Glandŵr Cymru
Canal & River Trust in Wales

Waterways for Wales

A prospectus for Welsh canals



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Foreword

Wales is a nation shaped by water. Our canals and navigable rivers are living threads that connect landscapes, communities and histories - from former industrial arteries that powered a nation, to today's blue-green corridors supporting wellbeing, nature recovery and sustainable growth. This prospectus sets out a renewed vision for Wales's waterways: as resilient public assets that deliver social, environmental and economic value for the 21st century.

Glandŵr Cymru - The Canal & River Trust in Wales (the Trust) - is privileged to care for these places on behalf of the public. Our waterways are open, inclusive spaces that bring people together - supporting walking, cycling, boating and volunteering, improving mental and physical health, and creating distinctive destinations that strengthen local economies. In towns, canals and rivers offer a powerful focus for regeneration; in rural and post-industrial landscapes, they provide continuity, character and opportunity.

Partnership is fundamental to realising this potential. By working with Welsh Government, UK Government, local authorities, community organisations, charities, businesses and landowners, we can invest more effectively, align priorities and unlock innovation. Shared ambitions - around placemaking, skills, tourism, active travel and cultural heritage - are best achieved together. This prospectus invites partners to co-create solutions that deliver lasting benefits for people and places across Wales.

Environmental resilience sits at the heart of our mission. Canals and rivers are vital components of Wales's nature recovery network. With thoughtful stewardship, they can enhance biodiversity, improve water quality, manage flood risk and help communities adapt to climate change.

From restoring habitats and tackling invasive species to improving water efficiency and carbon performance, our waterways are practical, scalable platforms for climate action - demonstrating how built heritage and nature can thrive side by side.

Promoting 21st century use of canals means embracing innovation while respecting history. Digital engagement, smarter infrastructure, inclusive design and new forms of recreation can broaden access and relevance. Our waterways can support modern infrastructure use and leisure boating where appropriate, host events and learning, enable active travel, and provide testbeds for green technology. Crucially, they can inspire the next generation to value and care for shared public spaces.

This prospectus is an invitation: to invest, to collaborate and to lead. By working together, we can ensure that Wales's canals and rivers continue to serve the nation - connecting communities, strengthening resilience and creating opportunity - now and for generations to come.



Fay Jones-Poole, Chair
Bwrdd Glandŵr Cymru



Ben Cottam
Director Wales & South West



Campbell Robb
CEO Glandŵr Cymru

Canals in Wales

As the charity with the responsibility of the stewardship of these amazing assets. Our mission is to unlock the potential of our canals in Wales as catalysts for growth, wellbeing, and environmental resilience, supporting the communities and industry of tomorrow.

More than just stretches of water, our canals are living heritage and green corridors that cut through towns, cities and rural areas, offering peace and space to breathe. In many of our towns through which they run, they are the fastest route out to the countryside and opportunities to access rural spaces. They provide places for boaters, walkers, cyclists, anglers, and communities to connect with nature. They are also havens for wildlife, from kingfishers to rare plants, proving the waterways are as vital today as ever, though in new ways. Additionally, canals provide assets which are vital for our economy and important parts of managing water in a climate where the management of our natural resources is paramount.

Canals are a catalyst for economic development and regeneration making a strong contribution to our local economies. In 2022, the Trust's waterways generated a direct Gross Value Added (GVA) contribution of £168m in Wales, with a total aggregate contribution to the UK economy of £474m. In employment terms, they supported 5,815 full time equivalent (FTE) jobs directly in Wales and help sustain more through different areas of the economy. However, we believe that there is much more potential to leverage our canals in place-based plans across all of Wales four regions to aid sustainable economic development.

Caring for this network requires constant dedication. Glandŵr Cymru works tirelessly across Wales to repair historic locks, strengthen towpaths, improve water quality, and create safe routes for leisure, recreation and active travel. Each project ensures the canals remain accessible and enjoyable for millions of people living and working nearby. Our work is supported by passionate and highly committed volunteers from all walks of life bringing skills and expertise.

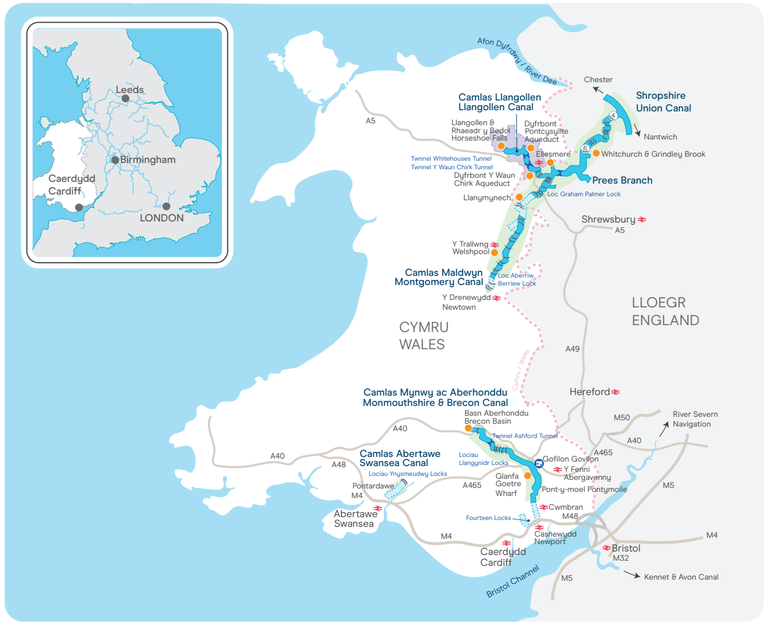
This effort is strengthened through partnership...

