

AINA CASE STUDY

HEALTH, WELL-BEING, RECREATION AND SPORT

Coventry Canal: a towpath greenway



Improved towpath north of Coventry canal basin with decorative treatment of a service crossing



One of the varied sculpture installations which form part of the towpath arts trail

Major improvements have made the towpath an attractive link between the city centre and historic Hawkesbury Junction

In the late 1980s Coventry's canal was tired, run down and awaited investment and redevelopment. Parts of the towpath were in danger of crumbling into the water, wildlife was threatened by pollution and few boats travelled towards the city centre.

A number of initiatives have since helped to improve the canal environment and the towpath now functions as an attractive well used route linking urban areas with the countryside around Hawkesbury Junction, where the Oxford and Coventry Canals meet. A detailed corridor study was initially prepared to identify opportunities for change and, with the support of Sustrans, a cycleway assessment of the towpath was later carried out to map access points, route width, engineering issues and boundary problems. These reports have led to many improvements and the towpath has now been widened, new bank protection provided and improved surfacing and signage installed.

More than £1 million has been invested over the last ten years to create a new towpath greenway along four miles of the canal in Coventry, creating a shared cycleway and pedestrian path. This provides a traffic free route for cycling and walking which has proved popular with local people and visitors. The National Cycle Network now follows the greenway between Leicester Causeway, just beyond the inner ring road, and Hawkesbury Junction.

A range of partners helped progress the work, including British Waterways, Coventry City Council, the local Groundwork Trust, Coventry Canal Society and community groups. Substantial European funding was obtained to support some of the work, and a successful bid to the Arts Lottery Fund enabled the canalside to become the setting for an inspirational arts trail which resulted in almost forty public art installations alongside the towpath. This has become a popular local attraction, and the City Council have subsequently funded canal rangers to help promote the waterway environment to all local communities.

Renewed interest in the canal has led to continued regeneration with housing developments and a contemporary footbridge built to the north of the historic canal basin, which boaters once again regard as a valued destination on the waterway network.