

AINA CASE STUDY

SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT

Leeds and Liverpool Canal: Aire Valley towpath



Improvements to the towpath have been carried out as part of a scheme to encourage more students to actively walk and cycle

The Aire Valley towpath walk follows 26 kilometres of the Leeds and Liverpool Canal between Leeds and Bingley and is suitable for all users. It forms part of the National Cycle Network, and also usefully links student halls of residence with the main campus for Leeds Metropolitan University.

The University was keen to promote the canal towpath as a means of travel and a city-wide campaign called UTravel Active aims to “increase the level of walking and cycling amongst staff and students at the University of Leeds and Leeds Metropolitan University, and in communities around the Universities.”

Improvement works were carried out to enhance the towpath surface and remove encroachment by vegetation and dumping of rubbish. Work included tarmac surfacing, removal of steps, new ramps at bridges and better access with new signage.

Access points have been created at both the halls of residence and the main campus. The work complements an earlier scheme linking halls of residence to the Headingley campus.

The scheme was developed by a partnership between the two universities, Leeds City Council, British Waterways, National Grid (the scheme uses a National Grid access road), Sustrans and Cycling England. An ecologist was employed to advise on the planning and construction work since the canal is recognised as an important local wildlife corridor.

Over £400,000 was spent on the improvements, with the majority of funding coming from Leeds City Council and £100,000 support from Cycling England and Sustrans. A commuted sum has been secured for the maintenance of the surface for the next 20 years, and further improvements between Leeds and Bingley could increase opportunities for sustainable travel.

The route was launched in 2010 by the UTravel Active project with opportunities for students to hire bikes and complete a cycle skills challenge. Rachael Elliott, Transport Coordinator for Leeds Metropolitan University said: "All our sites are within easy cycling distance of each other. It's fantastic that improved routes like this one continue to benefit from the clean-up work being done by staff and student volunteers, led by British Waterways, to areas around the canal towpath."