


LAYMAN'S REPORT

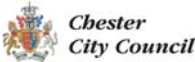
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QUERCUS

Quality Urban Environments for River Corridor Users and Stakeholders

Part Funded by the EU's LIFE Environment Programme

Lead Partner:  London borough of Lewisham, United Kingdom

Partners:  Chester City Council, United Kingdom

 Gemeente 's-Hertogenbosch, The Netherlands



The Aim

Each of the three partner cities features a river corridor with similar problems, but of varying size, and with different environmental and social characteristics. Each partner wanted to improve their urban environment by investing in their river, making it more accessible to local people, for their use and enjoyment.

The Problem

Flood prevention schemes and urban development, have, over the last 50 years, often led to rivers being enclosed in concrete, hidden or ignored. Local Authorities have been reluctant to invest in rivers perceiving that any improvements made would soon be spoilt by dumped rubbish, vandalism and crime.

As a result, urban rivers have often become unattractive, under-used, forgotten places. What could be a major community asset becomes a wasted space, and fear of crime soon prevents all but the most curious from using the river corridor at all.

The Solution

The QUERCUS project addresses the spiral of decline which can set in along river corridors:

Diagram – Figure 1:



The project encourages European urban areas to see access to river corridors as an important resource which, with a little investment, can become a cherished community asset, regardless of their scale.

QUERCUS has developed a transferable model to design out crime and fear of crime from river corridors. When applied, this halts the spiral of decline (fig 1 above) and ensures any investment made to improve the river corridor and surrounding environment is effective and sustainable.

Designing Out Crime

Using design as a tool to reduce crime and fear of crime in specific locations is not new. The concept has been around at least since Jane Jacob's work 'The Death and Life of Great American Cities' (Random House/Vintage, 1961). But attempts to apply the principles have generally been concentrated in housing development, and only recently employed effectively in open spaces.

The innovation of QUERCUS is to develop the model to address the issues specific to river corridors and linear open spaces. Having created a model the partners have put it to the test in their three very different urban contexts.

The model in summary: Developed by Groundwork South East London

In order for a crime to be committed three things are needed:

- an opportunity for the crime
(a place and moment where the crime is likely to go unnoticed);
- a victim or target,
- and a perpetrator.

It follows then that there are three possible approaches to designing out crime – to prevent opportunities for crime from arising, to protect the victim or target and to exclude any potential perpetrator from the site.

The QUERCUS model emphasises the potential, in a public open space, to reduce opportunities for crime by creating 'self policing space'. The aim is to create spaces where strangers mix, and informal supervision by many eyes and ears deny the opportunity to commit crime even when potential perpetrators may be present. Only 15% of criminal acts are pre-planned, with the remaining 85% being opportunistic. Removing the opportunity could therefore potentially prevent up to 85% of crime.

Approach 1 – Creating Self Policing Space

Creating self policing space means, most importantly, creating popular, busy places. The potential to use a linear space or river corridor as a route should be maximised, as this alone can dramatically enliven a forgotten space. Connections to the surrounding area are therefore crucial, and may need to be improved. Routes should be as direct as possible, visible and easily ‘legible’ to encourage use. Good signage is important, to, from and even within the river corridor, to build users’ confidence and help them feel safe.

But busy spaces are not necessarily self policing. Visibility within the space is also important. While visibility may never be as good in a linear space as in a large park, sensitive lighting, and pruning vegetation to improve sight lines round corners can enable users to see and be seen – reducing opportunities for crime. Overlooking by adjacent properties can also improve visibility, particularly in a linear space.

Thirdly, self policing space must be well maintained, for neglect generates fear of crime (as fig 1 above shows). Poor standards of cleanliness and general maintenance indicate a lack of care for a space, giving the impression that criminal activity may be overlooked or tolerated. Vandalism and graffiti only encourage further crimes to be committed. A clean and well maintained environment is therefore important in reducing opportunities for crime, by minimising places in which crime appears to be tolerated.

Whilst this is the primary, and most important means of designing out crime from river corridors, it is not the only tool in the box.

Approach 2 – Protecting the Victim

Known in the trade as ‘target hardening’, protecting the victim or target often involves changes to the physical environment. Potential hiding places for criminal perpetrators can be removed or made very difficult or unpleasant to stay in, and seating can be removed where loitering is an issue. Additional formal oversight can also be provided – protecting the victim through regular police patrols, the constant presence of a park ranger, or CCTV. Along river corridors and linear routes it is also important to provide occasional alternative routes – across the river for instance, or a spur to a residential area. This ensures that users are never ‘trapped’ but have a means of escape or avoidance should they feel threatened or unsafe.