As Wales's four economic regions grow projects across the different themes of this document, we believe there is an opportunity to consider now, how canals can complement those plans and proposals. One of our canals is represented in each of the City and Growth regions – each with their own distinctive benefits and representing different opportunities to grow the identity and resilience of those regions and their communities.

With a new government in Wales and new mechanisms for utilising public funding and with re-tasking of government organisations and partners to reinforce and grow the environmental, social and economic wellbeing of Wales, now is the time for a discussion about how our canals deliver against the priorities of Wales and its communities.

In 2022 the Trust's waterways generated a direct Gross Value Added (GVA) contribution of

£168m in Wales



Allwedd map / Map key

- dan ofal Glandŵr Cymru / cared for by Canal & River Trust
- na ellir ei mordwyo / dan adferiad / unnavigable / under restoration
- cyrff dŵr eraill / other water bodies
- loc / lock
- rhes o lociau / lock flight
- twnnel / tunnel
- lleoedd i ymweld / places to visit
- Safle Treftadaeth Y Byd / World Heritage Site
- swyddfa Glandŵr Cymru Canal & River Trust office
- gorsaf drenau / railway station

Canals: Unlocking the potential

This document reflects four important themes - ‘place & prosperity’, nature & biodiversity’, health & wellbeing’, and ‘resilience & security’. These demonstrate the benefit of canals to similar priorities across policymaking including the Wellbeing Goals stated within the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act of 2015.

Canals are uniquely placed to help deliver this shared vision. They provide modern solutions, from sustainable travel routes and flood-resilient infrastructure, to regeneration, boating and tourism, leisure, and community pride. They are an effective vehicle for place-based solutions within the communities in which they are located.

Canals play a critical part across four key themes:

Place & Prosperity

Supporting sustainable growth, boating, development & living

Canals drive economic growth through regeneration, housing, and sustainable transport, making towns vibrant places to live, work, and visit. Through apprenticeship programmes and volunteer initiatives, the Trust also offers the opportunity of an excellent environment for people of all ages to develop and refine their skills and improve their confidence and employability, offering pathways to greater mobility, opportunity, and support. Canals act as attractors for economic growth and development, whether as tourism assets, places for the development of businesses, supply chains and jobs or reinforcing communities. Our canals are loved and important representation of our heritage and provide important touchpoint for approaches to heritage, culture and the Welsh language.

Nature & Biodiversity

Vital habitats & corridors for nature to thrive

Waterways support biodiversity, protect habitats, and enrich green and blue spaces. Collaboration with key partners allows these benefits to reach across the region, creating a more equal and greener future for all our people. The careful management of canals by the Trust ensures the delicate balance of biodiversity is maintained and protects spaces to reinforce ecological resilience.

Health & Wellbeing

Connecting people with green and blue spaces, routes and nature provides benefits for our communities

Accessible spaces for walking, wheeling, cycling, boating, leisure, and volunteering improve activity levels, mental and physical health, as well as social connections. Working together with partners, our canals can help support wider public health and transport initiatives providing places where everyone is able to live well.

Resilience & Security

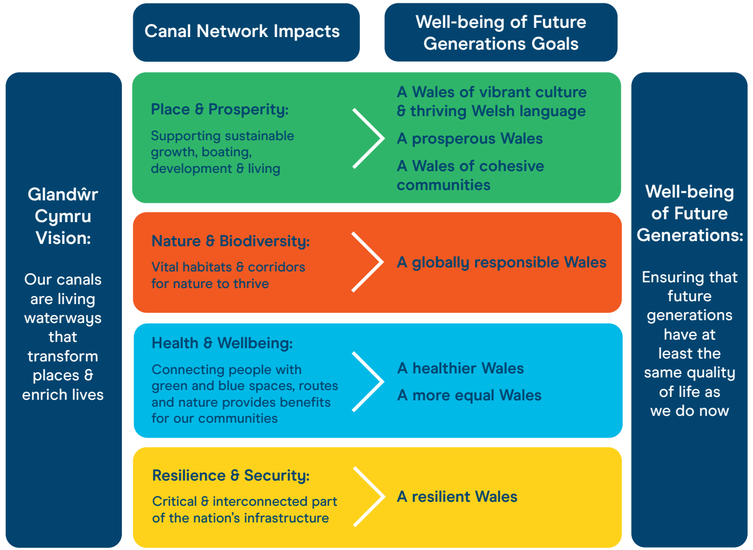
Critical & interconnected part of the nation’s infrastructure

Canals help build resilience by managing, flood risk and mitigation, helping with urban cooling provide climate-resilient infrastructure, help and support sustainable transport options. They can also host critical infrastructure such as cables, pipes for services such as water, electricity and internet fibre boosting energy and communications resilience and options for greater connectivity – particularly in rural areas of Wales. Coordinating with key industry partners ensures waterways are part of long-term planning for resilience and sustainability.

Aligned strategic visions

The Trust’s vision for ‘*living waterways that transform places and enrich lives*’ and its key themes of ‘Place and Prosperity’, ‘Nature and Biodiversity’, ‘Health and Wellbeing’, and ‘Resilience and Security’, strongly align with the wellbeing goals established within The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act.

Our multi-functional canals and infrastructure are already helping to deliver outcomes across all seven of the wellbeing goals as evidenced in the accompanying case studies and can, we believe, with further partnership working, deliver more.



Place & Prosperity

PLACE: Supporting sustainable economic growth, boating, development and living

Canals in Wales play a valuable role in supporting sustainable economic growth by attracting low impact tourism and encouraging local enterprise.

