

The Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal: Reconnecting the Past to the Future

A 10 year Regeneration Strategy Sustainable development in practice

1. Vision

Our vision is for a revitalised Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal to be an exemplar of sustainable development in practice, driving economic growth, social wellbeing and environmental change in the Cardiff Capital Region

2. Context

The Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal comprises a 56km (35 mile) navigable section to the north, from Brecon to Pontypool, and a further 11km (7 miles) to the south from Pontypool to Newport on the main line and for 6.5km (5 miles) to Cwmcarn on the Crumlin Arm. Widely regarded as one of the most scenic waterways in the UK, the Canal is a nationally important heritage asset that connects the Brecon Beacons National Park and Blaenavon World Heritage Site to the coast, passing through major urban areas of population and growth in the Cardiff Capital Region (Fig 1 - M&B Canal Context Plan).

The northern section of canal is owned and managed by Glandŵr Cymru - the Canal & River Trust in Wales, while the disused section south of Pontypool is in the ownership of the respective local authorities. Navigation was prevented on the southern section by several road crossings built over the line of the Canal and the structure has subsequently fallen into disrepair.

In 2015, a Sustainability Impact Assessment (SIA) was prepared by Peter Brett Associates on behalf of the Partnership. The report set out the economic, social and environmental case for investment in the canal.

3. The Opportunity

Wales has yet to capitalise on its historic waterways in the way that has been seen in England, Ireland and Scotland where living waterways have been used to transform places and enrich lives. Canals have not only become significant tourist attractions in their own right but have been the drivers for economic growth, reducing deprivation and changing perceptions both within local communities and private sector investors.

The Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal is uniquely placed, both geographically and in policy terms, to act as a catalyst for private sector investment and economic growth spreading the benefits of the Cardiff Capital Region to some of the most deprived communities in Wales, addressing key Welsh Government priorities relating to health, poverty and sustainability. Its capacity to create health changes at a community wide level led to its endorsement by NHS Cymru.

The Canal is already the most popular visitor attraction in the Brecon Beacons National Park, and that is achieved with just two thirds navigable. Its restoration and regeneration presents a major strategic opportunity for South East Wales and the Cardiff Capital Region that has the potential to act as an exemplar for sustainable development, delivering significant economic, social and environmental benefits.

Investment to secure its future and encourage economic growth around the surrounding area would add resilience to local economies, while providing cultural and recreational benefits to the local communities, which include some of the most deprived in Wales. Its legacy will be regionally important economic and social transformation and an iconic tourism destination.

The project will cost in the region of £85 million (£20 million for enabling works on the northern section and £65 million to restore the southern section). It is envisaged that the restoration of the waterway could be delivered as a series of work packages over ten years.

Delivering the project over a longer timescale maximises the opportunities for Welsh contractors, and for the inclusion of high quality training and education programmes. We believe this project will be a trail blazer, pulling together health, job creation, environmental improvements, increased economic and environmental connectivity and regeneration under one long term transformative investment.

4. Key Objectives

- **Creating Jobs and Growth**

Changing perceptions of the area as one in which to invest will bring forward the brownfield development already identified and encourage further, as yet, unanticipated private sector investment.

- **Promoting Health & Well-being**

The Canal connects some of the most deprived communities in Wales. As well as providing safe, flat and accessible open space, which helps to tackle the symptoms of unhealthy lifestyles, by changing the environmental and economic context in which people live it will also tackle the underlying determinants of health.

- **Tackling Poverty**

Through education and training programmes local people's life chances will be improved and by acting as a catalyst for investment and tourism, the Canal will both sustain existing jobs and create new opportunities.

- **Reconnecting Habitats**

The works, guided by the Canal Environment Prospectus and action plan, will connect habitats along the canal and with those in the surrounding area increasing their extent and resilience.

- **Creating an Iconic Visitor Destination**

A sympathetically restored, integrated and well-connected canal would provide a high quality visitor destination and outdoor recreational resource within SE Wales, acting as a destination in its own right, providing hubs of activity and creating links with existing attractions including the Blaenavon World Heritage Site, Brecon Beacons National Park, Cwmcarn Forest Drive, Cwmbran Town Centre and Newport Waterfront. Together they will create a regional tourism product, encouraging longer dwell times, increased visitor spend and greater numbers of inward visits.

- **Improving Access and Connectivity**

The towpath is level and traffic free offering an ideal active travel and recreational route. Much of the route is already part of the National Cycle Network. The canal corridor can add significant value to the proposed Capital Region Metro network, providing and connecting sustainable transport links between communities, employment sites and visitor hubs promoting and encouraging active travel.

- **Securing Cultural Capital**

The investment will conserve “working heritage” which is locally, nationally and internationally important and part of the story of Wales as the world’s first industrial nation.

5. Policy Fit

The regeneration of the Canal will be an exemplar of sustainable development in practice embodying the principles of the Well Being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015 applied effectively to bring the best return of investment to Wales. It will deliver cross-cutting outcomes through a collaborative approach contributing to Welsh Government policy and legislation related to employment, tackling deprivation, education and training, health, tourism, transport, heritage and the environment.

