

AINA CASE STUDY

HEALTH, WELL-BEING, RECREATION AND SPORT

River Medway: Medway Valley Walk



The Medway Valley Walk incorporates a range of user friendly features, such as disabled fishing platforms and high quality surfacing

Access for all and a series of circular walks help open up the riverside paths

The River Medway is the longest river and longest navigation in Kent and forms part of the Environment Agency's Medway Region. Once used for commercial trade, the river between Maidstone and Tonbridge is now a public navigation, and the Medway Valley Walk provides riverbank access through the 'Garden of England'. Using existing rights of ways, five shorter circular walks also link directly to the riverside.

The Medway Valley Countryside Partnership, comprising Kent County Council, Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, Maidstone Borough Council and the Environment Agency, works to encourage more people to enjoy and explore the 18 mile walk and its local countryside. Typical improvements have included widening the path, installing bridge ramps and removing stiles. Surfacing work to enable greater access for all has been undertaken in key areas on the edge of towns or villages.

The partnership also secured £204,000 from partners and EU Interreg which allowed bank restoration by specialist contractors, installation of disabled fishing platforms and a large number of smaller access improvements. Local volunteers help the partnership too, and their work includes path clearance and installation of handrails. Relatively inexpensive, the collective result along the path has a great benefit for accessibility and enjoyment of the riverside.

The Riverside Communities Project - funded by the Heritage Lottery, Ernest Cook Trust and the Bernard Sunley Charitable Foundation – developed as 2½ year project (2006-09) which engaged local people with their river in a programme of events, school workshops and interpretative work. An education pack, wildlife and heritage spotter guides and sensory walks were valuable outputs from the project.