Alterations to the river corridor designed to protect the victim should be made in specific crime hotspots and more hidden parts of the river corridor only. This is because the

approach may have adverse effects on wildlife (e.g. removing undergrowth as a potential hiding place) or on the attractiveness or usability of the space itself (e.g. removing seating).

Approach 3 – Limiting Access

The final approach to designing out crime from linear open spaces is to limit access to particular areas, in order to exclude potential perpetrators. The assumption made is that criminals are strangers, and that if strangers are denied access, or made highly identifiable and closely monitored as a result, then criminals will be excluded. To limit access in this way, clear boundaries are required which identify the space as ‘private’, for use in a defined way by a defined group. This approach is often applied to children’s playgrounds in parks, and could be applied in linear spaces with the creation of nature reserves or allotments.

This approach should be applied only to specific, small sections of the river corridor that are difficult to enliven. By providing a dedicated facility to a particular group, use of the space is encouraged. However, it must be recognised that limiting access, in order to exclude any potential perpetrators, necessarily also results in excluding other legitimate users.

The QUERCUS model therefore uses three approaches to design out crime and fear of crime from river corridors, but places particular emphasis on the creation of self policing space. The partners have tested the approach in several locations.

Applying the model

Each partner has applied the Designing Out Crime model in two or more locations along its urban river corridor. The vision, in every case, was to reduce crime and fear of crime *in order to* increase use and enjoyment of the river and its surroundings. However, partners were keen to ensure this was not achieved at the expense of wildlife which, before the project's intervention, could enjoy relatively undisturbed habitats along the river.

In order to keep these three objectives in balance, the partnership summarised its aims as:

- To increase use and enjoyment of the urban river corridor
- To reduce crime and fear of crime
- To improve habitats for wildlife

The partners set about achieving these aims in the following locations:

Partner	River	Project Site	Description of site
Lewisham	Ravensbourne	Cornmill Gardens	New open space near Lewisham town centre
		Ladywell Fields	Existing open space, river hidden
Chester	Dee	Castle Drive	Linear amenity space
		Roodee	Riverside path beside race course
		Flintshire Riverside Path	Undeveloped linear route alongside river
		The Meadows	Riverside wildlife site
		Grosvenor Park	Historic Victorian Park
's-Hertogenbosch	Dommel	Bastion Maria	New open space on western edge of city centre Ecological Linking Zone.

Local Transformation

In Lewisham



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Cornmill Gardens:
New open space and river restoration near Lewisham town centre



Cornmill Gardens restored river and new Community Open Space. 2007
© David Barbour - BDP

Ladywell Fields:
Existing open space, previously hidden river re-routed



Ladywell Fields new river channel. 2008

Cornmill Gardens

Cornmill Gardens is a new community space created as part of the QUERCUS project. The site was previously an underused linear park along the river Ravensbourne which ran through a concrete channel. There was no physical access to the water and the space had little amenity value. An opportunity was identified to embrace the concepts set out in QUERCUS to provide a high quality piece of public realm in the centre of an emerging new urban environment and to set a standard for future public realm design in the immediate area.



After extensive consultation with a wide range of stakeholders the finished park was finally opened to the public in July 2007. Cornmill Gardens has gone on to gain national recognition and has received the following awards:

- ***Horticulture Week Award – Best Landscape***
- ***Civic Trust Award***
- ***British Urban Regeneration Association ‘Waterway Renaissance Awards’***
- ***British Council of Shopping Centres ‘Town Centre Environment Award’***
- ***and has achieved Green Flag status in its first 12 months.***

It has also been included in key regional exhibitions; New London Architecture 2006 and 2008, Civic Trust Awards winners 2008 and Ecobuild 2008.

The park has also become the centre of community events for Lewisham town centre as well as wider borough activities. It has hosted the Lewisham Country Fayre, a Healthy Living Fair and was also used as the venue to celebrate Lewisham’s involvement in the hand over of the Olympic Flag to London. The park is heavily used by local residents, commuters travelling to and from the local transport links, and children



attending the local primary school. There is also a steady stream of cyclists passing through as part of the National Cycle route 21.