Waterways such as the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal, the Swansea Canal and the Llangollen Canal draw visitors seeking walking, cycling, boating and nature-based experiences. This steady, year round tourism supports small businesses such as pubs and cafés, accommodation providers, boat hire companies and visitor services, spreading economic benefits across rural and post industrial communities while minimising environmental impact compared with more intensive forms of development.

Beyond tourism, Welsh canals contribute strongly to the development of place, helping to regenerate towns and villages and strengthen local identity. Once central to Wales's industrial heritage, canals now act as living reminders of that history, offering distinctive landscapes that communities can take pride in. They are important platforms for the reinforcement of the importance of heritage, culture and the Welsh language. Investment in towpaths, bridges and heritage structures often acts as a catalyst for wider regeneration, improving public spaces, reconnecting neighbourhoods, and making places more attractive to residents, investors and visitors alike. As accessible green corridors, canals also improve connectivity by linking settlements to schools, workplaces and town centres through safe, active travel routes.

With the development of City & Growth Deals across all of Wales's regions, there is opportunity for our canals to act as attractors of investment.

Glandŵr Cymru works not only to maintain and develop our own waterways in Wales, but we also act as a key partner to local government and other partnerships to support the ambitions of local government such as Torfaen County Borough Council's Strategy for its own stretch of the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal, thus helping realise economic development potential. With only 4% of land adjacent to our canals in our ownership, we work to safeguard our historic waterways and vulnerable earth structures and the communities through which they run from any adverse impact from third party development activity In our role as a statutory consultee in the Development Management process.

We also endeavour to ensure that new third party development is appropriately designed and developed to maximise the opportunities presented by our waterways and to deliver wider environmental, economic and social benefits. We have produced specific canal related guidance - Designing for Canals - to help those involved in the production of design guidance, design codes and master planning to set design expectations for development in proximity to our waterways.



CASE STUDY: Montgomery Canal Restoration

The Montgomery Canal is one of the best examples of canal restoration in Britain, combining heritage conservation, ecological enhancement and sustainable tourism. Large sections are gradually being restored sensitively to protect rare habitats while re-introducing navigation.

The restoration, which is developing a regionally significant asset along the mid-Wales-Shropshire border has been supported by UK Government Levelling Up Funding, in partnership with Powys County Council, National Lottery Heritage Fund and the Mid Wales Growth Deal. The project is also one of nine priority projects identified by the Marches Forward Partnership.

This project effectively balances internationally important biodiversity with heritage recovery providing a canal corridor enhanced as a linked nature network supporting freshwater species as well as developing visitor access increased in a controlled and sustainable way. The restoration is providing opportunities for local volunteering, skills training and community engagement creating an asset not just of local importance but an attractor for tourism and a benefit for the local economy.

The Montgomery Canal restoration is an exemplar of partnership and working centred around developing 21st century use and protection of our historic waterways and habitats and will provide future opportunities to develop new partnerships with private, public and third sector partners to ensure the realisation of the full restoration.

The Canal's restoration is an example of ensuring long term environmental resilience while supporting rural economies and in keeping with preventative, place based investment consistent with the priorities of the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

Among the individual projects are the restoration of the Grade II* listed historic Vyrnwy Aqueduct, a replacement road bridge across the canal at Carregohofa Lane and the now-completed Wern Pond Nature Reserve, opened in November 2025.

There is much more exciting work for us to undertake on this project and securing future funding support will help deliver the entirety of its benefit for the Region. However, the realisation of this important restoration will create a significant asset which will be an important magnet for tourism and a growth opportunity for the mid Wales economy. Its development has also created important community partnerships which will help secure the long-term stewardship of the Montgomery Canal.



Carregohofa Lane



Wern Pond Nature Reserve

CASE STUDY: Pontcysyllte Aqueduct & Canal World Heritage Site

The Trust works closely with a wide range of partners to care for and protect the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Llangollen Canal World Heritage Site, recognising that its significance extends beyond the waterway itself. The Aqueduct is one of the most internationally recognisable structures in Wales and testament to the engineering determination and innovation of the 18th canal pioneers.

While the 220 year-old engineering marvel of the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct is renowned the world over and is an icon of Wales, it is part of the wider UNESCO World Heritage Site comprising 11 miles of canal and historic structures which not only represent a unique heritage asset but also a huge attractor of domestic and international tourism, attracting up to half a million visitors a year and providing an iconic location for many TV and film productions including most recently the hit movie, Peaky Blinders: The Immortal Man

As the navigation authority and major land manager, the Trust collaborates with local authorities, particularly Wrexham County Borough Council and Denbighshire County Council, as well as Cadw, Natural Resources Wales and Welsh Government. These organisations share responsibility for planning, conservation and environmental protection, helping to ensure that decisions affecting the site respect its Outstanding Universal Value and long term sustainability.

Partnership working is especially important in the conservation and maintenance of the historic structures that make the site internationally significant.

The Trust leads on the upkeep of the canal, aqueduct, towpaths and associated engineering features, while working with heritage specialists, conservation bodies including Cadw and UNESCO advisers to apply best practice in historic preservation. Regular condition surveys, specialist repairs and carefully managed water control are coordinated through agreed management plans, ensuring that conservation work balances heritage protection with the needs of boaters, walkers and cyclists.

The Trust also works with partners to support local communities, visitors and the wider economy around the World Heritage Site. This includes collaboration with tourism organisations, community groups, volunteers and local businesses to promote responsible access, learning and enjoyment of the canal. Joint initiatives such as education programmes, interpretation, events and biodiversity projects help people understand the site's global importance while encouraging stewardship at a local level. Through these partnerships, the Trust ensures that Pontcysyllte remains protected, well managed and valued by current and future generations.

