

AINA CASE STUDY

FAIRER, STRONGER COMMUNITIES

Dewsbury Water Linked



Community consultations helped generate ideas for a three year waterways project

Dewsbury Water Linked was established to deliver a wide ranging programme of environmental improvements based around the Calder & Hebble Navigation and the River Calder. The BIG Lottery awarded the three year project £174,000 after a series of community consultations helped identify local priorities: better community cohesion, improved health and well being and improved opportunities for employability.

Three local neighbourhoods - Savile Town, Thornhill Lees and Ravensthorpe - are segregated, but linked by the navigation, and the project brought them together using their waterways as a key environmental asset. The work also acted as a catalyst for green infrastructure projects and helped bring improvements to local traffic free greenways.

Towpaths were improved using young people employed via the Future Job Fund Initiative (managed by the local Groundwork Trust) with vegetation management, landscape work and provision of new waterside seats. In addition to physical enhancements a specially employed project officer worked closely with a local boating business to arrange a canal festival which has since grown year on year. This encouraged more local people to become involved, including an arts scheme to cover unsightly graffiti.

Other successes have included improved angling facilities, canoeing sessions, new visitor moorings, volunteer work and the development of a destination plan for Dewsbury's waterways. The ten day Dewsbury Outdoor Festival has been another spin off with partners promoting active recreational pursuits in the area, and 50% of Future Jobs Fund placements found employment within one month of finishing their waterway based work.

Several organisations, including Kirklees Council and the Canal & River Trust, worked in partnership to progress all aspects of Dewsbury Water Linked and a Volunteer Ranger expressed his enthusiasm for the scheme: *“Working as a volunteer creates different opportunities all the the time and as well as developing presentations and completing funding applications I've had the chance to interact with local communities and witness change from the grass roots.”*

The project shows how community consultation can lead to longer term waterway benefits and AINA members are encouraged to consider this approach when planning future improvement and regeneration schemes.