



River Gaunless in safe hands thanks to local management group

An event to celebrate the past, present and future work of the River Gaunless Local Management Group will be held at the Bishop Auckland Community Fire station on Monday 15th July. The event will be attended by the Wear Rivers Trust, Lancaster University, Groundwork North East and Cumbria, the Friends of Stockton and Darlington railway, the Environment Agency and more to showcase what has been happening on the river since the management group was formed in 2015. There will also be new project announcements and opportunities for the public to share their thoughts and ideas for future project development.

The event signifies the end of a two year project called the River Gaunless For People, For Wildlife Project which was delivered by the local management group through Wear Rivers Trust, Groundwork North East and Daisy Arts to enhance young peoples understanding of the ecological and historical importance of the River Gaunless. The river was known by the Vikings as the “useless” river, but through the delivery of the project, it has been proven to be anything but useless following various research and monitoring activities carried out by over 3000 participants including local school children and young people from around the Bishop Auckland area.

Funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Northern Heartlands and Greggs Community Fund, the project aimed to unite local communities from different backgrounds and cultures to celebrate the history of the River Gaunless and how it has influenced people’s lives since the early years. A total of nine primary schools, one college and seven local community groups from the Bishop Auckland catchment area were involved in researching, monitoring, managing and celebrating the health of the river through a total of 221 educational activities. These included school projects, river safety training, river surveys, practical habitat management, theatrical shows, outdoor adventures and fly-fishing lessons. Schools and youth groups included Cockfield Primary School, Cockton Hill Junior School, Bishop Barrington School, St Andrews Primary School, Prince Bishops Community Primary School, St Wilfrid Primary School, Woodhouse Primary School, St Anne’s Primary School, Ash Green and St Phillips Gypsy Roma traveler youth groups, The Princes Trust and St Helen Auckland Cub and Scout groups.

Nova Talbot, Positive Futures worker for Cockton Hill Junior School said - ‘Before the project started, the pupils had very little experience or knowledge of the River Gaunless however since getting involved, children and their families have been exploring the amazing River which they weren’t aware even existed on their doorstep which for us has been a real bonus’. ‘As well as learning about the river the children have also really enjoyed learning about the gypsy roma traveller community via Billy Welsh who was able to come into school to talk to the children about his heritage, which in itself the children are still talking about that visit now.’

Trish Pemberton, chair of the River Gaunless Local Management Group and joint education lead for the project said ‘In the future we want local residents and visitors alike to be able to walk along the banks and see a river free from litter, pollution, vandalism and graffiti and through the hugely successful education programme we have been able to open the children’s eyes as to what is so special about the river, which will hopefully encourage them to look after and cherish it for the rest of their lives.”

The youth engagement activity was led by Groundwork North-East and involved working with different youth groups throughout the Bishop Auckland area, covering river safety, river management, wildlife walks and litter picks. Joanne Ashworth from Groundwork North-East said “The project has proven to be most successful in engaging children and young people and improving their knowledge of the local area. The youth programme has proved to be hugely successful and the employment of a dedicated youth worker from the Gypsy Roma Traveler Community has ensured that the young people have received the support needed to progress through the programme.’

Wear Rivers Trust senior project officer and project lead for River Gaunless activity, Steve Hudson says “The project was designed to establish the local management group, engage with the local community and raise the profile of the river and has exceeded all expectations in terms of activities delivered and numbers of participants. Our main focus moving forward is to encourage more people to get involved with the work of the local management group, whilst also working with local farmers, landowners and volunteers to carry out practical improvements that will improve water quality and restore instream habitats for the wildlife which depends on it.”

The event will run from 17:30 til 20:00 at Bishop Auckland Community Fire station and will include a free buffet and refreshments. Anyone interested in attending will need to register with the Wear Rivers Trust on 01388 4888867 or email admin@wear-rivers-trust.org.uk.



Photograph



Pupils of Prince Bishops Community Primary School exploring the history of the River Gaunless on Cockfield Fell.

Upcoming photo opportunities

- Thursday 27th June, Copeland Road: Cockfield Fell. Morning only.
- Friday 28th June, all day. St Helens Primary: Cockfield Fell, Copley lead smelting site, West Auckland including Gaunless Bridge
- Monday 1st July, all day, St Wilfred's Primary: Same as St Helens
- Possibly: Wednesday 3rd July, me: St Wilfred's half day in the classroom: Stockton and Darlington Railway and local history.
- Thursday 4th July, Jane and Daisy Arts: St Wilfred's: the river through textiles

To arrange photographer sessions please call Trish Pemberton, WRT education officer on 07410945487.