Ladywell Fields



Before works, Summer 2006

Prior to the QUERCUS project, the river Ravensbourne in Ladywell Fields was hidden behind railings, and dense vegetation. It ran along the edge of the open space, unnoticed by most park users. The park itself lacked features and facilities and as a result was underused. Perhaps partly because it was often deserted, only 44% of local people felt safe in Ladywell Fields.

Applying the Designing Out Crime model, it was crucial to add interest to the park, in order to create a busy and potentially self policing place. At the same time, we wanted to increase the profile of the river within the park. So we created a new river channel, meandering through the middle of the park. Not only has this provided a focus for Ladywell Fields, but it has also given people visual and physical access to the water, so they really can use and enjoy the river itself.



The new river channel in use, 2008

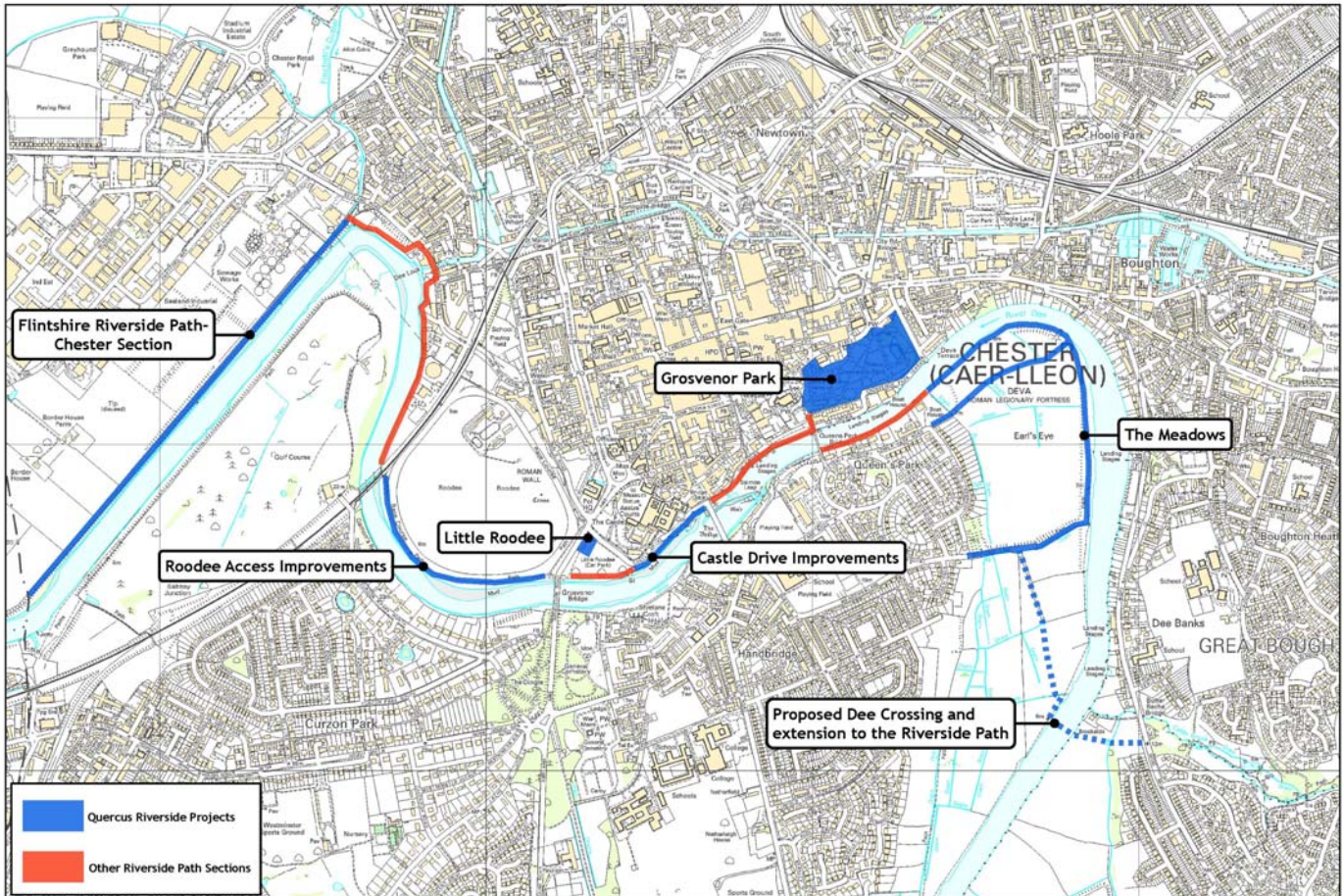
It is often said that water draws people to itself. In summer 2006, before the works took place, an average of 37 people were using the park at 2pm each afternoon. By 2008, (despite the poor weather) this had leapt up to 94. With this level of use, the space can be effectively self-policing, now 78% local people feel safe in Ladywell Fields. The new river channel and changes to the former 'nature reserve' have also brought about improvements in biodiversity.



