

Canal College landscaping at The Calders



The Canal College celebrated the start of a major new project last week out on the Union Canal near Wester Hailes.

The Lord Provost of Edinburgh, the Rt Hon Donald Wilson, and Edinburgh Canal Champion, Councillor Gordon Munro, joined young people at their new landscaped 'gateway' onto the canal at The Calders.

The Lord Provost and Councillor Munro signalled the start of the project as the young canal college participants, aged between 16 – 25 years, began work with public realm improvement specialists, Land Engineering, who have generously donated manpower and equipment for the project.

Funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, the European Union Interreg IVB North West Europe project 'Green & Blue Futures', Scottish Natural Heritage and Scottish Canals, canal college has been created by the Scottish Waterways Trust to help tackle youth unemployment in Edinburgh and Falkirk.

Through the pioneering initiative, young people between 16 and 25 years of age, who have not been able to secure a job or place in further education or training, have the opportunity to gain heritage and environment skills through a wide range of practical projects outdoors on the Forth & Clyde and Union canals.

This is the 'signature' project for canal college in Edinburgh, and it is hoped it will create an improved entrance to the 32 mile long Union Canal off Calders Crescent,

Designed by landscape architects Harrison Stevens, the new gateway at Calders reflects the heritage of the two hundred year old waterway and centres on a striking arc of timber sleepers. The new waterside space, which will be clearly visible from the A71, will also feature native woodland

planting, timber walling and reclaimed granite paving.

Marking the start of the work, Lord Provost Donald Wilson said:

“The canal college project is fantastic news for the local community around Calders. It will not only embrace local young workers and provide them with lifelong skills but provide residents and passersby with a vastly improved landscape. Investing in our communities through our young people and environment is invaluable and this project should be celebrated.”

Councillor Gordon Munro, Canal Champion for Edinburgh, added:

“This is a win-win deal. It’s a win for the young people gaining valuable skills to help in their search for work. It’s also a win for the canal and for the community around Calders who will see this part of the canal looking even more attractive for residents and visitors alike. Canals connect and this connection between young people, work skills and environmental improvements show what creative partnerships can achieve.”

Land Engineering’s Managing Director, Stuart Dillett, said:-

“Land Engineering is delighted to support the canal college in this new feature gateway at Calders, by providing accredited resources to support the activities being carried out by the students. By overcoming the technical challenges facing them, the students’ efforts will see improved local access and the wider canal community will gain a new gateway to be proud of. As well as the physical improvements, the most important facets are the heritage and employability skills each student will take away from this phase and from future training courses planned after this. Land Engineering appreciates the learning to be gained from such an initiative and is committed to supporting the training delivered to the young students.”

Danielle Moore, Project Co-ordinator for canal college

concluded:-“Canal College is a unique outdoors heritage and environment skills training programme which gets participants involved in practical projects from start to finish so that they understand and appreciate everything that is involved. The creation of the new gateway will be an amazing experience for participants from now until the project completes next year as they learn about design and drawing through to construction and horticulture.

“We are hugely grateful to the Lord Provost and Councillor Munro for showing their support today and to Land Engineering for giving their help in preparing the area for this exciting project. It is fantastic that they will also help teach the young people that working on a major project like this beside the canal isn't simply a case of just turning up with a spade. It takes a lot of planning, preparation and hard work but the rewards can be huge.”

The young people will roll up their sleeves and work with Land Engineering learning how to scan the ground for any nearby underground service lines then strip the top soil and prepare the ground for fencing.

Following the preparatory works, canal college participants and their volunteer mentors will begin the initial woodland planting and timber fencing to the west of the entrance. Subsequent canal college groups over the next year will be responsible for continuing the project, planting woodland, creating hedges, building fences and creating the central timber gateway feature.

Each canal college programme runs for two days a week for 14 weeks. During this time, the volunteer participants and their mentors carry out a wide range of practical projects and work towards a number of awards and certificates.

Projects include landscaping, tree planting and vegetation management, wildlife conservation, trail creation, canal

engineering, maintenance, management and customer service.

Awards and certificates include the Saltire Volunteer Award, John Muir Award (Discovery Level), Youth Achievement Award and canal college Award.

Towards the end of the programme, participants are also given help with job seeking and CV writing.