With Wrexham's bid for City of Culture Status in 2029, we feel that the canal and this World Heritage landscape provides strength to that bid and an opportunity to future develop it as an asset for heritage and culture. Our World Heritage Site Heritage Placemaking and the Arts programme brought together four canal corridor communities: Chirk, Froncysyllte, Trevor and Cefn Mawr, through a collaborative, community-led approach involving Community Advisory Groups, a Heritage & Conservation Group, local councils, Wrexham CBC, primary schools, a community wellness organisation and many community groups and local partners.

Across the last two years, the programme combined creative engagement, heritage research and placemaking to uncover and celebrate lesser-known local histories, delivering and enabling community projects and events, community-led trails and interpretation, and wellbeing initiatives including the 'Bench of Hope'. These activities supported mental health and emotional wellbeing through creative expression and open conversations, strengthened social connection and belonging, and encouraged more active use of canals and green space for physical wellbeing. Residents reflected that the programme "gives meaning to the place" and helped them discover stories "about the place I've lived in my whole life," while also creating opportunities to connect, reflect and build confidence through shared experiences.



Our programme supported sustainable economic growth by testing and demonstrating how heritage-led placemaking can increase visitor dwell time, boost local spending, and create opportunities for small businesses and traders. Through initiatives such as floating markets, water taxi trials, and community-led events, the canal was activated as an economic asset, supporting boating activity, encouraging new enterprise, and exploring future business opportunities linked to the waterway.

This approach also identified practical development needs, from infrastructure and access to the potential reuse of heritage buildings, helping to lay the groundwork for long-term regeneration that integrates tourism, community life and local enterprise. By embedding community leadership and aligning with wider strategic plans, the project supports a more sustainable model of living waterways - where economic growth, heritage preservation, boating, and everyday community use are mutually reinforcing.

The next phase aims to develop a long-term community-led Heritage Placemaking Strategy and Plan, connecting the four communities as distinct but linked destinations, expanding wellbeing, education and volunteering programmes, and supporting a more equitable model of sustainable tourism rooted in community leadership.



CASE STUDY: The Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal

Regularly cited as one of the most beautiful canals in the UK, The Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal – or Mon & Brec' as it's lovingly known - exists as one of Wales's most important surviving industrial waterways. Built in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the canal played a crucial role in transporting iron, coal, limestone, and agricultural goods from the Brecon Beacons to South Wales industry. Its continuing use preserves physical evidence of early engineering - including locks, bridges, and aqueducts - and helps tell the story of industrialisation in rural Wales. As a largely intact contour canal, it offers an authentic connection to the region's social and economic history that truly defines living heritage

The canal also has strong environmental value, acting as a linear nature corridor through the Usk Valley and the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park. Its calm waters and banks support aquatic plants, invertebrates, birds, bats, and other mammals such as otter, contributing to local biodiversity and landscape character. The canal helps with water management, providing irrigation for agriculture and feeding local water systems, and it encourages conservation & enhancement of surrounding green spaces for people as well as wildlife. At a time of increasing environmental pressure, the canal is a valuable example of historic infrastructure supporting modern ecological resilience.

The Mon & Brec also delivers substantial social and economic benefits. It is a major recreational asset for the region, attracting walkers, cyclists, boaters, anglers, and tourists year-round, which supports local businesses such as pubs, accommodation providers, and hire services. The Mon & Brec is the most visited attraction in the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park and delivers up to £30million of value to the regional economy annually.

In 2026, the canal's future and resilience was boosted by a grant allocation from Welsh Government for up to £2million over five years for the funding of necessary support water to feed the canal. This allocation recognised the essential role of the canal and its value to the region and to Wales and safeguards the future of this amazing asset for navigation, active travel, wellbeing and the economy.

With the development of the Cardiff Capital Region, there is opportunity to consider and boost the important role of the canal as an attractor for tourism and an asset for rural economic development to ensure that the benefits of the Capital Region and associated investment reach into rural communities within the region.

The Mon & Brec is the
most visited attraction
in the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park and delivers up to
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of value to the regional economy annually



PROSPERITY: Employability and skills

Our canals provide important opportunities to promote and support employability and skills by providing a wide range of vocational and entry level opportunities across heritage, construction, tourism and environmental management.

The maintenance and restoration of historic waterways relies on skilled trades such as engineering, bricklaying, carpentry and grounds maintenance, helping people develop practical, transferable skills. There are opportunities for canal projects to offer apprenticeships, traineeships and volunteering pathways, enabling individuals - including young people and those returning to work - to build confidence, gain qualifications and improve their long term employment prospects.

In addition, Welsh canals stimulate local employment through tourism and community enterprise. Boating, hospitality, visitor services and events along canals create jobs while encouraging entrepreneurship and customer service skills.

At the same time, canals act as outdoor learning environments, supporting training in conservation, biodiversity monitoring and green skills aligned with Wales's sustainability and wellbeing goals.

We believe that there is further opportunity to grow partnerships with skills providers across Wales and work with Regional Skills Partnerships to investigate how canals can be used to grow skills and training and support employability.

Volunteering

Volunteering acts as an accessible entry point into employment, particularly for underrepresented groups, providing structured progression into skills and careers. It is a core delivery mechanism, with participants contributing to heritage conservation, events, visitor services and community engagement. Volunteers receive training, supervision and support, enabling them to build confidence and gain practical experience in heritage, engagement and environmental work. Participation in canal projects provides opportunities to develop employability skills, gain real-world work experience and build pathways into further training or employment, especially STEM and green careers.

Youth Fellowship

The Trust is experienced in delivering youth initiatives including a Youth Fellowship Programme. This programme builds confidence, resilience and life skills; introduces young people to career pathways linked to waterways, heritage and environment; and supports social action and civic engagement.