After the works, summer 2008

In Chester

River Dee Access and Open Space Improvement Projects



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Flintshire Riverside Path Access Improvements



Flintshire Riverside Path – Summer 2006

This is a new route that was developed in cooperation with the neighbouring local authority in Wales with a corresponding section being completed across the border. The route utilises a flood defence bund that provides an elevated cycle path that extends the river corridor network. This provides a major recreational opportunity for residents and visitors to the city by developing access to countryside and low lying land of the river estuary.

Roodee Access Improvements

The historic Roodee Racecourse is a famous Chester landmark situated in a bend in the river. The track is surrounded by an outer path that had fallen into disuse. The strategic importance of this riverside route was recognised as a key link in developing the network of routes within the river corridor. The improvements that were carried out raised the quality of this path to match other sections with the aim of significantly improving access for both cyclists and walkers.



Roodee Footpath and Cycleway – Spring

Castle Drive Improvements



Castle Drive Open Space – Spring 2008

Castle Drive was an area of underused amenity space between offices and the river Dee. This space had been poorly managed for many years with vandalised benches, over grown shrubs and damaged paving. However, it is also strategically placed within the river corridor as it links key open spaces in the Groves and Grosvenor Park with the newly developed riverside paths to the west of the city. Improvements to this space involved high quality surfacing and landscaping to extend the riverside path and create an attractive and welcoming area.

Grosvenor Park

This historic riverside Victorian park was originally created in the 1870's. Like so many parks it has gradually declined through the lack of understanding of the original vision. Poor management and ad hoc changes over many decades have left it tired and in need of major investment. This input would be used to restore many of its original features but to also introduce new facilities that will complement the design. The park has contributed to the QUERCUS project through a major planning exercise that incorporates the design principles into the development of a vision that will carry it forward into the 21st century.



