

The Sherbourne Valley Project

The Diocesan Environment Group has been supporting the Sherbourne Valley Project for several years. We encourage parishes in the watershed of the River Sherbourne to become involved in this project to help them care for their local environment. This provides a good practical framework for Christians to be a blessing in their local communities and environments and for those churches that are signed up to Eco Church, this is an expression of one of the assessed categories, Global and Community Engagement.

Living Landscapes are landscape-scale conservation efforts to restore, recreate and reconnect our wildlife habitats, and which reconnect local communities with their wild areas. The Sherbourne Valley Project (<https://www.warwickshirewildlifetrust.org.uk/RiverSherbourneValley>) is one such project, initiated by the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and is a fitting addition to our 2021 City of Culture. Supporting this is one way our watershed churches can express their care for creation. A bid for Heritage Lottery Funding has been successful, and the Diocese of Coventry was one of a number of stakeholders that contributed, in our case in a very small way through individuals in the Environment Group, towards match funding.

The River Sherbourne is the reason why the settlement of Coventry started here in about 700AD. The Sherbourne starts northwest of the city and has been steadily controlled and covered throughout the 20thC, before the city's post war rebuilding covered and culverted it in the city centre. It reappears, southeast of the city centre. It is hoped that some sections may be opened up in due course.

One of our local vicars wrote: "Psalm 46 reminds us that *"there is a river whose streams make glad the City of God where the Most High dwells"* (v. 4). *The Psalmists and Prophets regularly return to the theme of water flowing through the land, emphasising that it is the Lord who creates streams and rivers (c/f Habakkuk 3.9); that they are an expression of praise (Ps 98.8) and that their return to the land is a sure sign of His blessing (Ps 107.35), most especially after a time of spiritual drought.*

With this promise in view, the opening up of the River Sherbourne could become a symbolic act for the city of Coventry, reminding our citizens that He has been present among us all along, with yet a prospect of a new thing being done and that He has heard those who have cried out in distress.

The joy of this project is that it need not function at a purely symbolic level, but may also bring practical blessings, to our community and to our natural environment."

There are opportunities to join others volunteering to look after the river and its surroundings. Volunteers meet at the Lakeview noticeboard for sessions that last from 10.30 to 15.00 on Mondays: 24th January, 28th February, 28th March and 25th April and on Saturdays: 12th February, 19th March and 16th April. For more details about volunteering, look at: <https://www.warwickshirewildlifetrust.org.uk/volunteer>. If you do get involved, please let your church know, as this will count towards your Eco Church Global and Community Engagement survey.

Godfrey Armitage, Diocesan Environment Officer