Current delivery is primarily in England but provides a proven model that could be adapted for Wales. These programmes complement wider Learning & Skills activity, which already engages young people in outdoor learning, develops employability and soft skills, and raises awareness of career opportunities linked to waterways.

Apprenticeships

The Trust delivers established apprenticeship programmes that provide structured, accredited routes into employment across waterway operations, construction, heritage, the environment, and community engagement. These include roles such as Construction Apprentices, Waterway and Environment Operatives and Cultural Learning and Participation positions, designed to build practical skills and support progression into long-term careers within the Trust.

Apprenticeships play a key role in widening access, addressing barriers to entry and creating clear career pathways linked to heritage, environment and community development. There is real opportunity to work in partnership to further develop this proposition in Wales.

Nature & Biodiversity

Vital habitats & corridors for nature to thrive

The UK is one of the most nature depleted countries globally, facing severe biodiversity loss, habitat fragmentation, low nature connectedness, and wellbeing inequalities.

Our canal network, positioned in areas of high nature deficit, has been undervalued for its ecological role. These corridors host diverse, interconnected habitats such as towpaths, banks, and water edges. These fill urban green voids, countering fragmentation from urbanisation and climate pressures, and linking fragmented landscapes. With targeted investment and partnerships canals can:

- Connect towns and cities as vital wildlife and people corridors
- Create and enhance habitats for threatened and protected species
- Function as an inclusive, inspiring 'linear park' for local communities
- Support environmental education, stewardship, and greater nature connectedness

By developing and enhancing these waterways, we can mend ecological fractures, enrich urban settings, and deliver benefits for biodiversity, health, and equity, directly supporting Wales's vision for a greener, more resilient, and nature-rich country.

The Nature Recovery Action Plan (2026) launched in March 2026 by the previous Welsh Government sets out a framework to reverse biodiversity loss, strengthen ecosystem resilience and drive coordinated action across public bodies, communities and partners. Local authorities are also subject to the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 Section 6 duty to maintain and enhance biodiversity, and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, which requires sustainable development and long-term environmental improvement. Our canals give us the opportunity to contribute to all of these strategic policy priorities

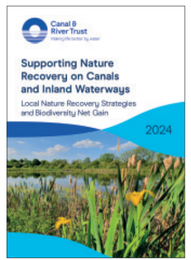
Restoration of our canals such as the Montgomery Canal for instance, serves to improve ecosystems and remove invasive species such as Water Soldier. Our canals and waterways create wetlands and aquatic habitats supporting rare and protected species and improve freshwater ecosystem resilience and biodiversity.

Canal corridors also function as continuous habitat linking urban and rural areas and through the maintenance of towpaths provide easy access for the public to those habitats. Furthermore, they currently contribute – and have the capacity to further contribute - to Resilient Ecological Networks (RENs) identified in Welsh policy.

Our canals support many different habitat types:

- Open water
- Heathland
- Woodland
- Orchards
- Grassland
- Hedgerows
- Aquatic fringe (canal banks)

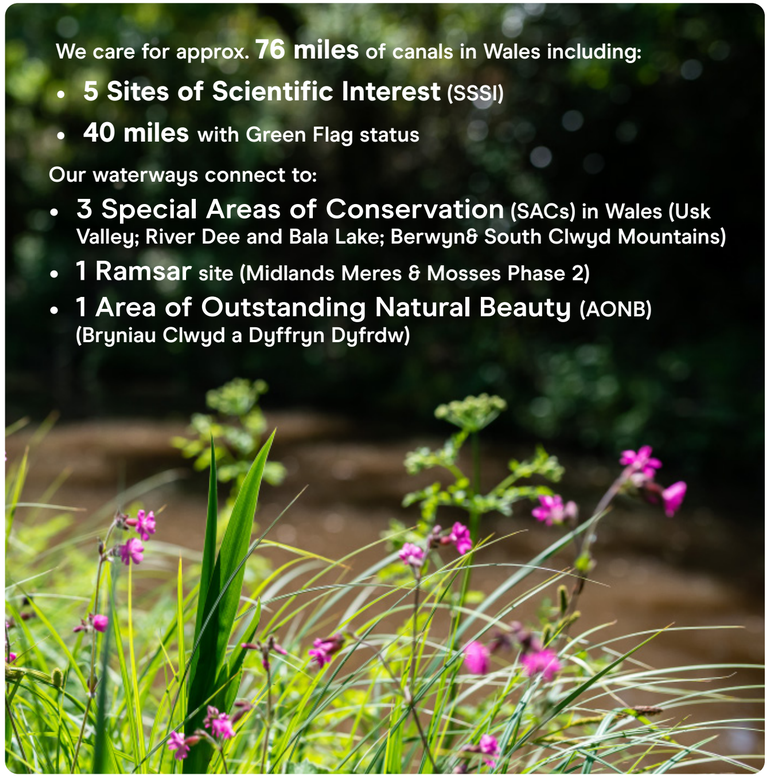




Glandŵr Cymru's specialised and sensitive approach to habitat creation and monitoring – balancing operation and environmental priorities and using GIS to map habitat helps to contribute to the growth of a data-driven approach to decision making – not just for our own use, but for aligning with the priorities of partners across government and related agencies.

The Trust plays a critical role in delivering biodiversity outcomes in Wales by translating national policy into practical, place-based action – centered on place and community. Through habitat restoration, ecological connectivity, partnership working and community engagement, Glandŵr Cymru supports both Welsh Government ambitions and local authority duties, making it a key delivery partner in nature recovery.

There has been, on average, a **20% decrease** in Welsh wildlife since 1994, with **18% of species threatened** by extinction.



