Torfaen waterways flow with volunteer support thanks to £854,500 HLF grant

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The money is being used to develop a comprehensive programme of training to equip new and existing volunteers, including the long term unemployed, with the heritage construction skills and canal management techniques needed to carry out the restoration work.

An estimated 270 volunteers will take part in the project, clocking up 6,510 volunteer days with 150 taking part in training and a further 50 receiving accredited training. The aim is to see boating, fishing and canoeing taking place along this stretch of waterway once again for the benefit of visitors and locals.

Dr Manon Williams, Chair of HLF in Wales, said: “Wales’ canals are an important heritage asset for the country and a haven for wildlife. This is a fantastic project with local people at the heart of it. By training volunteers in restoration and repair skills we can make sure the canal is maintained and valued well into the future. It’s great to see so many volunteers wanting to get involved and open up this historic section of the canal once again as a place for Torfaen residents and visitors to enjoy, which will in turn bring benefits to the local economy.”

The Monmouthshire and Brecon canal was constructed in a number of phases during the late 18th century and early 19th century to transport coal, iron ore and limestone to the docks at Newport. Starting life as two separate canals, the two were linked in 1812. At the time, roads were poor and transportation by water was the cheapest and most efficient way to move goods.

The use of canals for transporting goods died out in the latter half of the 20th century and this stretch of canal was formally abandoned in 1962. This project will restore the 1.5km stretch of the canal, to the south of Cwmbran between Ty Coch Lane Bridge to Pentre Lane, which includes a flight of eight locks and five Grade II listed bridges.

According to British Waterways*, 13 million people visit waterways every year, almost 20 million cycle visits are made to canals and with 35,000 boats afloat across the UK, canals and rivers are now busier than they were at the height of the industrial revolution.

Richard Dommett MBE, Regeneration Manager at the Monmouthshire Brecon Canal Trust, who has been working directly with community volunteers on the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal for the past nine years, said: “The volunteers recognise the potential which the canal restoration brings to local communities, contributing positively to both the economic, social regeneration and the conservation of the communities’ local heritage.

“The strong partnership which has built up over many years between the local authorities and the Trust has highlighted the desire of the local volunteers to see the canal conserved and enhanced as a complete waterway from Brecon to Newport and Cwmcarn including future access beyond to the Bristol Channel.”

The funding will also improve the interpretation of the canal including a community website, walking leaflets and newsletters. Local schools will be given the opportunity to get involved using education packs including a multimedia CD and learning aids linked to the national curriculum. A senior project officer and a volunteer supervisor will be employed

to manage the programme of activity.

Councillor Bob Wellington, leader of Torfaen County Borough Council, said: “The Canal is an important part of the heritage of South East Wales. In 2012 the canal is celebrating its bi-centenary and the Waterworks project will provide a lasting legacy and resource for local communities in Cwmbran and visitors to the area.”

The project will follow in the footsteps of the successful Fourteen Locks project which HLF supported with a £700,000 investment. The project was completed in 2010 and now welcomes 53,000 visitors per year to the Canal Centre at Newport and many more to what is considered to be Britain’s most picturesque canal.

* Statistics taken from British Waterways

Further information

Contact Kate Sullivan or Elinor Evans on 029 2076 4100 or email hlf@equinoxcommunications.co.uk.