

Campaign Against the Levels Motorway

savethegwentlevels@gmail.com

www.savethelevels.org.uk

c/o Gwent Wildlife Trust, Seddon House, NP25 4DY



Inquiry continues

The Public Local Inquiry into the aptly-named M4 Black Route has been going for eight weeks, and is expected to run until July. Supporters of the Campaign Against the Levels Motorway

carry on presenting carefully-prepared evidence against the motorway – so much is at stake!

The cases being made range from critiques of the Welsh Government's skewed analysis of the traffic projections, accident rates and economic need, to information on the world-class wildlife of the Levels – and exposing the travesty of the supposed 'mitigation' that is being offered for the devastation that would be caused to the fragile wetland landscape if the New M4 goes ahead.

The Inspector is giving everyone a fair hearing. However, many objectors have commented on the David & Goliath nature of the battle. The Welsh Government has ranks of barristers, specialists and support staff, and has invested several million pounds into building their case – in contrast, all many objectors can offer is their goodwill, common sense knowledge, passion and spare time, without the team of researchers and advocacy from a QC that does put an edge to a case! Rob Waller's experience of giving evidence is provided on the second page of this newsletter.

The Biggest Lies

The whole case for a New M4 is based on the claims that road building solves traffic jams and brings economic growth. The huge lie to both those arguments is exposed by a new CPRE report – find it here: <https://tinyurl.com/RoadLies>

The National Audit Office has also just published a critique of roads projects, which gives further support to this case. New roads are the problem, not the solution.

Video your views!

Lots of real people – like you – have excellent reasons why you don't want a Levels Motorway. Mathew Taylor of Marshfield wants to hear from you, to record your point of view in a short video. We need these online so we can get our views heard! Please email Mat on matht4@gmail.com – he'd love to come to see you.

BANANAS! Now that I've got your attention, we need more wildlife not more roads!!

Over a hundred local residents & campaigners made their views very clear at the start of the Inquiry. The Welsh media picked up the story which was front page news across Wales. When have you ever seen better placards than these?



Public Inquiry website

For the latest on the Inquiry programme, or any other information, then see the dedicated website: <http://m4-newport.persona-pi.com/> or contact Joanna Vincent, Programme Officer on 07483 133975.

CALM website

Thanks to Rhys Bartlett and Carys Edwards, the CALM website <http://savethelevels.org.uk/> has had a wonderful makeover. Have you visited it recently? Can you suggest more content?

Have you signed the petition?

<https://tinyurl.com/M4petition>

Want to get more involved?

The campaign is run by a lot of volunteers and a few hard-pressed staff of local conservation organisations, meeting every six to eight weeks in Newport. Please get in touch if you'd like to get meeting invites. We'd love more people to become actively involved.

For anything to do with CALM, please contact us via facebook (<https://tinyurl.com/NoNewM4fb>), email savethegwentlevels@gmail.com, find @CalmCampaign on Twitter or contact the Gwent Wildlife Trust office. Have we got your email address on our mailing list?

Have your say!

The CALM facebook page is full of strong opinions for and against a new M4. Road-building is appealing for many people who hate traffic jams, and don't grasp that new roads encourage more traffic, making congestion worse everywhere. Why don't you join the debate to say what is most important to you?

© CALM, April 2017. With thanks to all the photographers, and everyone who is doing so much in the interests of the Gwent Levels, a better future for local people and wildlife, and a sustainable future for Wales and the world.

A view from the Inquiry...

Rob Waller is fresh from four hours presenting evidence at the Inquiry – here are his reflections:

“I have some experience of planning inquiries from some years ago when I worked as a planning officer at the Welsh Office. But that did not prevent me being apprehensive about giving evidence, especially when I was called a day early. I rather regretted submitting so much information and asking to cross examine two of their experts – their economist and expert on traffic forecasts for heaven's sake!

“Actually it did not turn out too badly. Everyone was very polite – maybe a bit too polite – I couldn't help being a bit suspicious of the Welsh Government witness who came up to me beforehand to say he thought that my evidence was one of the best of its type he had seen. Whatever could he mean? In fact their two witnesses were a little nervous themselves. I was glad that I had prepared some questions and follow-up that I hoped would exploit some of their weaknesses.

“I read out my summary proof of evidence, arguing that we do not need a new motorway and that we could manage things by taking more local traffic off it. I had been rather taken aback to be emailed a 38 page ‘rebuttal’ of my evidence a couple of days beforehand. This prompted me to add a few extra points to my summary, which seemed to be acceptable – but when I said that I would submit a rebuttal to their rebuttal then the Inspector objected quite vehemently, saying this sort of ping pong could go on for ever!

“I then had one of their QCs (Mr Jones) cross examining me. They were intrigued to find out a bit more about me and attempted to catch me on the hop (with some success) by asking whether I was familiar with evidence from other parties such as the CBI. This can be tricky – if you answer ‘no’ it makes you look ill-informed. If you answer ‘yes’ then they will quiz you about it in detail. Perhaps the best approach is to say ‘broadly familiar with the main arguments’ – hard to know!

“Overall, though, it was not too harrowing an experience. I like to think I won on points. The Inspector did say I had given him quite a lot to think about.

“I don't think the process is very satisfactory from an objector's point of view however. For a start the Welsh Government is awash with expert witnesses and lawyers, with every report under the sun to hand. I was on my own with just a handful of papers. Their team also has the benefit of having heard everyone else's evidence.

“And the process seems to always give them the last word. When I had finished cross-examining their witnesses, their QC could try to repair any holes in their defence by ‘re-examination’ of the witnesses. And then there is the business of rebuttals – why can't we submit rebuttals to their rebuttals? And we can be sure that right at the end they will make lengthy closing submissions that try and rubbish all objections.

“Personally I would ban all lawyers from such inquiries – these are meant to be proceedings to enable Inspectors to find out the facts and help interpret those facts. Points of law hardly come into it. I may write to my AMs about it!”

The Levels Motorway: what is all the fuss about?

Well, quite a lot actually. There's the multi-billion price tag that could be spent so much better in so many other ways. There are transport alternatives that will take traffic off the roads, rather than generate much more traffic. There are the lives and livelihoods which will be ruined by compulsory purchase and the destruction a 14 mile swathe of land across the Levels.

So, there's no doubt that people will suffer locally, and suffer badly, if this road is built. The road will also make a large contribution to Wales' CO2 emissions, adding to climate change that is already wreaking destruction around the world, and which will get so much worse until we embrace true sustainability.

And then there's the wildlife. This ancient wetland landscape is of incredible importance. There is nowhere else like it in Wales, with its otters and water voles, cranes and kingfishers, rare plants and a host of sensitive wetland invertebrates. This is **“one of the jewels in the crown of Wales”** as top naturalist Iolo Williams said to the Inquiry this month.

In 1971, the ‘Convention on Wetlands’ was signed in Ramsar, Iran. This international agreement was specifically set up to protect wetlands like this, which are of global importance. Over 20 years ago, conservation charities called for the whole of the Gwent Levels to be designated as a ‘Ramsar Site’. There is a compelling case for this, given its scale and unique assemblage of wetland wildlife. However, that designation would have stopped the erosion of the levels for the LG factory, Gwent Europark – and of course the Levels Motorway.

Local politics in Wales, dating back to Welsh Office days, has prevented the will of the international community in saving the levels. This has to change – we must defeat the M4 Black Route at Inquiry, and get the Welsh Government to finally designate the levels as a priceless Ramsar site. **#NoNewM4**