CASE STUDY: Camlas Maldwyn Nature Networks

The Montgomery Canal is a nationally and internationally important Site of Special Scientific Interest and Special Area of Conservation, valued for its rare aquatic plants and as an accessible route for local communities. However, declining water quality, sediment build-up and climate pressures were putting both its ecological condition and community use at risk.

With support from the Nature Networks Fund, delivered by the Heritage Fund on behalf of the Welsh Government, Glandŵr Cymru delivered a coordinated programme of dredging, habitat restoration and access improvements between Welshpool and Newtown. Over a 2.5km section, approximately 600m³ of sediment was removed, improving water flow, reducing nutrient levels and restoring conditions for rare species.

The project also introduced preventative measures, including leaky dams and bank protection, to reduce future pollution and flood impacts, alongside habitat management at nearby designated sites. Improved access at Wern Nature Reserve and new bilingual interpretation panels have made it easier for more people to connect with the canal, while supporting long-term stewardship.

This targeted investment has strengthened the canal's ecological resilience, safeguarded navigation for the Heulwen Trust's accessible boating, and enhanced its role as a shared space for nature, wellbeing and local communities.

> "We warmly welcome the completion of these vital works on the Montgomery Canal. This investment protects the future of our trips and the people who rely on them. By improving water quality and keeping the channel clear, the project ensures our adapted boat can continue to travel safely and smoothly along this beautiful stretch of canal. These enhancements will help us continue opening up the Montgomery Canal to those who need it most."
>
> Gareth Thomas, The Heulwen Trust



CASE STUDY: Connecting Children & Young People with Nature

The Trust's learning programmes connect people with nature by using our canal network in Wales as living outdoor classrooms, combining hands on, place based learning with wellbeing, creativity and environmental action. Through programmes such as Explorers, children and young people take part in immersive outdoor learning experiences - ranging from fieldwork and habitat exploration to creative and practical activities - which help them understand their place in the natural environment and build lasting relationships with blue and green spaces.

This approach is reinforced through a structured journey from awareness to action, where classroom learning is paired with waterside visits and opportunities for social action, encouraging participants to develop confidence, resilience and pro environmental behaviours while improving their health and wellbeing.

This approach is delivered through a range of locally embedded programmes that bring these principles to life. In Torfaen, our Community Roots programme centres on the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal, combining outdoor learning, paddling, forest school and creative projects with schools and communities to build regular, meaningful engagement with nature and a stronger sense of local stewardship. In North Wales, heritage and learning activity at the Pontcysyllte World Heritage Site brings together schools and communities through trails, creative engagement and biodiversity projects, helping people better understand and value the natural and historic environment while spending more time outdoors.

Together, these programmes demonstrate how our learning offer in Wales embeds nature connection through regular, inclusive and experiential engagement with waterways as everyday community assets.

Our STEM learning programme connects young people's classroom learning to practical applications in engineering, environmental science and water management. Through curriculum linked workshops, site visits and outreach, it builds confidence, raises awareness of STEM careers and challenges perceptions about who can access them. Critically, the programme provides clear skills development pathways, from early engagement and hands on experiences through to work experience, placements and apprenticeships, giving young people exposure to and real roles in areas such as ecology and environmental science, as well as engineering and hydrology, supporting progression into green and technical careers while helping to diversify the future workforce.





Health & Wellbeing

Connecting people with blue spaces, routes & nature

Canals play a valuable role in supporting health and wellbeing in Wales by providing accessible, peaceful spaces where people can be active, relax, and connect with nature.

Towpaths along canals encourage everyday physical activity such as walking, cycling, and running, helping to improve fitness and reduce the risk of long-term health conditions. Calm water, wildlife, and green corridors offer restorative environments that support good mental health, reducing stress, anxiety, and social isolation. Our canals also bring communities together by creating shared public spaces for volunteering, social interaction, and local events, which strengthens social connections and a sense of belonging. By offering free, inclusive spaces close to where people live, Welsh canals contribute to healthier lifestyles and improved wellbeing for individuals and communities alike.

However, we feel there is much more potential to grow the wellbeing benefit of these amazing spaces. Closer, embedded partnership with Local Health Boards, local authorities, third sector partners and community groups could embed canals into social prescribing, prevention and active travel programmes, while celebrating Welsh culture and biodiversity along waterways would enhance their restorative value and strengthen people's connection to place.



Case Study: Torfaen Community Roots

Our Community Roots project in Torfaen is a place-based, grassroots programme that strengthens connections between local people and the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal, centred around the community hub at Pontymoile Basin near Pontypool.

Over the last four years, we have engaged tens of thousands of people, supporting residents to explore the Canal's heritage, improve wellbeing, and develop a stronger sense of pride in their local environment, while ensuring the canal is recognised as a shared community asset that belongs to everyone. Working in partnership with community organisations, schools and voluntary groups, the project engages people who may not traditionally access waterways, removing barriers linked to inequality and isolation and embedding a more inclusive, community-led approach to delivery.

Through a diverse programme of volunteering, creative projects, outdoor learning and skills development, Community Roots has transformed underused canal-side spaces into active, welcoming environments. This has included the development of a sustainable volunteer base, the creation of a community canoe club and paddling opportunities, and the establishment of a forest school and outdoor learning space, alongside a wide range of regular activities that bring people together and encourage ongoing participation.

These interventions have widened access to green and blue spaces, supported confidence and skills development, and enabled people of different ages and backgrounds to influence how the canal corridor is used and cared for, fostering long-term community ownership and environmental stewardship.

