



Through partnerships and practical action The Water of Leith Conservation Trust (WOLCT) works to protect and improve the Water of Leith as a haven for wildlife and a resilient blue-green network for the city. We deliver inclusive learning, volunteering and recreational opportunities which connect communities with Edinburgh's river. *Registered Charity no SC000015*

**This strategy document details our aims and goals in five key areas; Protect, Learn, Improve, Connect and Entrust. It lists the actions we plan to take over the next five years and the outcomes we hope to achieve.**



## PROTECT

**We aim to protect the river's natural and built heritage, ensuring the blue-green spaces and nature networks are resilient to change.**

Our Goals are to protect:

- the river's wildlife
- the river's blue-green spaces and nature network from development pressures
- the river's built and industrial heritage
- the Trust by maximising energy efficiency and effective & sustainable resource utilisation.

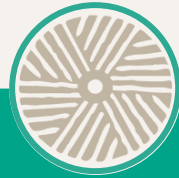


## LEARN

**We aim to be a Centre for Learning which focuses on rivers, biodiversity, heritage and climate change, sharing skills and knowledge with our community.**

Our Goals are to:

- Operate as an inclusive Centre for Learning
- Share skills with our volunteers & community
- Share knowledge to inspire and inform conservation and outdoor learning.

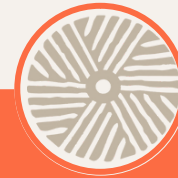


## IMPROVE

**We aim to improve water quality and appearance, river morphology and the health of habitats, ensuring walkway visitor experiences are improved.**

Our Goals are to improve:

- water quality and appearance
- habitats, river morphology and green infrastructure
- the walkway and visitor experiences for all users
- our product range to be more sustainable
- how we operate across all areas, working to achieve net zero.

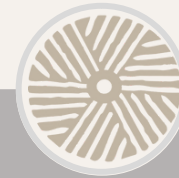


## CONNECT

**We aim to connect the local and wider community with our vision and the work of the Trust.**

Our Goals are to connect:

- through the Visitor Centre
- through volunteering
- through a dynamic online presence
- with under-represented groups
- with strategic and funding partners to achieve our aims and deliver intended outcomes.



## ENTRUST

**We aim to act as entrusted guardians of the river, advocating for its future on behalf of our members and community.**

Our Goals are to:

- Work in partnership with landowners, stakeholders and statutory bodies to benefit the river
- Engage and grow our membership
- Operate the Trust with sound governance, effective management and staff wellbeing
- Deliver the strategy and related action plans.



## PROTECT

### ACTION

- Keep good quality and relevant wildlife records and use to monitor the health and diversity of species across the catchment, and use to inform management practices.
- Safeguard protected species and their habitats through cycles of surveying and monitoring.
- Maintain a programme of meadow and woodland management to ensure there is no loss of biodiversity.
- Support the City's Water Vision; consult on developments which affect water quality, run off and the sewer network.
- Ensure the integrity of the river's Local Biodiversity Sites Network by reviewing planning applications and participating in consultations which affect the river's blue-green space.
- Report pollution and sewage discharge events and follow up with responsible stakeholders.
- Audit heritage features including all Scheduled Ancient Monuments and record.
- Work with partners and landowners to ensure historic features are preserved and safeguarded for the future.
- Work to understand in-stream barriers such as weirs; consider impact on fish passage and micro-hydro potential.
- Work with partners to develop a balanced approach to barrier easement within the river channel.
- Continue the programme of centre improvements and investment in energy and water saving technology.
- Reduce use of chemical and fuel to deliver conservation work, such as root cutting invasive species and scything.

## LEARN

### ACTION

- Deliver curriculum-focused outdoor learning experiences for school-aged children.
- Deliver qualification-level field study courses combining curriculum goals with real life surveys and research.
- Deliver an engaging and accessible programme for the special school sector.
- Develop and deliver continuous professional development workshops for teachers to develop outdoor learning skills.
- Sustain involvement with outdoor learning networks and educational establishments.
- Provide suitable engagement activities which target under-represented schools and groups.
- Deliver fun and engaging youth programmes and host learning presentations and workshop sessions for community groups, Trust members, volunteers and the public.
- Identify skills and training needed by the volunteer and staff team to ensure Trust goals are achieved.
- Improve the system of volunteer onboarding and induction.
- Develop and deliver practical skill master classes and facilitate focused courses in identified key areas.
- Sustain and develop research projects with universities and colleges, to forward strategic goals.
- Advise other organisations, groups and charities in best practice.
- Scope the potential for creating professional networks to support and develop our work and review opportunities to engage in local and national initiatives.



