Time to reap the rewards of a local river

A group of proactive residents are hoping to improve the historic St John’s River and the areas which surround it.

Since the impressive new cycle path was officially opened last November, the area around St John’s River on the Tramore Road has become an increasingly popular recreational venue.

Unfortunately, the stretch of John’s River which runs alongside the cycle path is an area which has been neglected for some time.

Now, a group of enthusiastic local residents are hoping to return the area to its former glory.

The Friends of St John’s River committee is striving to further improve the area so it can be enjoyed by all locals and visitors alike.

Brian Simpson from Kilcohan believes the river has enormous potential and is spearheading the project.

In the short term, planned projects include clean-up events (for each bank of river); on-going maintenance of willow branches blocking the watercourse; removal of life-buoys tangled up along different parts of river; and returning the ring-buoys to Waterford Marine Search and Rescue organisation who can recycle them and put them to good use on the river once again.

In the medium-term, planned projects include: clean-up events for each bank of river; on-going maintenance of willow branches blocking the watercourse; removal of life-buoys tangled up along different parts of river; and returning the ring-buoys to Waterford Marine Search and Rescue organisation who can recycle them and put them to good use on the river once again.

In the long-term, plans are afoot to install small slipways at either end of the Tramore Road stretch of the river which will allow for safe and easy access for kayaks and small boats. This exciting development would open up the river to the possibility of staging a small boat rally or kayak event. This will also in some way fulfill the original intent of the river which was to be used as a canal.

This particular stretch of waterway would be opened up as an extra amenity providing safe and sheltered waters for kayaking and boating in Waterford city,” said Brian Simpson.

“The sooner this is achieved the better for this stretch of river to realise its full potential,” he added.

The straight stretch of river which runs parallel to the Tramore Road is man-made. George Lane Fox had it built as a canal which was initially planned to reach Tramore in 1847 as part of a famine relief scheme.

After slipways are in place, improved signage will be provided on the Tramore Road and at either end of the walkway in order to let visitors know what is on offer.

It’s envisaged that there will be many long-term benefits of tree planting alongside the river.

There are a number of red squirrels in a small area of conifers along the old railway line between Blackrock and Balindud roundabout.

A new corridor of native trees would in time provide safe passage for the squirrels and other wildlife to colonise the Kilbarry Eco Park/Waterford Nature Park ensuring more wildlife for the city.

Plans are also afoot to engage with the Irish Wildlife Trust for the construction of more pools to encourage more smooth newts, fish, birds, bull-rushes etc.

The area is a haven for wildlife with the widespread presence of otters, kingfishers, mallards, frogs, moorhens to name a few.

Fish re-stocking in the river is also needed as this will generate fishing interest.

While all of these objectives may not be achieved by the closing date of the Get Involved competition, The Munster Express will support and chart the initial steps of the project and it’s hoped that the regular publicity will raise awareness of the project and encourage more people to come on board and volunteer.

It’s envisaged that activity levels around the river will return to bygone days when it played a very useful part in the fabric of Waterford city life as a favoured location for fishing, swimming and navigating.

It’s hoped that locals can once again enjoy the river and make use of it as a leisure facility.

“This return will be even more dramatic with improved facilities to allow more easy access to the river,” said Brian.

It’s hoped that the perception of the area as a drain and an eyesore will be destroyed, and that the facility will be enjoyed for many years into the future.

With the enjoyment and feel good factor being reaped from the hard work up to this point no one will want to see the river return to the poor condition it was in,” said Brian.

Small ongoing maintenance into the future will be a very small price to be paid for the rewards being reaped from the improvements,” he added.

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