This has been delivered through a range of practical, locally-led projects and partnerships, including community paddling sessions and open days, guided heritage walks, bushcraft and forest school programmes, and canal-side arts initiatives such as school-led mural projects. The programme has worked closely with local schools, youth groups, Torfaen County Borough Council, local colleges, referral centres, community councils and partners such as Sports Wales, Canoe Wales and grassroots organisations, while also engaging volunteers, families and individuals from neighbouring communities including Pontypool and Cwmbran. Through these activities, Community Roots has brought together people of all ages and backgrounds, supporting young people to build skills and confidence, creating opportunities for social connection.

Building on this strong foundation, Community Roots Torfaen now forms part of the Urban Nature Connections programme, which scales this proven model into a longer-term, nationally co-ordinated framework supported by Postcode Lottery players and funded by Worwin UK Foundation and Glandŵr Cymru. Through this transition, the project continues to deepen its impact by strengthening nature connection, improving health and wellbeing, and supporting communities to take an active role in protecting and enhancing their local environment. This approach ensures that the canal is embedded more fully into everyday community life, delivering lasting social and environmental benefits while supporting the Trust to care for the waterway in partnership with the communities it serves.

CASE STUDY: Actif North Wales Innovation Project

The Innovation Project, funded by Actif North Wales and delivered by the Trust, was established to test and learn how to break down barriers to physical activity for young women aged 11–25 in the Llangollen and Wrexham area, many with little prior connection to canals or organised activity. Using the local canal, towpaths and waterways, the project created welcoming opportunities over six months for around 100 participants to be active, connect socially and spend time in nature and demonstrated how Wales's canal network can be a catalyst for improving the health, confidence and wellbeing of young women.

Through low-pressure, taster-style sessions including canoeing, paddleboarding, walking and bushcraft, the programme successfully removed key barriers such as cost, confidence and commitment, creating accessible routes into physical activity.

A co-designed approach ensured delivery was shaped by young women themselves. Early consultation found a clear demand for flexible, social activities and affordable entry points, leading to a model that prioritised inclusivity, safety and enjoyment.

Impact has been significant, with participants reporting increased confidence, improved wellbeing and a stronger connection to their local environment. The canal has been repositioned from an under-used asset to a valued space for recreation, identity and community belonging.

These experiences are already translating into longer-term behaviour change. Many young women expressed a desire to return independently with friends or family, supporting sustainable habits and ongoing engagement with physical activity.

Delivered in partnership with local organisations, schools and community groups, the project has also strengthened local infrastructure for youth engagement, creating a collaborative model that can be scaled across Wales.

The Innovation Project shows how canals can unlock healthier, more confident communities, connecting young people to nature, to each other and to new possibilities.

Participant quotes highlight the depth of impact this project has had:

> "I got told I was strong today"

> "This is way better than being at home"

> "The most fun I've had in a couple of weeks"

> "Will we get to come back?"

Resilience & Security

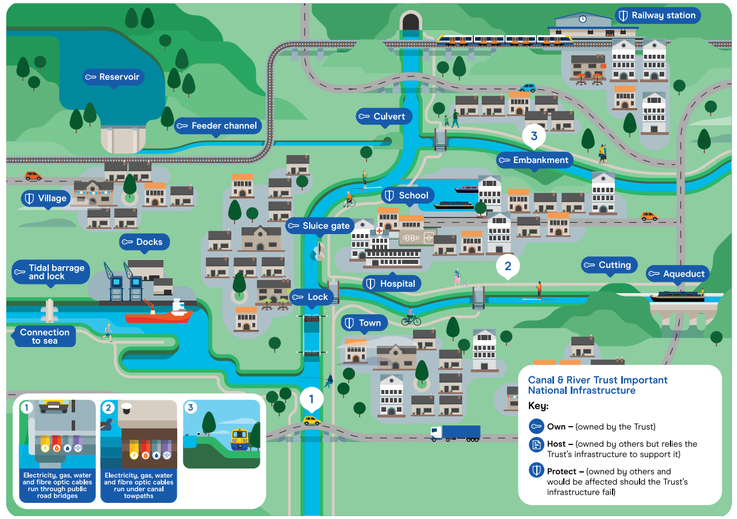
Critical & interconnected part of the nation's infrastructure

Canals in Wales have an important role in supporting resilience by contributing to climate adaptation, water management, and sustainable travel.

As interconnected water systems with rivers and streams, canals can help manage water levels by storing excess rainfall and slowly releasing it, reducing flood risk during extreme weather events while supporting water availability during drier periods. They also support ecological resilience by providing habitats and wildlife corridors, helping biodiversity adapt to environmental change assisted by careful stewardship of the work of our employees and volunteers. In addition, well maintained canals can offer low carbon transport and recreation routes, encouraging walking, cycling, and local tourism, which strengthens local economies and community wellbeing - key components of long term resilience.

Canals play a critical and interconnected part of the nation's infrastructure. They can help to support climate resilience by storing and moving water to help mitigate urban flooding and manage drought risks. However, our ageing canal network is under immense strain from the impacts of severe and increasingly frequent weather events. A major challenge is the rising frequency and duration of extreme weather events, both floods and droughts, which affect the resilience of our structures and habitats, as well as our customers and waterway-dependent businesses.

The national canal network is made up of thousands of connected and interdependent structures, from aqueducts and reservoirs to locks and culverts, all monitored and maintained to keep canals open, vibrant, and protective of the communities they serve. This infrastructure also carries vital services and communications such as full-fibre broadband beneath towpaths, while canal bridges often support critical electricity, gas, and water lines, underscoring the structures' importance to local communities and the wider region.