## ACTION

- Remove litter by conducting regular clean-up.
- Hold Debris Discovery Sessions to understand the origins of the litter and work to reduce the sources.
- Prevent litter from reaching the river through behavioural change and physical barriers.
- Continue boat clean-ups in Leith and sustain the partnership agreement.
- Identify the location of all Combined Sewer Overflows (CSO) which affect the river and monitor through river patrols.
- Support university-led water quality testing and analysis to determine sources of poor water quality.
- Investigate tributaries for sources of pollution, Invasive Non Native Species (INNS) and litter and identify issues to be addressed.
- Remove, monitor and prevent the spread of targeted INNS throughout the catchment.
- Develop and maintain community wildlife gardens and a network of wildflower meadows along the walkway.
- Identify ecological management compartments along the river valley and areas where there is the potential for habitat enhancement/creation which links to the wider City Nature Network.
- Identify locations within the catchment where green infrastructure and natural solutions would improve river morphology, enhance the nature network and promote flood attenuation.
- Seek partners and landowners to support the delivery of identified green infrastructure projects.
- Review results of river fly surveys and fish surveys to identify locations where in-stream habitat improvement measures would be benefit fish passage and/or invertebrate diversity.
- Review actions from SEPA's water framework directive action plan for the waterbodies associated with the catchment and seek funding to deliver improvements as appropriate.
- Support the maintenance of the existing walkway and network, and agree an annual programme of activities to keep the path surface and associated infrastructure in good order.
- Audit paths and identify areas that require improvement or investment to make the route suitable for all users, and support partners with implementation of maintenance projects.
- Implement the Coalie Park Improvement Plan.
- Seek support and funding to work within the Dean Valley to improve paths, railings and heritage features.
- Work with partners to improve accessibility to the upper catchment and the Pentland Hills.
- Develop new community link projects, connecting more neighbourhoods to the walkway.
- Continue the programme of investing in the Centre, incl updating interpretation, flexible seating and outdoor spaces.
- Improve and develop the retail and cafe experience to include more sustainable and ethical products.
- Develop relationships with corporate partners delivering volunteering opportunities and financial support.
- Review environmental impact of Trust activities and develop an action plan which aims to achieve net zero by 2030.



## CONNECT

### ACTION

- Be accessible to the public seven days a week providing information, catering and facilities suitable for all users.
- Provide quality river and walkway information, and enjoyable and informative exhibitions and events.
- Manage the Trust volunteer team to ensure connection to all areas of our work.
- Provide a weekly programme of volunteering opportunities on the river and daily at the Visitor Centre.
- Connect with local business and non-profit organisations to offer volunteering opportunities, undertaking quality tasks and learning new skills.
- Support and develop the Patrol Team; review reporting and recording methods to improve communications.
- Maintain a quality online presence to connect users and followers with the river, its walkway and the Trust's work.
- Develop a communications plan which connects people with our work and celebrates volunteer action.
- Connect individual actions with impact on the river focusing on litter, 'only the 3 Ps' and climate change.
- Connect with Leith citizens through projects including developments at Coalie Park and basin water quality.
- Connect with, encourage and support local 'Friends of...' groups along the river and its greenspaces.
- Support the management of recreational fishing on the river to ensure the resource is not exploited or over used.
- Connect with under-represented groups by offering volunteering opportunities and engagement activities.
- Develop engagement activities and facilities suitable for families with young children.
- Connect individual young people with volunteering through development of suitable roles, existing award schemes and offering placements.
- Provide suitable engagement activities which target underrepresented groups.
- In 2028 celebrate 40 years of WOLCT.

## ENTRUST

### ACTION

- Develop partnerships and sustain relationships with landowners and statutory bodies to develop projects which improve the river and tackle local issues.
- Lead the Water of Leith Action Group delivering the 2020-2030 Management Plan.
- Support the Edinburgh Biodiversity Network and other City initiatives.
- Run membership recruitment drive to increase the number and diversity of our members.
- Empower members to become advocates for the river and take an active role in its protection and improvement.
- Consider a name change to Water of Leith Trust.
- Ensure the Trust is run effectively and efficiently in line with good governance, charity and other legislation.
- Ensure Trust policies and procedures are fit for purpose.
- Ensure financial security of the Trust and fundraise to support the delivery of this Strategy.
- Continue to build a healthy and resilient staff and volunteer team.



# 2023 - 2028 STRATEGY - OUTCOMES

*Our Vision: A healthy river cared for by its community*

## PROTECT

Disturbance or destruction of protected species habitats is prevented.

Water quality and the river's resilience against flooding and impacts of climate change is improved.

Diversity of species is monitored to avoid net loss and promote gain.

Sources and impacts of pollution are fully reported and monitored.

Better understanding and awareness of heritage assets and no loss of important features.

## LEARN

Young people understand & value the river and environment, which encourages behavioural change to not drop litter, protect water resource and care about nature and wildlife.

Our community learns about and appreciates the rivers built and natural heritage, which encourages them to support our goals.

Our community is empowered with the practical skills to protect and improve the river and support all areas of our work.

Our understanding of outdoor learning, volunteering and conservation extends beyond the Trust.

## IMPROVE

A more resilient, connected, diverse and natural river catchment.

A river and its wildlife protected from the impacts of litter.

A river free from impact of targeted invasive species.

An accessible walkway suitable for all users.

A walkway which better connects communities and supports wider active travel or recreation opportunities.

## CONNECT

Our community has a valued resource they can rely on.

Visitors & users enjoy their interactions and experiences at the Centre, online and on the river, while understanding and valuing our work.

Volunteer engagement on the river and at the centre remains high, with a valued and skilled team.

The whole community has the opportunity to connect with or volunteer on the river, leading to increased diversity in all areas.

The wider community can access the information required to inform visits and understand the river.

## ENTRUST

Actions within the Water of Leith Management plan are delivered.

Members and funders entrust staff and Trustees with the operation of the Trust and delivery of this strategy.

A diverse membership is more engaged in the work of the Trust and retain their membership.

Our operations are more resilient and support reduced organisational impact on climate and water resources, furthering Net Zero 2030 ambitions.

A resilient and skilled staff & volunteer team.