



the
WATER of LEITH
Conservation Trust

Annual Report 2025-6

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The Water of Leith Conservation Trust (WOLCT) is a registered charity established in 1988. Through partnerships and practical action the Trust 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.

Throughout 2025-26 we continued to deliver our five-year strategy through five connected priorities: Protect, Improve, Connect, Learn and Entrust. Together these guide our work to safeguard biodiversity, improve the river and its habitats, inspire learning, strengthen communities and ensure that the Trust remains resilient for the future.

This has been one of the most successful years in the Trust's history. We celebrated 25 years of the Water of Leith Visitor Centre, completed the transformational Coalie Park Improvement Project and invested in renewable energy to help achieve our Net Zero ambitions. We also expanded our Learning Team, delivered our largest ever education programme and welcomed record numbers of volunteers, whose enthusiasm and commitment continue to shape everything we do.

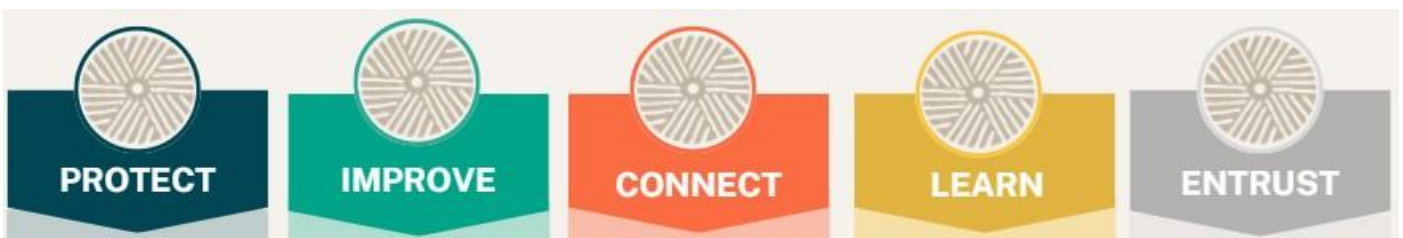
The impact of this work can be seen right across the river catchment. Cleaner waterways, healthier habitats, improved access, thriving community spaces and thousands of people connecting with nature all contribute to a healthier Water of Leith and a stronger sense of shared stewardship.

None of this would have been possible without the continued support of our volunteers, members, funders, partners and local communities. Together we are helping to create a river that is healthier, more resilient and valued by everyone who lives, works and spends time along its banks.

2025-6 at a glance

This year we:

- Completed the £500,000 Coalie Park Improvement Project
- Celebrated 25 years of the Water of Leith Visitor Centre
- Welcomed 20,365 visitors to the Visitor Centre
- Delivered 233 practical conservation tasks
- Recorded 14,175 volunteer hours across conservation, learning, governance and the Visitor Centre
- Delivered 108 school learning sessions, 70 community learning sessions and 35 events
- Completed 168 river clean-up tasks
- Carried out 151 walkway maintenance sessions
- Carried out 519 volunteer river patrols and over 450 hours spent on wildlife monitoring and citizen science
- Installed solar photovoltaic panels and air-source heat pumps at the Visitor Centre
- Increased membership to 370 supporters



Details of our governance, Trustees, the full independently examined accounts, The Management Plan and our 2024-29 Strategy are all available on our website: www.waterofleith.org.uk/the-trust/

PROTECT

"Healthy rivers begin with healthy habitats. By monitoring wildlife, protecting biodiversity and responding to environmental threats, we are helping the Water of Leith thrive."

Throughout the year our staff and volunteers carried out an extensive programme of ecological monitoring across the catchment. Meadows, woodlands, bats, fungi, butterflies, bumblebees and riverflies were all surveyed, with records contributing to local and national monitoring schemes. This long-term approach helps us understand how habitats are changing, identify emerging threats and make informed decisions about future conservation management.



Volunteers receive accredited training from the Riverfly Partnership

Protecting water quality continued to be a key priority. Monthly Riverfly monitoring provided an early warning system for pollution, while reports from volunteers and river users helped identify and investigate pollution incidents quickly. We continued to work closely with Scottish Water, SEPA and other partners to improve the health of the river, supporting wider projects to reduce pollution and strengthen the resilience of Edinburgh's urban waterways.

Our programme of invasive non-native species control also continued at catchment scale. Volunteers tackled giant hogweed, Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam through coordinated river wades and targeted conservation tasks. Wherever possible we expanded the use of non-chemical techniques, including root cutting, reducing reliance on herbicides while preventing invasive plants from spreading further along the river corridor.