Grosvenor Park – Summer 2008

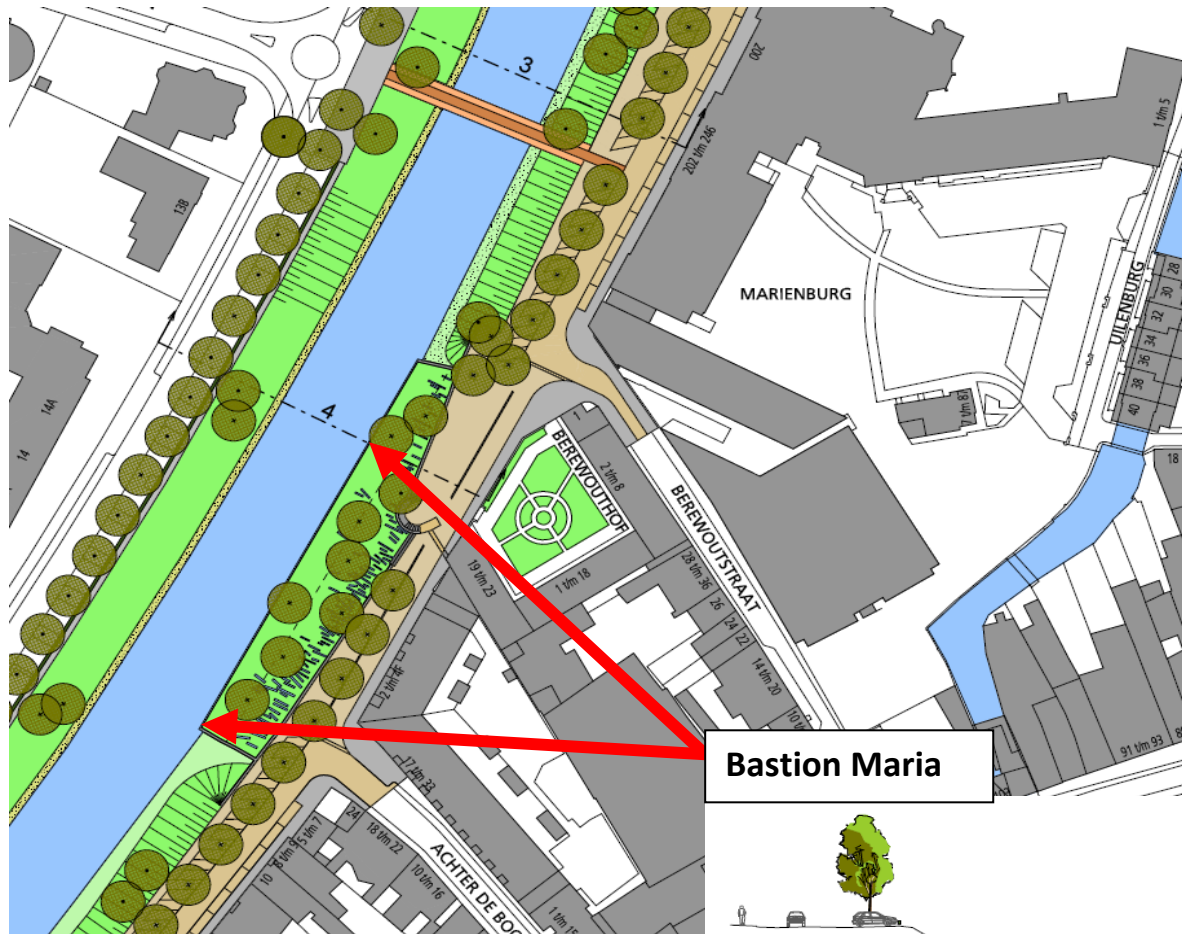
Meadows Access Improvements



The Meadows – Autumn 2005

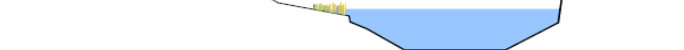
This important wildlife site is only a few minutes walk from the city centre yet it provides the opportunity to enjoy peaceful wetlands, grazing cattle and watch passing boats on the river. The construction of a surfaced path has facilitated access for those less able and families with push chairs on what used to be a muddy track. Increasing accessibility has helped to encourage more users with the paths becoming an increasingly popular way to enjoy the natural environment upstream of the city. “The footpath has really opened up the Meadows, it’s been a great improvement” *Friends of the Meadows*.

In 's-Hertogenbosch



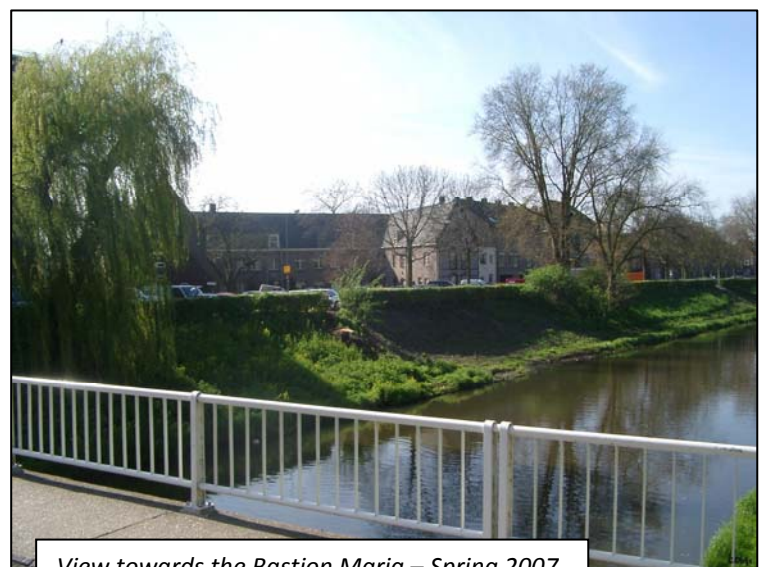
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Bastion Maria

The QUERCUS project site in 's-Hertogenbosch is located on a part of the river Dommel that appears more like a canal, with luscious green steep banks and mature trees. Prior to QUERCUS, the riverside environment was inaccessible and underused. Cars were parked at right angles to the pavement by the fortress walls with hedges on each side creating a very narrow walkway which in places was not even adjacent to the riverside. As a result it was almost impossible to stroll along the waterfront or enjoy the beauty and peace of the river Dommel.



