook and the Crane, we heard about the committed work of volunteers such as the Rainbow Garden at the entrance and a thriving Community Orchard. There was a discussion about the scope for naturalisation of some parts of the river bank and work is underway to introduce native plant species on the banks and to create a stepping stone crossing on the brook. Riverfly monitoring is undertaken regularly by volunteers in Yeading Brook at Yeading Walk. Upstream from Yeading Walk, Yeading Brook is culverted and there is discussion with London Borough of Harrow and with other community groups about monitoring and improving water quality. Yeading Walk is a highly valued and much used green space surrounded by suburban housing. The work of Friends of Yeading Walk shows how committed care can conserve and improve a green space that might otherwise be ecologically vulnerable. The Community Fund grant forms part of a long term strategy to sustain the value of this park.



Tree planting: Community Fund project.

Flex MSE Vegetated Wall – restoring native species to the river bank

Native-species hedge, with Trees for London

Community Orchard