

BACKING OUR GREAT CITY

THE GWENT LEVELS

The South Wales Argus is promoting and championing a 'We're Backing Newport' campaign to highlight and promote the best of Newport. All the contributors to date have done a great job of explaining why it is a great place in which to live, work, spend leisure time and do business. There is so much to be proud of.

Wentlooge Community Council (Peterstone and St Brides) and Marshfield Community Council want to add their voices to this campaign by adding The Levels to 'the best of Newport'.

Newport City Council's responsibility umbrella embraces both the urban and the surrounding stunning countryside. A magnificent jewel in Newport's crown, the GWENT LEVELS, sits on its doorstep. The Levels, from Chepstow to the River Rumney in Cardiff, 20,000 acres in all, of which almost all of the Wentlooge Levels and a great chunk of the Caldicot Levels lies within Newport's jurisdiction, are one of the most spectacular ancient landscapes, ecology, nature conservation, archaeological and cultural gems.

The Levels is as deserving as Newport city centre and its close environs to be promoted, not least for its rich store of wildlife, its habitats, its architecture, its landscape and its visible and hidden and as yet, in some cases, undiscovered archaeological remains. The Levels is an area on Newport's doorstep that merits a pride of place in Our Great City because they are so unique and so accessible and provide precious green space so close to the very busy conurbations of Newport and Cardiff. The Living Levels Landscape Partnership, 'Newport Matters'/September 2016, stated that "Some people may be unaware that Newport has an iconic landscape of international significance right on its doorstep. Living Levels aims to connect people to this historic and vibrant place and give it a sustainable future. Their project aims to restore, protect and tell the story of this unique landscape. For six hundred years this rich, rural landscape particularly in the Wentlooge Levels covering the parishes of Coedkernew, St Brides and Peterstone has remained largely unchanged and untouched by time. The Levels are ancient wetlands, beautiful low lying coastal areas reclaimed from the sea with their rich store of wildlife, landscape, architecture, archaeological remains, habitats, flora and fauna. For centuries the land of the Levels was subject to flooding, mainly from the sea, until the devastation of the Great Flood of 1606, believed to have been a tsunami, resulted in the construction of a more effective sea wall. "It is a dreamy landscape of wide skies, shining estuary waters and flat fenland shielded from the sea by a long sea wall built by the Roman legionnaires in Caerleon". The Romans grew wheat on the reclaimed marshes which were drained by a 2,000km network of major and minor reens, extended in the twelfth century by the Benedictine monks of Goldcliff and managed and maintained by two separate drainage boards, the first with origins in the reign of Henry V111 and now, in the present day, by NRW.

You can walk for miles in solitude between dense hedges and tall reed beds, along grassy tracks, through ancient villages, passing beautiful churches, farms and buildings and along the coastal path that follows, as closely as possible, the sea wall observing grazing marsh, woodlands, saltmarsh, open mosaic habitats, birds, sea waders, bats, dormice, water voles, protected and notable species, aquatic vegetation, insect and invertebrate species, badgers, the great crested newt and other amphibians, otters, reptiles and water voles.

The Gwent Levels is one of the largest surviving areas of ancient grazing marshes and reen drainage ditch systems in Britain and is the largest of its kind in Wales. Over time the area of wetland in Britain has significantly decreased in size and extent and consequently the remaining wetlands

including our Levels and the Norfolk Broads, the Somerset Levels, The Ouse Washes, North Kent Marshes, Pevensey Levels, Romney Marshes and Amberley Wild Brooks are becoming more unique. The Gwent Levels is as important, or more important than its English cousins because of findings such as fossilised footprints dating back 8,000 years, grazing that took place 5,600 years ago and recently the discovery of ship remains. Seventy percent of the land is designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest/SSSI's in six separate locations – Peterstone and Rumney, St Brides Wentlooge, Nash and Goldcliff, Whitson, Redwick and Llandeveyny and Magor and Undy as the wildlife and locality is of such high quality. It is also a Landscape of Outstanding Historic Interest in Wales and it is An Archaeological Sensitive Area. The River Usk is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), and the Severn Estuary a Special Protection Area (SPA) and a RAMSAR and an SSSI.

The Gwent Levels, the last remnant of an ancient marshland rates on a footing of exclusive excellence as described by other contributors to Our Great City debate. It is accessible to all citizens. All Community Councils on the Levels are proud to promote it.