

Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal

Glandŵr Cymru Briefing for the Senedd Cymru Petitions Committee

September 2025

Introduction

- The Canal & River Trust is the charity that cares for over 2000 miles of canals and waterways across England and Wales. These canals are a vital asset for millions, providing environmental, social and economic benefit and resilience, and are at the heart of our industrial heritage. Glandŵr Cymru – the Canal & River Trust in Wales – works with partners across Wales to maintain our canals and waterways for the benefit of existing and future generations.
- We are grateful to the Petitions Committee for the opportunity to contribute an update on the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal (the ‘Mon & Brec’) as part of the Committee’s follow-up work surrounding the petition on the future of the canal brought by Cllr Jan Butler in July 2025.
- While clearly facing uncertainty, since the debate in the Senedd in July, more positively, the canal has continued to serve as an attractor for the region and Wales, enjoyed by thousands over the summer period. It has been maintained by an investment by the Canal and River Trust of around £1million in its water supply since April (a rebate amount may be made at the end of the contract period in March 2026). This is despite drought conditions causing the closure of around 20% of the canal network across England and Wales. The Mon and Brec supply is the only canal water supply temporarily funded by the Trust across the network.
- The Senedd Petition Committee debate of 9th July demonstrated the scale of concern felt across political parties and beyond about the challenges to the Mon & Brec. This was further supported and reinforced on the day and subsequently by representation from the *Preserve and Protect the Mon & Brec* campaign group, members of the Commercial Operators Group as well as the Canal & River Trust.
- We welcome the Deputy First Minister’s acknowledgement of the significance of this issue and his statement during the Senedd debate that Welsh Government is ‘fully committed to enabling a workable solution’ as well as the subsequent



announcement of the Task & Finish Group to consider the issues surrounding the canal, water supply and funding. However, this group is yet to meet.

- Since the debate in the Senedd, the UK has continued to experience a prolonged period of drought. This has heavily impacted our canal network placing significant pressures on the Canal & River Trust as an organisation and our resources as a charity.
- This period of drought has had its own impact on the River Usk – declared as one area of drought in Wales by Natural Resources Wales (NRW). This, along with the limitations of the NRW abstraction licence for the Mon & Brec, has increased the volume of support water required to maintain the Mon & Brec under the Trust's agreement with Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water. The purchase of that supply by the charity has ensured the operation of the Canal over recent months where otherwise, the canal would almost certainly have been subject to restrictions, closure and potentially harmful environmental impacts as a result of drought.
- We remain of the view that that as an asset of shared local, regional and national benefit, it is not sustainable, nor reasonable to continue to place the financial burden of the maintenance of the water supply of the canal on the Canal & River Trust as a charity.

Economic & Social Impacts

- The Mon & Brec stretches 56k through the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park and adjoins the Blaenavon World Heritage Site, supporting local tourism, wildlife, heritage and the wellbeing of nearby communities. It is a vital tourism asset hosting an average of **3.6million** visits per annum and 1021 private boats, alongside a busy hire boat trade with 54 boats for hire estimated to be used for approximately 6,734 days a year.
- The canal brings significant economic value to Wales both through the boating activities, visits to the towpath, and wider beneficial impacts on the local economy – particularly the local rural economy. The total economic activity or output generated by the canal comes to approximately **£30 million per year** contribution to the Welsh economy, supporting **1000 direct and indirect jobs**. This includes the direct impacts of the boating economy and the visitor towpath economy as well as the impacts on supply chains of these areas (canal-dependent businesses including hospitality and boating businesses, and employee spend, for example)



- Canal-dependent businesses – particularly boat hire companies – face a worryingly-uncertain future. They understandably require certainty to take bookings, make investment decisions and commit to staffing levels for the 2026 season. Businesses also report significant drops in bookings for 2026. This is why the Canal & River Trust is seeking progress on discussions to find a sustainable solution for the canal
- the Mon & Brec is not only a vital environmental and social asset but also remains central to the economy of those areas through which it passes, and particularly to the economy and attraction of Bannau Brecheiniog, in which it is the Park's most visited attraction. This has driven ambitions by partners to restore other sections of the canal in coming years

Water Resourcing

- The Trust has maintained an active conversation in recent months with DCWW regarding management of water supply to the canal and the wider consequences of water resource pressure due to lack of rainfall and drought. While dealing with immediate pressures, our engagement with DWCC has also focussed on the exploration of alternative sources of water supply for the canal.
- Following the Senedd debate in July, Welsh Government announced the investment of £5 million in the Manorafon pumping station owned by DCWW. While this investment was unexpected for the Trust, it ostensibly supports water supply resilience and is therefore welcome. However, we were clear at the time and remain of the position, that this investment does not address the more urgent substantive question of the ongoing operational costs of that supply in the year past March 2026 which to-date have been paid only by the Canal & River Trust. Hence from the Trust's point-of-view the investment in itself does not provide the sustainable solution to the financial challenge caused by the new licensing conditions.

Conclusion

- We believe that the short-term challenge to the future of the canal remains significant, and this has changed little since our briefing to Senedd Members at the time of the debate, notwithstanding the announcement of the formation of the Task and Finish Group. However, this group has not yet met and so it has been difficult to move this issue forward.



Glandŵr Cymru
Canal & River Trust in Wales

- The Canal & River Trust remain committed to working with partners across governments and other organisations to determine an agreement that resolves the short, and longer-term pressures facing this vital environmental, social and economic asset and secure it for future generations. We hope that the Task & Finish Group will be able to meet soon to move forward at pace and reach an agreement giving the certainty that all partners would wish to see.