

Leicester Riverside: combining canal and river



Leicester's riversides are well known for the ways in which they link and connect areas of green space and wildlife interest throughout the city's waterway corridor



Commuting and recreation are both popular ways of enjoying the city's waterways

The Leicester Riverside path follows the River Soar and the Grand Union Canal, both through the city centre and out to surrounding countryside. The route is almost 20 kilometres long and runs between Wanlip and Thurmaston (to the north of the city) and Blaby and Glen Parva (to the south). It connects to numerous parks and open spaces and links to visitor attractions such as the National Space Centre. On the canal sections, the towpath is owned by British Waterways but managed by Leicester City Council.

Leicester's watersides are well known and regionally important for their wildlife value and the path helps provide access to a series of nature reserves and a range of green spaces, where board walks have been provided in some wetland locations. Facilities provided include car parks, toilets and picnic sites, and cyclists are welcome along designated lengths, which are generally separated from walking paths. Though much of the network does not use formal rights of way, the riverside is now popular for recreation and commuting, and recent improvements have also been welcomed by boaters.

In the central area, towpath improvements have been accompanied by extensive redevelopment which has recognised the importance of the river corridor, with new access points, public spaces and footbridge crossings. Signage and information is provided, and leaflets - "Discover Leicester's Riverside Park" - with clear maps and interpretative material are produced by the City Council, some of which are available to download.

Approximately 95% of the route is off-road and cycleway lengths are treated with an all-weather surface. Separation of routes helps reduce potential conflicts, and users are asked to be considerate to others, e.g., cyclists are specifically recommended to use bells and to remain aware of others on the riverside. The towpaths link to the National Cycle Network, and wheelchair access is continuing to improve throughout.

Leicester City Council's Riverside Development Officer works with other agencies and user groups to help develop the full potential of the city's waterway network. In addition, the City Council operates a Riverside Ranger service, and their award winning Greenboat Project encourages volunteers to help keep the area clean. The Rangers work on site to increase awareness, minimise anti-social behaviour, and offer walks, talks and school events.