

Grand Union Canal: access for all



Towpath improvements between Watford and Rickmansworth have made canalside access easier for everyone, and have included designated bankside areas for anglers



Towpath improvements cater for all users between Watford and Rickmansworth

Access has been improved for a wide range of users on the towpath of the Grand Union Canal between Watford and Rickmansworth. This has been carried out by upgrading the surfacings, installing ramps and interpretation signs, producing a leaflet and linking the towpath to other routes. The work involved a diverse mix of organisations including three district councils, British Waterways, Groundwork Hertfordshire and local disability, angling, cycling and community groups.

Two access for all trails have been developed to help maximise the potential of the canal as a recreation and leisure facility. The improvements have created sustainable transport links in what is generally a heavily congested area and also help fulfil objectives set in the Hertfordshire Local Transport Plan.

The towpath between Watford and Rickmansworth has been given a firm surface suitable for a range of users including anglers wheeling fishing tackle trailers and parents pushing youngsters in buggies. Two shorter stretches are now also suitable for wheelchair users, with well designed access ramps. The rural nature of the paths has been maintained using a crushed aggregate surface that is both hard-wearing and suitably pale coloured.

Rather than widening the path beyond two metres, passing places have been created and anglers provided with a narrow strip of grass on which to sit with their equipment. Simple bays have been installed at regular intervals for wheelchair users to park by the waterside – also enabling them to fish.

The towpath links to existing amenities, such as a Sustrans route, a local water sports centre and popular local paths. This has made the towpath part of a series of pleasant circular walks, and Watford Borough Council has erected street signs to better promote the routes. The paths are well used, and people questioned along the route are happy with the improvements. One canal boat resident says that she now cycles the 'long way round' to work, because it is so much easier and more pleasant.

The works cost around £100,000, shared amongst the partners, with a further £150,000 spent on complementary works. Extras such as local signage and a map were paid for by the local authorities.