

CRUMLIN ARM OF THE MONMOUTHSHIRE AND BRECON CANAL MANAGEMENT AND ENHANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES PLAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During August 2006, Caerphilly County Borough Council commissioned LTC Landscape Architecture to undertake a study and prepare a Management and Enhancement Opportunities Plan. The subject of the study is the Crumlin Arm of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal, between Forest Drive, Cwmcarn and Harry Roberts Bridge, Pontymister. The Plan is to cover a 10 year period from 2007 – 2017.

The key objectives of the study are to:-

- Survey the existing canal corridor
- Appraise the opportunities for landscape and management improvements
- Formulate costed proposals for landscape enhancement and management and maintenance operations.
- Prepare Design Guidelines to guide future proposals.

On site surveys were carried out of the land within Caerphilly County Borough Councils ownership, private land immediately adjacent to the canal and land within the wider visual envelope which impacts upon the corridor.

Detailed site surveys were carried out of the following elements:-

- landscape and visual quality
- ecology
- engineering overview of canal condition
- existing trees and woodland, using CCBC's Arbotrack system
- canal users / public consultation
- consultation with specified Councillors

The study found that the canal corridor has many strengths. It is a valuable landscape and recreational resource within the Ebbw Valley, containing sections of distinct rural and suburban landscape character. It acts as an important wildlife corridor and supports an array of habitat types. The canal towpath is heavily used as a footpath link and leisure resource and is valued for its peace, tranquility and wildlife.

The study also identified weaknesses. The water level in the canal is variable and the canal structure is in need of localised repair. The significant quantity of litter along the corridor and a lack of consistent management have led to a perception of neglect. Non native invasive plant species are rapidly colonising the canal banks and watercourse and there is a lack of integration with the wider landscape (including, views, footpath links and visitor locations).

To maximise these strengths and address the weaknesses a 12 point list of strategic aims and objectives for the canal corridor has been developed as follows:-

1. Retain and strengthen the existing character of the canal within each character area.
2. Reinforce the linear canal feature within wider the landscape context.
3. Upgrade the standard of managed areas.
4. Define pedestrian, vehicular and shared use areas.
5. Rationalise street furniture and signage.
6. Provide historical reference.
7. Improve the corridors integration with adjacent areas.
8. Encourage biodiversity.
9. Improve the quality of the canal water.
10. Repair and improve the canal structure.
11. Create identifiable nodal points/areas.
12. Maximise the benefit of long distance views.

A masterplan has been developed to enable the implementation of a series of actions to realise the list of aims and objectives. The masterplan is in the form of 1:2500 scale plans, which identify locations and prescribe the specific requirements for each location. Actions are varied and include the implementation of new works along with necessary repairs and urgent management actions.

Many of the masterplan prescriptions are 'small' scale and localised but several locations provide opportunity for larger scale enhancements. These are identified as 'Primary Enhancement Sites' and larger scale sketch scheme proposals have been prepared for these sites.

The operations and sketch schemes recommended by the masterplan have been costed and prioritised to inform an achievable plan of action.

A 10 year management and maintenance plan has also been prepared for the masterplan area. This sets out recommended maintenance and management operations. 1:2500 scale plans identify the locations for action and the accompanying tables set out the recommended frequency of operations and approximate costs.

The study is presented as an A3 printed document divided into Volumes.

Volume 1 and its Appendices contains the Survey, Appraisal and Masterplan proposals.

Volume 2 sets out a series of co-ordinated Design Guidelines to inform the realisation of the masterplan and future projects.

Volume 3 contains the Management and Maintenance recommendations for the period to 2017.

Volume 4 contains a photographic record and executive summary of the survey of the condition of the existing trees. This survey was carried out using CCBC's ArboTrack system which records the survey information electronically. This is now stored on the Clients data base.