Protecting the river also means reducing our own environmental impact. During the year we invested in a second electric vehicle and completed the installation of solar photovoltaic panels and air-source heat pumps at the Visitor Centre. Together these improvements represent a significant milestone in our Net Zero journey and demonstrate our commitment to leading by example.

In numbers:

- 7 meadow sites surveyed twice during the year
- 13 Riverfly monitoring sessions completed
- 11 pollinator transects monitored by volunteers
- Over 2,650 Giant Hogweed plants removed or treated
- 8 pollution incidents reported and followed up
- 100% of Trust-managed meadows maintained using ecological best practice, including scything



Debating species on a survey at Coalie Park mini meadow.

IMPROVE

"Working with volunteers and partners, we continue to make the Water of Leith cleaner, healthier and more accessible for everyone."

Improving the condition of the river and its surrounding environment remained a key focus throughout the year. Volunteers contributed thousands of hours to practical conservation, removing litter, maintaining the walkway and tackling invasive non-native species.

River clean-ups took place across the catchment, including two full river wades from Balerno to Leith and regular monthly clean-ups by boat in Leith Basin. Debris Discovery audits and litter hotspot surveys helped identify where waste was entering the river, allowing the Trust to work with schools, businesses and local communities to prevent waste at source.



Wading at Murrayfield on the hunt for litter & Himalayan Balsam.



Tea break for the Coalie Coalition

A major milestone this year was the completion of the £500,000 Coalie Park Improvement Project. The transformed riverside space now provides improved access, attractive public areas, including a striking Gaudí-inspired mural-clad skate area, and enhanced opportunities for recreation, biodiversity and community engagement. The project has created a welcoming destination for local residents and visitors alike. The establishment of The Coalie Coalition, supported through funding from the Leith Chooses programme, will help ensure the park continues to be actively cared for and championed by the local community for years to come.

Volunteers also contributed to habitat enhancement through the planting of dozens of trees at Longstone Copse, and thousands of native wildflower bulbs and perennial plugs along the river corridor, increasing opportunities for pollinators and improving biodiversity.

The Redbraes Tunnel Accessibility Project was completed, improving year-round access along a key section of the Walkway through drainage, resurfacing and safety upgrades, with support from Walking Scotland and the City of Edinburgh Council. Alongside day-to-day walkway improvements, the Trust continued to plan for the future by developing proposals for significant investment in the Walkway and Dean Valley.

In numbers:

- 168 clean-up tasks completed
- 3,772 volunteer hours spent on river clean-ups
- 151 walkway maintenance tasks delivered
- 3,966 volunteer hours maintaining paths and infrastructure
- 51 invasive species control tasks completed
- £500,000 Coalie Park Improvement Project completed
- 11 Leith Basin clean-ups by boat delivered



Pathwork at Chesser

CONNECT

"The Water of Leith brings people together through volunteering, learning and shared experiences in nature."

The Water of Leith Visitor Centre continues to be a welcoming gateway to the river, offering opportunities for people of all ages to discover, enjoy and care for this unique natural asset. This year we celebrated the Centre's 25th anniversary, marking a quarter of a century of connecting people with the river through exhibitions, events, learning and volunteering.

Volunteers remain at the heart of everything we do. Throughout the year they supported practical conservation, visitor engagement at the Centre, river patrols, governance and community events, contributing a record number of hours across every aspect of the Trust's work. Their enthusiasm and commitment continue to make a lasting difference to both the river and the organisation.



Silver Anniversary celebration event at the Centre



Balgreen meadow stomp!

Community engagement continued to grow through public events including Plant Sales, Christmas Fayres, guided walks and children's activities. We also expanded opportunities for young people and under-represented groups to connect with the river through volunteering, placements and informal learning programmes, helping to ensure the Water of Leith remains a resource accessible to all.

Our dedicated River Patrollers continued to play a vital role in caring for the river, completing 514 patrols along the 13-mile Walkway. As well as identifying issues such as litter, pollution, invasive species and maintenance needs, patrollers collect valuable data on wildlife and path usage. Analysis of nearly 2,500 patrols since 2018 is helping the Trust understand changes in visitor numbers, accessibility and environmental pressures, providing important evidence to inform future management and investment decisions.

Regular communications, social media, community events and partnerships with local businesses helped strengthen connections with supporters throughout the year. Together, these activities continue to build a community that values, cares for and champions the river.

