



Waterways and Wildlife

Managing our natural environment
An introduction to managing our natural environment

Wales' Waterways – Natural Environmental Prospectus

Preface

As the Chair of Bwrdd Glandŵr Cymru (the Canal & River Trust in Wales) I am very proud that we have produced this initial Prospectus on the natural environment values of our inland waterways which has been written with the support of the Welsh Government's Green Infrastructure Capital Investment fund, for which we are grateful.

This is the first step in considering the role that the natural environment of the canals of Wales can and already does play within the wider landscape. Glandŵr Cymru was an early signatory of the Sustainable Development Charter and this approach is in line with the principles of that charter. It has been further prompted by recent legislation not least the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act and the principles of Sustainable Management of Natural Resources.

The Prospectus establishes the framework for this approach to be embedded in the way waterways are managed. For Glandŵr Cymru, there is more work to do, especially the engagement of our own staff and contractors already working on our waterways and the local communities and partners working alongside us to deliver this transformation in the way canal habitats are managed and improved.

Over the next year and beyond, the methodology set out in this Prospectus will be implemented by Glandŵr Cymru across its waterways in Wales in consultation with our existing supporters and, we hope, new partners with similar aims. A start has already been made on the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal. The principles are applicable to all canals and it is our hope that we will be the vanguard for change across and beyond Wales.



Nigel Annett CBE

Chair of Bwrdd Glandŵr Cymru.

Introduction

1. The value of our inland waterways:

Despite being artificial (or at least heavily modified), inland waterways can still make a significant contribution to natural resources for public benefit. Wildlife began colonising the canal system as soon as it was built and the conservation of this 'natural heritage', in partnership with riparian communities and others with an interest in conservation, is a key objective of Glandŵr Cymru.

By their nature canals incorporate a range of habitats which can be important, not only in their own right but as connecting corridors. Waterways also have a part to play in ensuring the resilience of the landscapes of which they are a part. This has been recognised and reflected in previous publications, e.g. by IWAC:

As a whole, the inland waterways system in Britain makes an important contribution to biodiversity and to aquatic wildlife in particular. In the interests both of nature conservation and of the continuing attractiveness of the system to its users, this contribution needs to be protected and, where practicable, enhanced.

And Jacobs :

The inland waterways of England and Wales provide many benefits; social, economic and environmental. The provision of these benefits varies from waterway to waterway, ranging from minor to highly significant.

The baseline benefits have been found to range between £109k per kilometre per year to over £730k per kilometre per year for the key benefit categories.

And is a significant part of the catchment approach to water management being implemented across the UK through mitigation measure targets for achieving Good Ecological Potential (GEP guidance from UKTAG).

However, that UKTAG guidance does not identify the precise mitigation needed at a site or provide design guidance to avoid significant adverse impact on other uses and so opinions on what could or should be delivered are often divided. This is also an issue with traditional Biodiversity Action Plans.

2. Wales' unique approach:

Wales has a unique approach to the sustainable management of natural resources – as set out in the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act and the Environment (Wales) Act - which can overcome these difficulties. Welsh Government has funded the development of the application of this approach to the environmental management on our inland waterways, in line with Glandŵr Cymru's own stated aims and aspirations as set out in our 10-year strategy, to start the creation of a national action plan to improve the environment and biodiversity of all canals in Wales at a strategic level, contributing to Wales' national strategies.

Inland waterways are particularly suitable for the approach set out in the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act because the nature of the canals - comprising natural, built and social heritage - and their reliance for their survival on their relevance and importance to local people, means Glandŵr Cymru's work, to be successful, has to align with the principles of sustainable development. The actions prompted by this prospectus will improve the resilience of the canal network; improve and maintain stocks of natural capital at optimum levels; protect the significant economic benefits Wales' canals provide; and contribute to even greater involvement of local communities in the management and active use of their waterways.

To do this within the principles of sustainable management of natural resources we need to:

- 1) Understand what benefits and intrinsic value the environmental assets of our waterway network can provide; while recognising what limits are placed on delivering natural environmental value by the physical constraints and social / economic uses of the waterways; and so identify what improvements might be practicable.
- 2) Gather evidence to identify the current condition of specific waterway environmental assets and the landscape-scale context in which they sit; to identify what improvements will make the optimum contribution to ecosystem values and resilience.
- 3) Encourage further stakeholder involvement on our waterways to engage interested parties including local people and other potential collaborators in the development of proposals and plans for delivery.

- 4) Embedding the targeted improvements into the work of Glandŵr Cymru, its partners and others working on canals by assigning new local standards for routine maintenance, repair and refurbishment works; and as a list of aspirations where resources and partners may be sought to take forward locally.
- 5) Further survey and investigation at greater detail for specific habitats and species to provide for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of activities and so adaptation of plans in collaboration with communities and other partners.

The outcome will be habitats that have been brought to the optimum condition and local communities will have both the desire and capacity to help maintain them, for instance through community canal adoptions.

This Prospectus is the first step towards that step-change in approach, bringing together the first four requirements identified above by:

- Identifying which habitats and species are of particular importance on our inland waterways; and
- What typically can be done to enhance their value within the physical constraints and requirements of other uses.
- Introducing a practical methodology for surveying the natural assets of an inland waterway to begin a plan; considering local context; with
- A worked example of survey and initial planning of actions for the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal.

The Prospectus establishes the framework for this approach to be embedded in the way waterways are managed. For Glandŵr Cymru, there is more work to do, especially the engagement of our own staff and contractors already working on our waterways and the local communities and partners working alongside us to ensure we deliver this transformation in the way canal habitats are managed and improved and that there is consistency in environmental actions on canals in Wales across all major stakeholders.



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