



Councillor Jeremy Hurley; Nicola Pearce
Neath Port Talbot Council
Civic Centre,
Port Talbot
SA13 1PJ

cllr.j.j.hurley@npt.gov.uk
n.pearce@npt.gov.uk

CC: Donna Williams / NPT Regeneration regeneration@npt.gov.uk
Derek Fenn neathandtenantcanalstudy@atkinsrealis.com
Bethan Blackmore b.blackmore@npt.gov.uk
Patrick Moss patrick@mossnayloryoung.com
Laura Wigg-Bailey laura@mossnayloryoung.com

7th January 2025

IWA Response to Neath and Tennant Canals Options Consultation Questionnaire

Dear Councillor Hurley, Ms Pearce,

Further to our email to you on the 19th December 2024.

We will also respond via your online questionnaire but feel that a more detailed response is required.

We are glad to see that the introduction text to the questionnaire recognises some of the benefits that the restored canals can bring to Neath and Port Talbot. However, we firmly believe that restoration of the canals can bring additional significant benefits to the Council area and beyond. Other canal restorations elsewhere in the UK have revitalised town and city centres, and have brought significant benefits to the local economy, residents' well-being, tourism and local ecology.

We would encourage you to read IWA's recent report *Waterways for Today* which demonstrates the benefits of inland waterways and highlights twelve specific themes. The report is available on our website and can be downloaded here - <https://waterways.org.uk/campaigns/waterways-for-today>

Our view is that the Consultation Questionnaire's options lack the ambition and strategic vision that the missing Option 4 – Full Navigability of the Canals could bring to the County Borough.

We strongly disagree with Option 1, and we believe that a No or Minimal maintenance approach cannot work. The lack of maintenance on the canals has allowed many structures to fall into disrepair to such a state that you terminated your Neath Canal Public Access

Rights Agreement in December 2023 due to the unsafe state of the canal structures. A No or Minimal maintenance approach is not viable.

The consultation questionnaire also makes no mention at all of the key canal historic/heritage assets that need protecting in the short term. The Aberdulais Aqueduct (a Scheduled Ancient Monument) and associated weir are vital parts of both canals, and their continuing neglect is having, and will have, a significant impact on the viability of the canals' restoration and future use. We cannot see how any consultation can ignore these important assets. We are also very aware that a lack of action in this area may also have a significant impact on the Canal Side properties and other properties in the area. Our view is that the restoration of these important assets and a solution for the potential flooding of the area needs to be done with the utmost urgency. The NRW (National Resources Wales / Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru) Aberdulais Flood Risk Management modelling project from February 2024 has shown that removal of the aqueduct will not provide any significant mitigation to future flooding. We also believe that nothing should be done now, for a short-term gain, that precludes future canal restoration or increases future restoration costs.

Protection from flooding, and repair of the aqueduct and weir can only happen with a constructive partnership between the canals' owners, the Council, Cadw, NRW and others. We see this as step 1 of any future work.

We cannot support Option 2 as being the main option for the canals. Option 2 appears to be the same No or Minimal maintenance approach as Option 1 with the addition of some SUP and canoe launch points. The same arguments against Option 1 also apply here. Also, since the lack of maintenance has resulted in some structures falling into a state of disrepair, and being assessed as being unsafe, there must be a question of safety in allowing access for SUPs and canoes.

Concerning option 3 - whilst piecemeal work on sections of the canals will bring some benefits, it is unlikely that these sections of the canal will bring the significant benefits to the area and community that the missing Option 4 will bring. Significant amounts of money have been spent on specific parts of the two canals in the past. But these gains have been lost in part due to a lack of a cohesive strategy, and due to a lack of ongoing maintenance. We are also concerned that option 3 mentions "infilling". We can't see how this can be in any way beneficial to the local community, or the canal ecology. Canal based wildlife needs running water, clear of weed and debris. Breaking the wetland habitat of the canal up into separated water "ponds" will quickly lead to stagnant, silted water with little wildlife or diversity.

We would support the missing Option 4 - Full Navigability of the Canals as being our preferred main option. We do recognise that this is an ambitious vision, but it is not more so than other restoration projects that have happened across England and Wales in the last 50 years, and more recently.

We believe that a clear Vision and Strategic Plan needs to be developed with full use of the canals being the key objective. There are clearly many obstacles in the way with funding being a key one. However, we have seen elsewhere, that with the right components in place, funding will be forthcoming. The ongoing restoration of the Montgomery Canal to full navigation with key partnerships between the canal owners CRT (Canal and River Trust / Glandŵr Cymru), multiple councils, NRW, supported by IWA, canal restoration trusts and representatives such as MSs and MPs has shown what can be achieved.

It is clear that the Neath and Tennant canals' ownership issues needs to be resolved. Ideally, there should be a partnership, ideally acting as a single organisation, which all of us can support, that has ownership authority to work across both canals for their entire length. We

see this as the next step whilst the issues at Aberdulais are being resolved. We recognise that previous partnerships are no longer in place, but it is vital that all interested parties work together for the combined benefits.

We also believe that the long-term Vision and Strategic Plan will be the foundation for the following funding and restoration steps. The Vision and Strategy needs to be developed by the lead partnership / organisation and will show the goals that will be achieved along the way. The Strategy also needs to include local community groups such as volunteer groups and local and national canal trusts and associations. The recent successes and achievements of the Swansea Canal Trust show how much can be done with a committed volunteer led organisation supported by local people, the canal owners and the local council.

Having a committed partnership / dedicated organisation, with supporting volunteer organisations, working together on an ambitious Vision and Strategy will show funding organisations that this is a project worth supporting.

To summarise, we believe that:

1. The Aberdulais Aqueduct, weir and associated flood works need to be protected and completed as soon as possible.
2. Canal ownership relationships need to be resolved so that works can be completed along both the canals.
3. A new partnership / dedicated organisation needs to be set up.
4. A clear Vision and Strategic Plan needs to be created supporting the Vision of Full Navigability of the Canals.

The Inland Waterways Association is the only independent, national charity dedicated to supporting and regenerating all of Britain's navigable rivers and canals. We are also founder members of campaigning group Fund Britain's Waterways, which is a coalition of organisations representing hundreds of thousands of users and supporters of inland waterways. We are campaigning for national and local government to act now and protect the public benefit and natural capital of our waterways.

Yours sincerely

Dr Ian Sesnan
IWA Deputy Chair (Restoration)
The Inland Waterways Association

Contact through: Amy Tillson, Campaigns Officer
Email amy.tillson@waterways.org.uk