In numbers:

- 20,365 visitors welcomed to the Visitor Centre
- 14,175 volunteer hours contributed across the Trust
- 233 practical conservation tasks completed
- 34 public events delivered
- 42 corporate volunteering days supported
- 514 River Patrols completed
- 9 youth placements completed



Exploring Colinton Tunnel

LEARN

"Learning about the river inspires people to care for it, helping to create lasting stewardship for future generations."

Learning remains central to the Trust's mission, helping people of all ages understand the importance of healthy rivers, biodiversity and the natural environment. During the year we expanded our Learning Team, enabling us to deliver more sessions than ever before and respond to growing demand from schools and community groups across Edinburgh.

Our outdoor learning programmes gave thousands of young people the opportunity to explore the river through hands-on activities, developing knowledge, confidence and a lasting connection with nature. Programmes for primary and secondary schools continued to grow, while we further diversified our learning offer, launching new programmes for nursery-aged children and expanding outreach activity beyond the Visitor Centre.



Laura explaining bedload measurement during a typical Scottish field study day.



Discovering river life.

Throughout the year, children and young people explored woodlands, rivers and local greenspaces through curriculum-linked activities focused on wildlife, biodiversity, sustainability and caring for the environment. During the summer months alone, more than 500 children participated in outdoor learning events, while youth groups and community organisations took part in nature-based activities, and environmental education sessions across the catchment. These programmes help foster curiosity, confidence and a lifelong connection with nature from an early age.

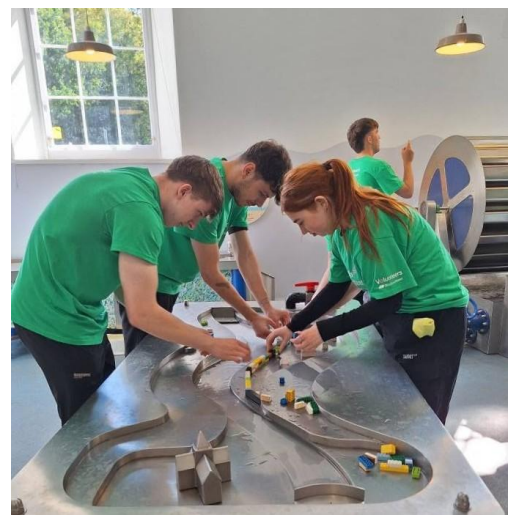
Community learning also expanded throughout the year, with guided activities, practical conservation sessions and skills workshops encouraging people of all ages to become involved in caring for the river.

Popular "Learn to Wade" sessions and volunteer training helped build practical skills while supporting the Trust's conservation work. The trust staff team even had a go at curling at the Murrayfield ice rink!

Partnerships with universities and education providers continued to strengthen research, monitoring and outdoor learning, ensuring that knowledge and experience are shared beyond the Trust. By inspiring curiosity and encouraging practical action, our learning programmes are helping to build the next generation of river guardians.

In numbers:

- 60 primary school sessions delivered
- 48 secondary school sessions delivered
- 70 community learning sessions delivered
- 2 pilot school projects completed
- Multiple practical skills workshops delivered



Never too old to build a Lego flood wall!!

ENTRUST

"Strong partnerships, responsible governance and careful stewardship ensure that the Trust can continue protecting the Water of Leith for generations to come."

The Trust continued to strengthen its governance, partnerships and organisational resilience throughout the year, providing firm foundations for the successful delivery of our strategy. The five-year review of the Water of Leith Management Plan helped ensure that our work continues to respond to changing environmental and community priorities.

Support from members, funders, businesses and charitable trusts enabled us to deliver an ambitious programme of conservation, education and community engagement. Membership continued to grow, while regular newsletters, events and opportunities to get involved helped strengthen relationships with supporters throughout the year.

A significant milestone was the completion of major renewable energy improvements at the Visitor Centre. The installation of solar photovoltaic panels and air-source heat pumps represents an important investment in the Trust's future, reducing both carbon emissions and long-term operating costs as we work towards our Net Zero ambitions.

The Trust also completed its first external audit and continued to strengthen governance, financial management and organisational systems. Together with a growing staff team and committed Board of Trustees, these achievements ensure the Trust remains well placed to deliver lasting environmental and community benefit.

