

AINA CASE STUDY

FAIRER, STRONGER AND MORE ACTIVE COMMUNITIES

Stoke on Trent: Canals for the Community



Through its Reaching Communities programme funds from the Big Lottery Fund have encouraged people to enjoy their local waterways

The North Staffordshire Canals and Connecting Routeways Project carried out a wide range of towpath improvements throughout Stoke on Trent, but its work was drawing to a close by 2006 and British Waterways recognised that a new catalyst would be needed to ensure local people continued to benefit from the changes that had taken place.

In 2007, consultants were therefore commissioned to consult the community and their work confirmed that many canal users had welcomed the improvements. The main barrier to greater use by those who did not appreciate the city's canals appeared to be lack of stimulation, and 80% of those surveyed agreed a dedicated Project Officer would help make the waterways a livelier and more vibrant environment for all.

Consequently, the Canals for the Community project was born to cover the canalside communities alongside the Trent & Mersey and Caldon Canals with the aim of reducing social exclusion and creating a desirable place for leisure and recreation. Funding of £186,919 was awarded through the Big Lottery Fund's Reaching Communities programme for a three year project lasting until June 2011. The scheme is supported by partners including Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Stoke Angling for Everyone, BTCV, Walking for Health and the Federation of Stadium Communities.

A broad range of projects are being delivered, covering themes which include conservation, training, art, interpretation and events. Activities have included fishing courses/taster days, cycling events, themed guided walks and volunteer work to tidy the towpaths. A canalside walking map has been produced to broaden the appeal of the canal and a ceramic artist worked with schools and other local groups.

During the project's first year 44 specific events took place, with almost 2,000 people engaged in canal activity - far in excess of expectations, and confirming the benefits of working with local communities to create a legacy of interest, ownership and pride in the city's regenerated waterways.