

PRESS RELEASE

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MINISTERIAL VISIT SHOWCASES HEALTH AND WELLBEING BENEFITS OF WATERWAYS IN WALES

The Minister for Culture, Tourism and Sport, Lord Elis-Thomas, has visited the Montgomery Canal in Welshpool to learn how Wales' former industrial waterways can play a vital role in improving the health and wellbeing of hundreds of thousands of people.

The Minister, accompanied by local Assembly Member and Chair of the Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee Russel George met with officials from Glandŵr Cymru – the Canal & River Trust in Wales – to find out how the charity is working to help improve the health, happiness and wellbeing of those living in waterside communities.

Recent research shows that, as well as the health benefits offered by walking, running or cycling on the towpath, simply spending time by the water can help people feel happier and improve their life satisfaction. With many people living on the doorstep of a canal or river, Wales' free-to-use waterways are uniquely placed to help tackle issues such as increasing rates of obesity, diabetes, and other debilitating conditions as well as rising levels of stress, anxiety and other mental health conditions.

As part of the visit the Minister enjoyed a short walk on the towpath at Town Wharf and a boat trip with Heulwen Trust before visiting a photography exhibition at Powysland museum. The Heulwen Trust offers boat trips for children and adults who are less able and have taken over 69,000 people out on their boats, enabling them to benefit from the canal in Welshpool.

The visit was also an opportunity for the Minister to get an update from the Montgomery Canal Partnership on the Heritage Lottery Funded £4 million project to reopen a further two miles of the Canal, from Maesbury to Crickheath in Shropshire. The project also involves the creation of a new three-hectare wildlife habitat within Aston Locks Nature Reserve, upgrade of nearly five miles of towpath and a comprehensive programme of community events and activities. The project will mean that, once finished, half of the canal's 35 miles will have been restored.

Ceri Davies, public affairs and policy manager for Glandŵr Cymru, said: "It was great to welcome the Minister to Welshpool, along with our friends from the Montgomery Canal Partnership and Heulwen Trust.

"It was particularly useful to update him on the Trust's focus on wellbeing and how we plan to unlock the potential of Wales' waterways to make a real difference to people's health and happiness.

"It was also a chance to reflect on the progress of the restoration of the Montgomery Canal which will bring real economic benefits as well as encouraging even more people to enjoy the health and wellbeing benefits of being by water."

The Canal & River Trust works with 15 partner organisations which make up the Montgomery Canal Partnership. The Partnership aims to restore the canal fully within the next decade enabling boats to return to this part of the canal for the first time since 1936 and providing a haven for people and nature.

John Dodwell, Chair of the Montgomery Canal Partnership, said "We were glad to be able to tell the Minister why the restoration of the canal should be completed. The canal can provide a wealth of heritage structures and wildlife and wild plants for people to enjoy. Importantly, the revived canal will be able to enhance the tourism offer in this part of Powys and so bring in more people with their spending money."

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