Financial Summary

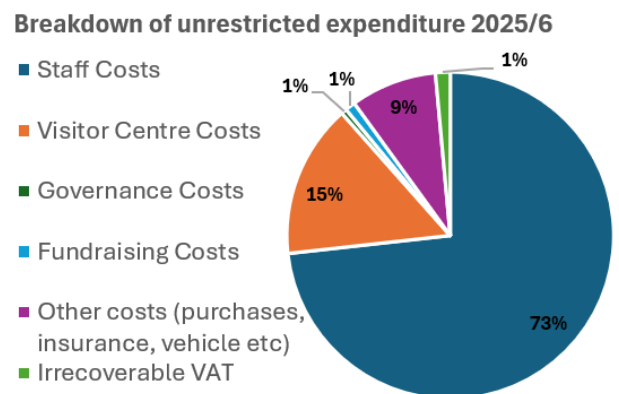
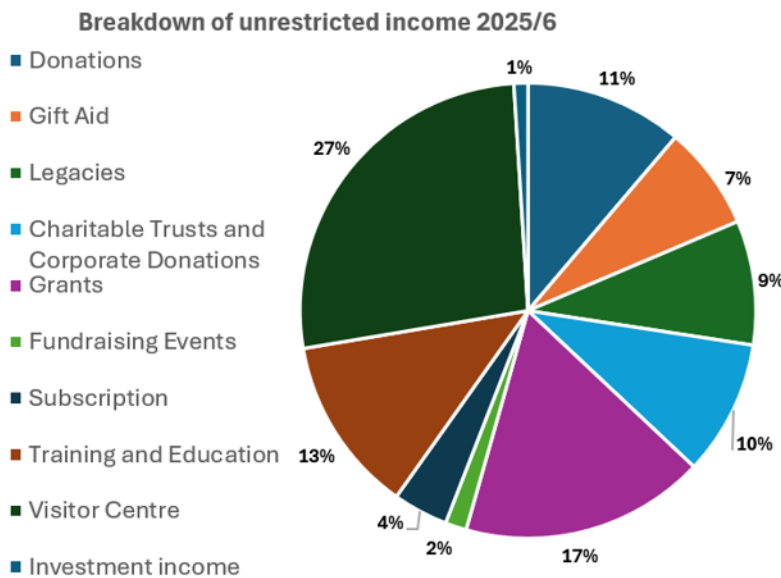
This year, the charity generated total unrestricted income of £290,979 and incurred unrestricted expenditure of £335,279. After investment gains of £19,384, this resulted in an overall deficit of £24,919 for the year.

At the year end, the charity's unrestricted reserves stood at £1,030,337, largely due to notification of the exceptionally generous legacy gift from our late Chair, George Hunter, received in the previous financial year. While these funds have not yet been fully transferred to our accounts or become available for expenditure, owing to the complexities involved in administering the estate and developing an appropriate investment strategy, the Board has already begun planning for their long-term impact.

In anticipation of receiving these funds, the Trust has already taken steps to strengthen our staffing structure, improve the Centre's sustainability through investment in solar panels and a heat pump, and develop ambitious plans to expand our reach and impact in line with our Strategy.

Continued support from our members, volunteers, funders, and partners remains essential as we work to deliver these ambitions. Together, we can ensure that George's legacy, alongside the contributions of all our supporters, creates lasting benefits for the river and the communities that depend on it.

The following charts show how unrestricted income was raised and how those funds were used to support the Trust's work throughout the year.



Looking Ahead

As we move into the next year of our Strategy 2024-2029, our focus remains on delivering practical improvements for the river and its communities while making best use of the opportunities presented by the Trust's growing capacity. We will continue our catchment-scale approach to tackling invasive non-native species, investigating tributaries to identify sources of pollution and invasives, expanding citizen science monitoring, and enhancing habitats through meadow creation, woodland planting and targeted biodiversity projects. We will also work with partners to develop proposals for significant investment in the Water of Leith Walkway and the Visitor Centre, improving accessibility, infrastructure and the visitor experience for all users.

Building on record levels of volunteering and engagement, we will further develop opportunities for volunteers, community groups, schools and under-represented audiences to connect with and care for the river. Our learning programmes will continue to grow through work with schools, special schools, community groups and universities, while new skills training opportunities will help equip volunteers with the knowledge needed to support conservation and monitoring activities.

Alongside this, we will continue to strengthen the organisation through good governance, sustainable fundraising and delivery of our Net Zero Action Plan. Working with our members, volunteers, partners and funders, we remain committed to ensuring that the Water of Leith is a healthy, accessible and resilient river, cared for by its community



A healthy river cared for by its community

For more information or to subscribe to our blog for regular updates please visit

www.waterofleith.org.uk or call in to the:

Water of Leith Visitor Centre, 24 Lanark Road, Edinburgh, EH14 1TQ.

Call 0131 455 7367 or email admin@waterofleith.org.uk

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