

Response to the Draft Lower Ebbw and Sirhowy Valleys Masterplan

We welcome the fact that the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal has been recognised within the draft plan as an important community recreational and tourism asset. It also acts as an attractive green travel route for walkers and cyclists. Its proximity to Cwmcarn Forest Drive lends itself to joint visits by tourists and thus joint promotion.

We are however disappointed that the initiatives listed in the Crumlin Arm Action Plan (Caerphilly County Borough Council 2015) have not been carried forward into this plan. Other than those already funded and mostly implemented via The Canal Adventure Triangle there appear to be no new initiatives relating to the canal within this Masterplan. Should there not be mention of imaginative schemes suggested in the past, such as a marina and associated hotel within the former quarry at The Darren, at least this should be listed as an aspiration where the Council will seek to set up a partnership with the private sector and seek grant aid to make it happen? Whilst the potential of the canal has been mentioned there are no specific initiatives, or commitments to seek grant aid and/or partner with the private sector to maximise the canals potential.

Whilst our long term goal is to restore the Crumlin Arm to full navigation, we understand that this can only be accomplished in phases, as and when financial resources can be found through grant aid. In the meantime isolated sections of the canal can still be enjoyed and used for walking, cycling, fishing and navigation. For example with the potential for synergy with the Cwmcarn Forest Drive the section of canal from its current terminus at Pontywaen to the blockage at Darren Road could be used for navigation. A trip boat and/or restaurant boat could operate along this section.

Regrettably, due to road construction the canal has been truncated unceremoniously just after it crosses the Cwmcarn Aqueduct. To enable the canal to function as a tourist facility the canal there needs to be a visible destination to arrive at. Ideally a small mooring basin with an associated cafe and facilities such as boat electricity charging point and water and waste disposal facilities, which would allow a trip boat to operate. This could be constructed at its current terminus or further south to the where more land is available. Although not as good from a tourism perspective as a mooring basin, a minimum initial investment in a turning head or “winding hole” should be provided here and at the current end of navigation at Whysoms Wharf, Darren Road This would enable a larger trip boats to operate. This plan should therefore identify these requirements and commit the Council to seek funding to achieve them.

The recreational, tourist, and ecological potential of the canal is hampered by severe lack of water during periods of sustained dry weather. This lack of water is particularly felt on the eastern end of the Crumlin Arm where the canal bed dries out with resultant loss of wildlife. The plan should commit the Council to investigate additional sources of water such as mountain streams, and/or the enlargement of the Cwmcarn Forest Drive Lake and its use as a feeder reservoir for the canal in times of drought. The reason for the problem is that when the canal was built it had 3 reservoirs, the main one being at Pen Y Fan Pond, which has been severed from the canal by road construction. The other two smaller reservoirs, one of which utilised the water from the Carn brook, have also been lost.

We concur that the canal should be included within this wide ranging Masterplan for the area, as it is an important and integral community valued resource. However, due to the technical and funding challenges that are unique to the canal corridor we believe that an updated Crumlin Arm Action Plan or strategy/subject plan should be produced which highlights and plots a way forward to tourism development opportunities.

Revd. John Collier, Chairman
Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenny Canals Trust
March 1st 2022

About the Monmouthshire Brecon & Abergavenny Canals Trust

We are a local South-East-Wales based registered charity, run by volunteers, which campaigns and works to improve and sustainably restore the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal for the benefit of our local community.

Along with campaigning for restoration, we undertake on-the-ground works and run a successful interpretation centre at Fourteen Locks, Newport, where we have run an “Education through Restoration” project with 60 local schools in partnership with Newport City Council. We work in partnership with the canal owners, Glandwr Cymru, the Canal and Rivers Trust in Wales, Torfaen County Borough Council, Newport City Council and Caerphilly County Borough Council. Whist our main base is at Fourteen Locks, we operate two eco-friendly electrically driven Community Boats at Goytre Wharf Llanover, a beautiful location within the Brecon Beacons National Park.

The canal is a 200-year old historical, leisure and economic resource, running from Brecon to Newport. About 35 miles at its northern end is navigable and a popular tourist attraction, with the remaining 5 miles from Cwmbran to Newport, and 4 miles from Newport to Cwmcarn, left to be restored. The unrestored section is well placed to serve the local urban communities of Cwmbran, Newport and Risca.

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