

Major funding boost for River Aire regeneration project

The funding completes a package of £2.3 million that will enable the Developing the Natural Aire (DNAire) project to reconnect the ecology of the river by building fish passes on the last four high weirs below Gargrave, allowing salmon to return to the river for the first time since the Industrial Revolution.

All four fish passes – at Armley, Kirkstall, Newlay and Saltaire – will be installed in summer 2020 and will allow those salmon which already get as far as Leeds to finally reach their spawning grounds upstream of Skipton.

Oliver Harmar, Yorkshire Area Director of the Environment Agency, said:

“We are delighted that The National Lottery Heritage Fund has awarded this money to Developing the Natural Aire. It’s an amazing project that continues our work in further regenerating Yorkshire’s beautiful rivers.

“Rivers such as the Aire, which was heavily polluted 30 years ago, are now home to a rich array of wildlife. The DNAire fish passes will enable salmon and coarse fish species to migrate upstream and provide fantastic opportunities for the River Aire to be enjoyed by everyone.”

Using the return of salmon as a catalyst, the project will be carrying out an extensive community engagement programme that will reconnect communities to the river that led to those communities existing in the first place.

Over the next three years it will deliver a series of events with community partners, including working with:

- Schools, helping to teach young people in river guardianship, so that they understand the importance of looking after our rivers and how STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) subjects are vital
- Volunteers to clean up the banks of the river, removing litter and invasive weeds and making it a more welcoming environment
- Walkers and ramblers to create a series of short self-guided trails illustrating locally important stories

The project will also train ‘citizen scientists’, who will monitor the river and report pollution.

Geoff Roberts, Chairman of the Aire Rivers Trust, said:

“We are delighted to have received this support from The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

“It will help the project and be a catalyst for the renaissance of the River

Aire, making it more healthy, vibrant and valued.

“The link between our rivers and the communities which depended on them has been lost and this project creates a great opportunity to re-forge that link.

“We now live in an exciting time when river wildlife is returning to our rivers and this project offers many opportunities for people to get stuck in and make a positive difference to wildlife and improve our understanding of the area’s important industrial history.”

The project also received £500,000 from Yorkshire Water as well as funding from the EA, Craven District Council, Bannister Trust and Garfield Weston Trust and others.

Nevil Muncaster, Yorkshire Water’s Director of Asset Management, said:

“Yorkshire Water is delighted to be an active partner in this project to revitalise one of Yorkshire’s great rivers.

“It will build on the great water quality improvements which our investment has brought and will remove the remaining obstacles to the return of salmon.

“The project will also enable local communities to build a new connection with their river in a way which hasn’t been possible since the industrial revolution.”

David Renwick, Director, England: North, The National Lottery Heritage Fund, said:

“National Lottery players have told us that natural heritage projects are of great importance to them and high up on the list of priorities they wish to see their money going towards.

““Developing the Natural Aire is a fantastic example of one such project, and we are delighted that through our funding we will be able to aid in the re-establishment of at-risk species, like the Atlantic Salmon and lampreys, to the River Aire.

“We are also delighted that the project also offers communities great opportunities to increase their connection to the river, and in turn, their health and wellbeing, through the varied and exciting programme of activities.”