

The Montgomery Canal

The Vision

Raising Funds for Restoration

More about the Montgomery Canal – background, restoration to date and current position

The Vision for the Montgomery Canal

We aim to work with the Montgomery Canal Partnership; “To restore the Montgomery Canal as a flagship model of sustainable canal restoration with a strategic focus on rural regeneration. To protect the canal’s unique environment and heritage through research, management and excellence in design. To increase access for all through interpretation with the promotion of tourism and educational use.”

Raising funds to restore the Montgomery Canal

In 2008 the Montgomery Canal Partnership took a decision to take a more dedicated, strategic approach to fundraising for the continued restoration of the Montgomery Canal under its Conservation Management Strategy, “Regeneration through Sustainable Restoration”.

The aim is to locate and secure funds on behalf of the Montgomery Canal Partnership to complete the sustainable restoration of the length of the Montgomery Canal from Frankton, through to the navigable section either side of Welshpool; opening the canal up to managed navigation whilst protecting, managing and optimising access to heritage, leisure use and conservation.

As a consequence it will be shown that a very significant wider regeneration purpose will be served, both directly related to the canal and along the wider canal corridor, producing significant social and economic benefits for the wider community.

Given this position the Partnership believe that securing funds to allow restoration at least through to the Welshpool length is possible.

However in the current funding and economic climate, raising the funds to deliver the series of projects required to achieve this aim represents a serious challenge. We are therefore developing a Funding Strategy. This strategy focuses on raising funds for those projects required to connect the isolated 18 km length of canal around Welshpool to the national network. This means restoring 13 km across England and Wales and thus connecting with the 12 km of the already restored northern end of the canal which links with the national canal network via the Llangollen Canal and all the opportunities this brings.

The strategy summarises the background, restoration and current position of the Montgomery Canal as an example of a part restored rural waterway with real local, regional and national enthusiasm to see it fully restored, underpinned by a fully developed Partnership delivering against the Conservation Management Strategy under the heading, ‘Regeneration through sustainable restoration’.

We identify the vision for the Canal and make an assessment of the current position of the Canal as a fundable entity. We then identify ‘what needs to happen’ to optimise the opportunity to raise funds.

We make a series of specific recommendations in terms of required actions to enhance the position of the Canal and put it in as attractive a position as possible to funders including; working practices, identifying and measuring outputs and outcomes, marketing and relationship management, making links with local, regional and national priorities, breaking the restoration down into ‘Development Packages’, recognising the importance of associated development sites as providing the key to unlocking economic benefits, and identifying enabling work by the Partnership, potentially lead by British Waterways.

We then show how the case for support can be made by identifying a set of outcomes which can be marketed to partners and funders, and identify indicators which should be developed to enable accurate measurement and thus demonstration of outputs to date, and projected outputs from future phases.

More detail is provided on what we believe may be the most important element of this funding strategy – that of breaking future restoration down into a set of Development Packages. This is proposed both for practical project management reasons in terms of identifying a clear specification and costing for each future phase and those actions required to deliver it, but also in order to identify economic development opportunities related to the canal restoration. These development opportunities require a restored canal to open the door to their development and thus, as a consequence, provide clear justification for funding ongoing restoration.

In summary, to achieve the level of funding needed and maintain it over the length of the restoration project, we believe it must be clear that the project has the full, prioritised support of all key stakeholders, represents the best option available, provides clear value for money against demonstrable outputs and outcomes in line with national and regional priorities, can be delivered in manageable, fundable stages linked to associated development projects and that the Partnership is actively leading the restoration through direct intervention or enabling actions, particularly related to those development projects. By working through the Funding Strategy we believe this can be delivered.

More about the Montgomery Canal

Background

The Montgomery Canal is a special waterway, demonstrating a rich combination of agri-industrial heritage, high value ecology and wildlife, and both tapped and unexploited potential for sensitive economic development (e.g. tourism). It runs 55 kilometres from a junction with the Llangollen Canal (and thus the national canal network) at Frankton Junction (approximately 8 kilometres north east of Oswestry) in a southwest direction to Newtown in Powys, east Wales.

