

History of the Green LifeBoat



Cranfleet Green LifeBoat working boat

The project was conceived by Paul Leonard-Williams and Leicester City Council's Riverside Team, in response to complaints from users of the waterways regarding litter and debris. The team saw the potential for a working boat helping to address this key practical problem, and at the same time acting as a catalyst for volunteer involvement, raising awareness and understanding of waterway issues. It would also support and add value to the Rangers role in improving and sustaining Leicester Riverside.

To get started, the team negotiated the lease of working boat "Cranfleet" pictured above, from British Waterways. At the same time the Council was approached by Environ, (a Leicester based environmental charity), and the editor of the Leicester Mercury, who were planning a new "Greenlife" environmental page for the newspaper. They were looking for a high profile campaign to launch the page, and wondered if a mass clean up along the canal would be feasible. The four organisations' objectives came together perfectly, with a clean-up campaign scheduled for National Spring Clean week. The resulting project was named the "Greenlife Boat" and the project boasted.

- Unprecedented publicity in the Leicester Mercury, not only for the clean-up, but for Riverside generally – regular articles over several weeks about every aspect of the City's waterways.
- The first celebration of the City's waterways for many years, a fun launch event on the Mile Straight and in Castle Gardens with the Lord Mayor launching the project and campaign, the Greenlife boat (and flotilla) appearing complete with a Samba band, and for the first enthusiastic volunteers getting stuck in.
- A schools' art competition to design decorative panels for the boat – local children's interpretation of waterway scenes
- A week of daily clean up events
- Excellent partnership between public, voluntary and business sectors, and first class co-operation between several City Council services – especially the Riverside rangers, waste management and community arts.

- Promotion of the Mercury's city wide environmental Greenlife campaigns which went on to covering a whole range of environmental issues.

The initial campaign week was followed by a summer of regular events – amounting to some 2,000 hours volunteer time - managed by the Riverside Rangers, along the length of the City's waterway. Several further highlights included:

- Garry Lineker travelling down the Mile Straight on the Greenlife boat as part of his Freedom of the City tour
- The Project winning an award in the Institute of Environmental Health's National Spring Clean week competition
- The Leicester Mercury winning a Press Council award for Environmental journalism.
- A Community Commendation in the 2002 national Waterways Renaissance Awards.