

The Monkland Canal Line – Linear Park

The Monkland Canal Line is a 12km long heritage, leisure and ecological linear park of national and local significance, providing an educational and leisure resource through the heart of local communities. Our objective is to set down a vision for the creation of a linear park connecting over twenty communities within North Lanarkshire and providing a significant national commuting and leisure link between Glasgow and Edinburgh. It will be a key part of central Scotland's green/blue infrastructure.

The canal corridor exists as open water, built urban form or as unused overgrown open space through a forgotten and redundant landscape. The canal corridor has recently been granted Schedule Ancient Monument status. We are proposing this exciting project because we believe that the Canal Line has the potential to improve the lives of communities within the region, raise the profile of the canal, its potential for investment, enterprise and water based activities and to highlight the heritage context. There is a real desire to provide Coatbridge and its environs with a strategic vision which starts to set out development principles for the next few decades to help stitch together disparate parts of the townscape and connect to the wonderful asset of the adjacent rural environment. The concept is promoted on behalf of The Monkland Canal Steering Group, established in 2008, which includes Scottish Canals, Scottish Waterways Trust, North Lanarkshire Council (development, planning and design departments), Summerlee Heritage Museum, Calderbank Community Group, Sustrans, Coatbridge Community Forum, HarrisonStevens, New Calderbank Regeneration Group and LX Arts (a community arts based group).

At the heart of the concept for the linear park is to provide a high quality physical environment which is currently degraded, unsafe and undesirable. The canal line concept has been inspired by linear parks throughout Europe and North America, the High Line in New York for example. The linear route will promote and encourage sustainable economic growth, increasing levels of personal and business mobility through commuting use on the towpath and cycle routes but also investing in the land within the corridor. The improved access and attractiveness of the Canal Line will increase leisure activities from adjacent communities encouraging active travel. The Canal Line will complete the link between east and west with a major infrastructure investment of a link over the railway at Bargeddie to connect the route of the canal to Easterhouse. Greater connectivity therefore encourages walking and cycling to school (new paths off the canal route have already been installed to new local schools), shops and places of employment as an alternative to the car or public transport. We intend to raise the profile of this link, creating a desirable place upon which developments no longer turn their back and provide a backdrop for safe and sustainable communities to improve people's lives, promote economic success, and allow nature to flourish.

The concept proposals review the significance of the canal line from a regional and local scale. Regionally the linear nature of the route comes into contact with a number of communities where improved access to walking and cycle routes to the countryside would be of huge health benefit. The route can be used as a commuting network from the adjoining settlements to Coatbridge, west to Glasgow or east to Eurocentral and Bathgate beyond. At a local level each area of the route will be analysed to assess the access and infrastructure potential. The three themes of Ecology, Heritage and Leisure are defined geographically relating directly to the context and existing activities. Locally the presence of the route, its historical significance and its future potential opportunities will be highlighted through a series of structures and interventions leading along the canal. A fire festival has been mooted as a potential method of ensuring the Canal Line starts to build on the essential links between the communities and forms the base level of an implementation strategy.

Scottish Canals funded the development of the initial concept with a view to encourage further investment to complete the full study. We are currently at a point where we have an exciting vision but with limited scope to develop the study further to set out delivery strategies and a programme. Our strategy aims to provide a baseline analysis of the linear route including infrastructure, land ownership, the LDP and land uses, define a cohesive strategy for the creation of the linear park and identify opportunities throughout the linear park for interventions, festivals, shelters, look outs and camping pods. We have provided a detailed study of one of the eight character areas (Lock Street Park) and wish to provide a similar depth of study for the rest of the canal corridor. It will establish a series of design principles for the areas of the park set out as development briefs and ensure that the proposals set out in the report are secured in the planning system, identifying opportunities for delivery. The funding will be used to continue with and complete the study, setting out real goals and deliverables from minor interventions to those of greater ambition. We believe that a successful bid will raise the profile of the project vision within central Scotland and beyond.