View towards the Bastion Maria – Spring 2007

The city of 's-Hertogenbosch is restoring all of its historic fortifications. In the overall plan, the city wall is viewed as an urban walk; a linear park for the town centre which residents and visitors can enjoy strolling around. The Western side of the city's fortifications is detailed in the plan 'Westwal Keert Weer' (The Western Rampart's Return). The 'Bastion Maria' is the Quercus project site, and forms part of this West Wall.

The creation of the Bastion Maria is an ambitious project. It not only restores an historic feature on the river, but also incorporates a settling tank to contain sewerage overflows following heavy rainfall, which could previously have contaminated the river. On top of the settling tank, a small riverside open space is being created, to give people the opportunity to rest and enjoy the riverside. The park is 1.4m lower than the street level, allowing people to be much closer to the water.



The Bastion Maria – March 2009

The simple, but meticulous layout of the park is appealing. Long lines of sight are created along the river, and a wide, welcoming entrance draws people into the open space, as recommended by the Designing Out Crime model.

Opposite the Bastion itself, improvement works are being carried out to the banks and shallows, to create wetland habitats and wildlife corridors, known as ecological linking zones. The Bastion Maria plays a significant part in enlivening the river corridor, making it a safe and attractive place for residents and visitors to enjoy.

Due to the unexpected discovery of a collapsed section of historic fortification wall, the building works were slightly delayed which in turn has meant that evaluation of the site only began in final months of the QUERCUS project calendar. A full evaluation of the scheme is now underway and will be completed in the summer 2009 when the park will be in full use. The results will be publicised on the Quercus website.

QUERCUS Achievements

The QUERCUS partnership has achieved its objectives. It has

- 1) developed and tested a model of Designing Out Crime which can be applied to any urban river corridor

and

- 2) tested this model in a range of contexts

In so doing, the partnership has transformed eight local project sites from forgotten spaces to thriving places, focusing on improving the common key natural asset; the river.

It has demonstrated that it is possible to invest modestly but effectively in urban river corridors, enabling no-go areas to become cherished community assets.

The partnership actively seeks to encourage others to do the same, making the most of their 'Rivers for People', developing Quality Urban Environments for River Corridor Users and Stakeholders.

An Ongoing Legacy

Not only will the QUERCUS project sites serve local communities for decades to come, but QUERCUS partners have also successfully used the project to lever in additional external funding to continue investing in their urban rivers.

Lewisham

Following the successful delivery of QUERCUS, and its impact, locally and further afield, the London borough of Lewisham was in a very strong position to bid for funds to further improve the river Ravensbourne.

A £2m bid was made to the London Development Agency's Parklands fund to transform the rest of Ladywell fields following the model of Quercus, and to improve the walking and cycling route, which follows the rivers, known as the Waterlink Way. Funding was officially awarded In March 2009 and the new Parklands project is now underway.

The UK's Environment Agency and River Restoration Centre have included Cornmill Gardens in a best practise guide produced as part of the London Rivers Action Plan.

Chester

Chester City Council has further developed the concepts of a green network within the river corridor and beyond by developing a plan for the river corridor that includes an extension of the cycle route to the south east. This will require the construction of a new bridge that will improve access to the river and its surrounding spaces for communities on both sides of the river. To this end partnerships have been developed that have successfully identified £4.85m to invest in the promotion of walking and cycling routes through new infrastructure, training and events. This has culminated in the City of Chester being identified as a “Cycle Demonstration Town” by Cycle England as an exemplar of best practice.

‘s-Hertogenbosch

The Quercus project in ‘s-Hertogenbosch has been instrumental in developing excellent partnerships with other public bodies, particularly the local waterboard, and regional administration (Province of North Brabant) who have a responsibility to create an ecological connecting zone along the river Dommel. These organisations are, together, contributing 50% of the Bastion Maria costs, and are keen to work in close partnership with the city in the future.

As a member of a European network of walled towns, ‘s-Hertogenbosch also participates in different EU funded projects within the Objective 3 framework. We have recently received 400,000 euros of new EU funding for a project entitled ‘Manoeuvres’ in which 10 walled towns from Belgium and Holland are exploring ways to develop their economy by utilising their position as historic military strongholds.

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The QUERCUS Project Good Practise Toolkit is available on the QUERCUS Project Website: www.quercus-project.eu

EU LIFE+ Website: www.ec.europa.eu/environment/life/index.htm

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