Key policies to which the project would contribute include the suite of Welsh Government Bills on the natural and historic environment, planning and the wellbeing of future generations; the Cardiff Capital Region Strategy (particularly the ‘Key Themes’ of Connectivity, Skills, Growth & Identity); the Wales Vibrant & Viable Places Regeneration Strategy; the South-East Wales Regional Strategic Framework; the Welsh Tourism Strategy 2013-2020; South East Wales City Region Tourism Action Framework 2014-2020; Welsh European Structural Funds Programmes 2014-2020; and the respective Local Plan, Economic Strategies and Biodiversity Action Plans of each of the local authority partners.

6. Forecast Outputs

Whole Canal:

- 258 net additional tourism jobs
- £5m net additional GVA from tourism
- 842 construction jobs (84 FTE assuming 10 year duration)

Across Caerphilly and Torfaen (other authorities not calculated):

- 2,129 net additional jobs from canalside development
- £93m net additional GVA
- 3,590 new houses (gross)
- 213,000 sq m of non-residential development (gross)
- 227 hotel beds (gross)

NOT included above was, for example, the development potential at Crindau. Over two phases it would deliver:

- 6000 m² non-residential development
- 200 – 325 housing units
- 260 hotel beds (gross)

7. Partnership and Community

A collaborative approach is being taken to the regeneration of the Canal co-ordinated through the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal Regeneration Partnership. This is made up of Caerphilly, Newport, Monmouthshire, Torfaen and Powys Councils, the Brecon Beacons National Park, the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal Trust, the Islwyn Canal Association and Glandwr Cymru. The Partnership has progressed restoration and improvement work over the past twenty years and delivered a wide range of complementary projects and community events.

The project is strongly supported by local communities in recognition of the benefits and resource that the canal and its restoration will bring. Community engagement and volunteering will continue to play a vital role in the restoration and renaissance of the Canal.

8. Enabling Works

Enabling works will be required to secure the reliability of the structures in the navigable section and secure a sustainable water supply.

9. Restoration Programme

Central to the regeneration strategy for the Canal is a phased programme of discrete but complementary restoration investments made up of individual projects or operations. The programme involves investment in the physical infrastructure of the waterway, key visitor hubs and complementary activities (Fig 2 - Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal (South) Regeneration Proposals).

Extensive engineering works are required to restore the canal to navigation through Cwmbran and on the Crumlin Arm, as well as creating a link to the River Usk at Crindau. This includes re-engineering of existing road crossings, restoration of historic lock and other structures, and re-lining and dredging sections of the canal channel. Outline engineering designs and associated costs have been prepared for the majority of the restoration. Unlike many canal restoration projects however, the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal significantly benefits from the line of the disused section of canal remaining within local authority ownership.

10. Monitoring & Evaluation

The SIA (PBA 2015) and CRT's work with Cardiff University provides the basis for an evaluation framework that will enable the Partnership and funders to monitor performance, contribution to established policy directives, and value for money of investment over time.

Appendix 1 - Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal Corridor Phased Investment Programme

This paper is intended to provide a high level forecast of investment to bring the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal into full navigation and to capitalise on it thereafter. The restoration programme consists of 5 discrete but complementary restoration investments made up of individual projects or operations which are illustrated in the accompanying map. The list also includes key complementary projects which are linked to the regeneration of the Canal and which will be reviewed on a regular basis.

Note:

- Investments can run concurrently or be re-ordered as funding becomes available
- Complementary regeneration projects will be developed as funding opportunities arise, which may provide mechanisms to deliver one or more elements of each investment.
- Costs are estimates only based on preliminary investigation and design work
- The longer the programme, the more volunteers can achieve and the greater number of individuals that acquire skills qualifications
- Third party funding will be essential to complement aspects of the works. Potential sources include:
 - Heritage Lottery Fund – restoration of historic structures, skills development, volunteer capacity building
 - Big Lottery Fund – community and spatially driven programmes such as People and Places
 - Section 106/Community Infrastructure Levy payments linked to developments and revenue payments where the canal is an enabler or forms part of a development's open space
 - European programmes, at least until c 2020, for skills development, growth and jobs, tourism infrastructure, etc.
 - Charitable trusts and donors e.g. education, health, the arts, youth engagement, environment, etc.

The project comprises distinct elements:

- Infrastructure – the basic canal channel and operational structures (£85M estimated cost)
- Facilities – for users of the towpath and the navigation
- Facilities – for visitors drawn to a particular location for whom the canal may be incidental
- Canal-side development for which the canal acts as a catalyst

The last three are dependent upon the first but elements may be required as a criterion for funding applications. In typical canal restorations to date, some of these may complete 5 to 10 years after the canal infrastructure has become operational.

Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal Investment Programme

(Lead body shown in brackets for each element)

A. THE CANAL

Restoration Investment Section I (£20M) - £4.4m of works will be complete by end 16/17:

Brecon to Pontypool – Structural stability and Sustainable Water Supply Enabling works

Projects

- 1.1 Embankment leakage and failure risk mitigation (Glandwr Cymru)
- 1.2 Modify and reinstate historic feeders (Glandwr Cymru)
- 1.3 Install water supply from Afon Lwyd at Pontymoile (Glandwr Cymru)

Restoration Investment Section II (£14M):

North Cwmbran – Restoration of navigation from current terminus at Five Locks to Cwmbran Town Centre canal basin to stimulate inward investment as part of a comprehensive regeneration programme

Projects

- 2.1 Restoration of canal from Five Locks to Cwmbran Town Centre to navigation (TCBC)
- 2.2 Cwmbran Town Centre Canal Basin (TCBC)
- 2.3 Dredging / Water supply (TCBC)

Restoration Investment Section III (£30M):

Restoration of navigation from Cwmbran Town Centre to Newport Boundary

Projects

- 3.1 Greenforge Way (TCBC)
- 3.2 Cwmbran Drive to Tamplin Lock (TCBC)
- 3.3 Raise low level bridges
- 3.4 Pentre Lane
- 3.5 Dredging / Water supply (TCBC)

Restoration Investment Section IV (£11M):

**Newport
Restoration of navigation from Malpas to 14 Locks & Harry Roberts Bridge**

Projects

- 4.1 Fourteen Locks phase 2 restoration (NCC)
- 4.2 Ruskin Avenue lift Bridge (NCC)
- 4.3 Pontymason Lane Bridge underpass (NCC)
- 4.4 Dredging (NCC)

Restoration Investment Section V (£10M):

Restoration of navigation from Newport Boundary to Cwmcarn

Projects

- 5.1 Harry Roberts Bridge and Manor Road Crossings (CCBC)
- 5.2 Gelli Bridge, Thistle Way and Navigation Road Bridge crossings (CCBC)
- 5.3 Dredging

B. COMPLEMENTARY REGENERATION PROJECTS (These are 'Work Packages' that incorporate delivery of components of the wider Mon and Brec Canal Restoration Investments Sections as well as maximising the regeneration opportunities and the potential of the navigable canal sections)

Adventure Triangle Work Package (£5.1M):

Adventure Triangle – Comprehensive programme of projects to develop visitor hubs and tourism investment at Pontypool, Risca & Cwmcarn through the ERDF Tourism Attractor Destination (TAD) Project. Incorporates elements of restoration investment II and V, associated with tourism infrastructure, links to Pontypool town centre, investment associated with housing and skills development.

Projects

- 6.1 TAD Year 1 Programme (2017/18) to include:
 - Abercarn/Cwmcarn Aqueduct (CCBC)
 - Adventure hub facilities (CCBC)
 - Lock restoration (TCBC)
 - Towpath improvements (TCBC)

- Dredging (TCBC)

6.2 TAD Year 2 Programme (2018/19) to include:

- Cwmcarn - Pontywaun lining works (CCBC)
- Cwmcarn turning circle & gateway (CCBC)
- Canal corridor landscaping & recreational spaces (CCBC)
- Cwmcan Forest Drive Gateway (CCBC)
- Green cycle routes (CCBC)
- Access Improvements to encourage Zip Wire private sector investment (CCBC)
- Mynydd Maen / Twmbarlwn (CCBC & TCBC)
- Five Locks basin enhancement (TCBC)
- Pontnewydd Canal improvements (TCBC)

6.3 TAD Year 3 Programme (2019/20) to include:

- Pit Wheel car park (CCBC)
- Pontymoile basin activity centre (GC/TCBC)
- Pontymoile basin improvements (GC/TCBC)
- South Sebastopol basin and village core (TCBC)

Cwmbran Town Centre Canalside Work Package

Cwmbran Town Centre Canalside Development as part of a comprehensive regeneration programme. A public/private partnership

Projects

7.1 Private sector led mixed use waterside development and canal basin (Private sector)

Goytre Wharf Tourism Investment Work Package (£1.32M):

Goytre Wharf – development of fully accessible leisure and recreation site

Joint Project taking advantage of adjacent Glandŵr Cymru and Natural Resources Wales land ownership. Private sector contribution from ABC Leisure Group.

Projects

8.1 Design of facilities co-produced with the communities who will use them (£20k)

8.2. Delivery of improvements to include £1.30m):

- DDA compliant access from towpath to the site
- Adaptive bike trails by the water and in the woods
- Adaptive boats and launch facility
- Outdoor Education facility
- Interpretation and arts package

Crindau Waterside Regeneration Programme Work Package
(as set out in the Urbanist's Prospectus June 2015)

Projects

9.1 Private sector led mixed use waterside development and connection between M&B Canal and River Usk at Newport Waterfront. (Private Sector but likely to require public sector intervention)

Towpath Improvements Work Package includes integration into the active travel and recreational network.

Projects

10.1 Phased delivery of centrack or similar towpath throughout, ideal width 1.5m, minimum width 1.2m. To include DDA compliant access to towpath from highway (CCBC/NCC/TCBC/GC)

Ty Coch Waterpark, Cwmbran Work Package

Projects

11.1 Private and Community Trust partnership development at Ty Coch Waterway Park incorporating restaurant, marina, and community visitor centre. (MBACT/TCBC)

Fig 1 - M&B Canal Context Plan



Fig 2 - Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal (South) Regeneration Proposals

