

2008 Rally Park, Leicester, with Capita Lovejoy and Kathryn Moore

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Capita Lovejoy Development Study for Rally Park Leicester, with Kathryn Moore.

"The word 'architecture' embodies the lingering hope – or the vague memory of a hope – that shape, form, coherence could be imposed on the violent surf of information that washes over us daily. Liberated from the obligation to construct, it [whether architecture, art, landscape] can become a way of thinking about anything – a discipline that represents relationships, proportions, connections, effects, the diagram of everything."

– Rem Koolhaas: 'Content' 2004

Maybe 'boundary' is the right word, but it may make for a stronger concept if it is about blurred or lost boundaries...or shifting boundaries, whether this is the shift of the boundary that took the River Soar and then what is now the Park into the city, or the shift of boundary between participation and spectating, or between what is garden and what is parkscape, or what is community and what is city. Or between art and everything else.

At one time, Leicester's sprawling industrialisation must have seemed unstoppable, with time-honoured city boundaries constantly shifting outwards to match the speed of expansion – to capture for the swelling city the new canal navigation and river-fronting factories, cheaper coal from the outlying collieries to the north-west, more land for more housing and manufacturing.

As the boundaries of the rapidly industrialising city shifted geographically, the social boundaries reinforcing our individual identities became as tightly circumscribed as the paths and flower beds in the new Abbey Park. The civic, social and cultural conventions that underpinned Leicester's industrialisation during the 19th century were as defensible as the walls of *Ratae Corieltavorum* had been 1800 years earlier.

Today, Leicester is on the move again – its boundaries shifting in ways unimaginable a century or so ago. Established land parcels and forgotten corridors are being reconfigured to improve connectivity, increase porosity and open up opportunity; and social interactions and cultural agendas are increasingly more welcoming of diversity and difference as a basis for developing "identity, confidence and self-esteem" (Leicester's Cultural Strategy).

Rally Park is pivotal to all this. Although a legacy or remainder site left over from the 1966 closure of the Leicester & Swannington Railway, its position on the River Soar invites new thinking about the north/south landscape corridor as a potentially important sub-regional and 3 Cities/Counties resource that can revitalise neighbourhoods, create new destinations to enhance visitor and resident experience alike, and make Leicester a more liveable city into the 21st century.

Rally Park is also an important east/west connector between the city centre and neighbourhood communities via Soar Island. The possibility of extending Soar Lane to the west, first proposed before 1875, can now be realised to the benefit of residents and visitors, encouraging new development and infrastructure.