Resilience & Security

CASE STUDY: Water Transfer – Llangollen

The Llangollen Canal water transfer plays a strategically important role in distributing water from the River Dee catchment across parts of North West England and the Midlands. Originally constructed as a navigation, among its many 21st century uses, the canal has also evolved into a vital piece of regional water infrastructure, delivering a wide range of environmental, social and economic benefits.

The Llangollen Canal supports a story of regional water resource resilience. Water abstracted from the River Dee at Horseshoe Falls is conveyed via the canal to support public water supply systems serving large urban populations, including areas around Chester, Merseyside, and the West Midlands. This inter basin transfer helps balance water availability between wetter upland catchments and more water stressed regions, particularly during dry periods.

The canal simultaneously delivers water for transfer and maintains navigation levels along its length. This dual-purpose role supports boating, walking, cycling and local tourism, contributing to the rural economy of North Wales and the border counties. As a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the canal's continued use and maintenance also safeguard its historic structures and cultural value.



CASE STUDY: Swansea Canal

Resilient active travel infrastructure

The Swansea Canal demonstrates how historic waterways can be resilient and multi-functional infrastructure. In Clydach, nearly 1.5km of canal towpath was upgraded in 2022 to a safe, accessible shared-use route for walking and cycling, forming part of the National Cycle Network (NCN43) and providing a low-carbon alternative for everyday journeys.

Delivered by Swansea Council in partnership with the Trust and supported by Welsh Government Active Travel funding, the scheme strengthened transport resilience by offering reliable routes that sit outside the highway network, while also supporting climate adaptation through the continued stewardship of a green-blue corridor.

Building on this work, the Trust has contributed to recent Regional Transport Planning, identifying opportunities to extend similar improvements further along the canal to Ynysmeudwy. This would unlock an additional 2.5km of potential active travel route within a safe, traffic-free environment, enhancing connectivity between communities while reinforcing the canal's role as critical infrastructure that supports sustainable transport, wellbeing and long-term resilience.


Credit: Martin Davies

Together we will:

This Prospectus has demonstrated the value of our canals and waterways in missions to grow our economy, boost community and personal wellbeing, and reinforce environmental stewardship and sustainability.

They provide a platform for instilling the value of heritage within place-based policy approaches and opportunities to grow and nurture the Welsh language and culture. Through sustainable funding and new partnerships, there is much more opportunity to grow the proposition of our waterways.

Working together with partners and stakeholders this summary of actions will position our canals in Wales as a 21st-century asset for inclusive and sustainable growth and neighbourhoods, places for nature, health and wellbeing, as well as helping build climate resilience.



Working together for Place & Prosperity we will:

PP1: Develop our canal infrastructure to sustain thriving canal corridors with a mix of businesses; visitor, residential and business moorings; paddle sports and angling; alongside new and innovative waterway uses as canals continue to evolve.

PP2: Engage with each of Wales's four economic regions to investigate how canals within those regions can further add to the development of regional economies and communities as catalysts for regeneration

PP3: Leverage and grow the value of our canals and their heritage as attractors of tourism and rural economic development and help grow their role in telling the story of Wales to reinforce Wales's brand domestically and internationally collaborate with developers and local government partners to develop safe, attractive and connected waterside neighbourhoods that integrate land and water, celebrate the unique character of our canals, and improve boating infrastructure and support waterside businesses to thrive.

PP4: Working with communities, local schools and colleges and Regional Skills Partnerships, we will create job and apprenticeship opportunities within canal corridors for local people, as well as expanding community rehabilitation programmes, to support skills development and local employment.

Working together for Nature & Biodiversity we will:

NB1: Collaborate with government and partners to reinforce and boost environmental resilience by enhancing canals as wildlife corridors, supporting and connecting biodiversity within wider landscapes and providing access to nature.

NB2: Support Welsh Government's ambition to build skills and capacity in green jobs, through apprenticeships, volunteering, and training opportunities.

NB3: Increase biodiversity along canals by helping native species to thrive, supporting wildlife corridors and optimising the opportunities improve access to nature rich areas.

NB4: Look to work across government partners across Wales to actively investigate how Glandŵr Cymru's work and our focus on promoting habitat creation and protection, managing water control and utilisation of technology and innovation can learn from, and contribute the strategic and policy priorities such as Resilient Ecological Networks for example.

Working together for Health & Wellbeing we will:

HW1: Support the ambition of boosting access to high-quality green or blue space, connecting local people with nature and the outdoors, being safe and welcoming blue spaces with Green Flag accreditation.

HW2: Develop the UK's largest regional healthy active travel network along our canals, breaking down barriers to towpath usage by increasing awareness and inclusion in transport plans and where possible, linking to plans for regional Metro networks in Wales.

HW3: Expand nature-based health interventions, including our 'Canals on Prescription' programme to support preventative health and alleviate the pressure on the NHS in Wales.

HW4: Engage with local people to promote the health and wellbeing benefits of actively looking after our canals, our volunteers are happier and healthier!

Working together for Resilience & Security we will:

RS1: Where appropriate, and working with industry partners, we will exploit the use of our network to transport water from areas of surplus to areas of need, supporting the country's critical water infrastructure and housing growth ambitions. We will build partnerships drawing on innovation and engineering expertise as water management bodies to inform and create solutions to offset natural resource pressure

RS2: Use our canals to mitigate the effects of climate change by managing drought and flood, enhancing water storage, supporting resilient ecosystems, and protecting communities and infrastructure.

RS3: Work with developers to explore and utilise our canal network's potential for renewable energy generation, such as heating and cooling, solar and micro-hydro power, and for other innovative solutions to provide sustainable developments.





More information

If you would like further information please contact:

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- https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/wales

Glandŵr Cymru
Canal & River Trust in Wales

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