

Vision to revitalise River Leven communities secures major investment

21 January 2019

A project to revitalise the River Leven in Fife as a great regional asset has received more than £300,000 in funding.

One of the first initiatives of The Leven Catchment Project has been awarded £250,000 through Sustrans Scotland's Community Links scheme and £65,000 from the Scottish Environment Protection Agency's Water Environment Fund.

The funding from Sustrans and SEPA will finance feasibility and scoping work, starting this month, for the 'Connectivity Project'. This is one of a series of smaller initiatives designed to help deliver the wider vision for the region and focuses on a 5km stretch of the river Leven at Levenmouth.

Plans include developing a series of paths to connect the isolated communities to and along the river, and unlocking opportunities on vacant and derelict land in the area.

"The River Leven catchment in mid Fife was historically home to several hundred mills and factories, with a proud population of miners and workers in manufacturing industries," explains SEPA water specialist Pauline Silverman.

"But there are serious environmental challenges in the area and the river has become a barrier between communities – disconnecting people and towns from each other. The purpose of the Leven Catchment Project is to achieve environmental improvements whilst working with key partners and communities to maximise social and economic opportunities."

Key partners in the project with SEPA so far are Fife Council, Forth Rivers Trust, Scottish Natural Heritage, Sustrans, Fife College and Scottish Water.

By 2030, the partners' goals include the region becoming a 'go to' destination and tourism becoming one of the region's key economic contributors. The vision also includes the River Leven catchment being a dynamic hub for social enterprise, youth and education, and the region having a natural environment that will support a diverse ecology and celebrate its social history.

Reconnecting people and place is a key focus of the initiative, and plans involve developing a wide range of linkages along the River Leven between the catchment communities, Loch Leven – where the river originates – and the coast.

Community Links is funded by the Scottish Government and delivered by Sustrans Scotland, the sustainable transport charity, in partnership with local authorities, statutory bodies and educational institutions for the creation of cycle network infrastructure for everyday journeys. Since 2010,

the programme has funded more than 500 projects across Scotland.

Karen Ridgewell, Project Coordinator for Sustrans Scotland, said "We are very pleased to be working with SEPA and the other partners in the Leven Catchment Project to develop new links between the many communities in the area. We look forward to engaging with the local communities to help make new paths and spaces for walking, cycling, scootering and wheeling."

SEPA's remit includes improving or removing environmental pressures, including barriers to fish migration, water quality issues and physical modifications to the rivers.

The Water Environment Fund is an annual grant provided by the Scottish Government and administered by SEPA to improve the physical condition of water environments that have been damaged by historical activities. This includes financial support for removing or reducing the impact of redundant structures that are barriers to fish migration, and projects to restore natural river shape and function.

Cllr Ross Vettrano, Convener – Environment, Protective Services & Community Safety Committee at Fife Council, said: "Fife Council is delighted to be a partner on The River Leven connectivity project. This large partner project offers the Levenmouth valley area a great opportunity for positive change. Working together, we will pool resources and skills to ensure this project puts local people and the environment at its heart and that the benefits are long term.

"This feasibility stage, which looks to see how we can restore the river, create a river park with amenities and a path network that links everyone in the area, is very exciting. I look forward to seeing the opportunities offered by this stage of the project and being involved in the design and engagement programme with the local communities this summer."

Rhona McInroy, Forth Operations Manager at Scottish Natural Heritage, said: "We are proud to be part of this exciting project and look forward to working with our partners and the communities of Levenmouth to enhance the fabulous natural assets of the River Leven and surrounding area."

Alison Baker, Director of the Forth Rivers Trust said: "The River Leven is a ribbon of life through the heart of the Levenmouth area and we are delighted to be involved in this work to improve it and the wildlife it supports, for the enjoyment and benefit of local communities and people. Linking the river to local neighbourhoods will provide access for day to day use and will inspire recreational and enterprising use of the river corridor once again."

John Wincott, Environmental Services Coordinator at Fife College, said: "Fife College is delighted to be a partner in this venture, which is enabling our talented students to make use of their creative skills in a live project which benefits the environment and the local community.

"Our students' skills are wide ranging, from creative arts and video production to aerial surveying and graphic design. Those involved so far have

thoroughly enjoyed the experience – many of our students, from the wider College community, live in and around the Levenmouth area, which makes the experience even more relevant.

“This is an excellent example of partnership working where a range of organisations bring a different mix of skills and knowledge together to form exciting results. We very much look forward to being involved in further stages of this very worthwhile project.”

A Scottish Water spokeswoman said: “We are currently putting the finishing touches to a new £4 million sewer pipe to help protect the environment for the long-term in the River Leven. The 190-metre-long pipe goes into Levenmouth waste water treatment works – which serves a quarter of a million people in Fife. We are delighted to support this project to enhance and improve access to the natural assets in the area.”

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