The canal was constructed in stages from 1790 to 1819. Very much a rural canal for most of its length, the primary purpose of the canal was to transport lime for agricultural purposes, the original promoters of the canal including local landowners seeking greater crop yields. With growing competition from improving rail and then road transport, the canal remained viable until the First World War, from when there was a gradual deterioration in maintenance, and steady decline in traffic. The canal fell into disuse following a breach near Frankton in 1936, and was officially abandoned in 1944.

In 1968 the canal was classed as a remainder waterway: “to be dealt with in the most economical manner possible, consistent with the requirements of public health and the preservation of amenity and safety”. This classification severely limits the ability of British Waterways to invest in the canal. In some places the canal has been filled in, roads have been built over the channel, bridges have been lowered, and infrastructure such as pipes and manhole covers have been built in the canal bed, presenting several obstacles to restoration.

Restoration to date

Despite ‘remainder waterway’ classification there remained keen interest in the canal from both nature conservationists and canal restoration enthusiasts. In 1969, with the prospect of a new relief road being built along the line of the canal through Welshpool, “The Welshpool Dig” was organised by the Shropshire Union Canal Society and the Inland Waterways Association, opening up a short length of the canal.

Restoration continued with a focus on re-opening (in some cases unconnected) lengths of canal and individual structures (e.g. locks), based on opportunities and priorities and availability of labour and funding. In 1987 the British Waterways Act protected the route.

Thanks to support from a range of voluntary organisations restoration has continued, with further support and funding from a number of bodies, including Powys and Shropshire County Councils and, more recently, Lottery funds and European funds.

Strategic restoration now focuses on a combination of re-opening the canal to boat traffic, maintaining and enhancing conservation issues through the creation of offline and in-channel nature reserves, preserving the built heritage and optimising associated social and economic benefits resulting from the restoration.

Current position

There is now 12 kilometres of the of the northern section of the canal open from Frankton Junction to Redwith Bridge in England, connected to the Llangollen Canal, and a further 18km in Wales, centred around Welshpool, but this section is isolated from the main network. This leaves 5 km of the central section of the canal in England and 8 km in Wales to complete the connection of the Welshpool length to the national network (and 11 km at the southern end in Wales to complete the restoration through to Freestone).

The southernmost end from Freestone Lock to Newtown is dry, and no longer in British Waterways ownership.

The canal has been described as “the prettiest canal in England and Wales”, connecting to the national network through the Llangollen Canal, the most popular canal in the UK. It enjoys major significance for built heritage, with 127 listed buildings and structures along its length, some of which

have either been restored or still require restoration, including the Vyrnwy Aqueduct. The canal is recognised as the most significant canal for conservation in the UK, formally identified through statutory designations, together with international value for its wildlife.

One of the results of these factors is the strong enthusiasm from the boating community for re-opening for navigation. Balancing this with conservation issues requires sensitive management. The canal is included in British Waterways' national priority list for restoration.

The canal and its wider corridor are highly valued as a resource by the local community, contributing to health and quality of life. In recreation terms this includes walking, cycling, angling and canoeing, as well as traditional narrowboats.

In economic terms the canal, particularly following restoration, is recognised as a major driver to the local economy through tourism and sensitive, sustainable, related commerce and development both adjacent to the canal and across the wider canal corridor.

Since 1999 restoration and regeneration has been carried out under the banner of the Montgomery Canal Partnership. The Partnership brought together all the interested parties and completed a Conservation Management Strategy (CMS) in 2005, which addresses all the diverse issues and competing needs in an integrated manner, setting out a strategy for the completion of the restoration which balances the requirements and objectives of all stakeholders.

In summary, continued restoration under the CMS involves re-opening the canal to managed navigation, with all the regeneration benefits this brings, whilst meeting requirements to provide in-channel and/or offline nature reserves to preserve and manage conservation issues, and taking a sensitive approach to the restoration of the related built heritage (bridges, locks etc).