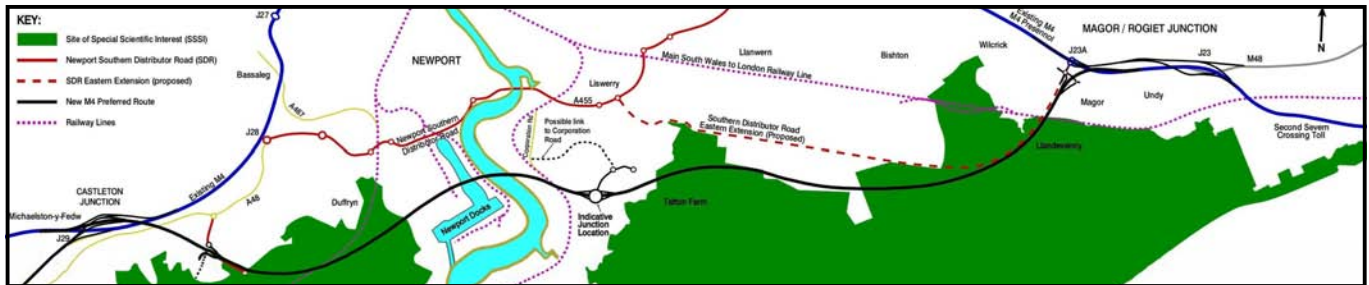




Campaign Against the Levels Motorway  
Website: [www.savethelevels.org.uk](http://www.savethelevels.org.uk)

## NEWSLETTER – June 2008



### From the Chairman

2008 will be critical to the future of the Gwent Levels. We owe it to the local and global environment, and future generations, to put our all into getting the Welsh Assembly Government to rethink their stance.

The proposed 'new M4' would be devastating to the local environment if built, and a horrible blight on local communities. As a nature conservationist, I have so many concerns about the impact on the Gwent Levels. This is such a sensitive ecosystem. The reens – ancient drainage ditches – are Gwent's rainforest in biodiversity terms. Numerous developments over the years have already nibbled away at the Gwent Levels – surely it is time to say enough is enough. The threat of this road is not just in its land take to the road itself, but it threatens insidious water pollution which will flow throughout the reen system around the whole of the Levels, poisoning this freshwater habitat. If this road is built, I suspect that the change will lead to the extinction of species found nowhere else in Wales – such as the great silver beetle (a fabulous water beetle, also Britain's largest beetle) – as well as the sad sight of the carcasses of barn owls and otters regularly littering the motorway verges over the years.



**Great Silver Beetle -  
*Hydrophilus piceus*.  
Length 40mm.**

The ecological impacts are likely to be the following:-

- **land take across the 5 miles of Site of Special Scientific Interest**, with this corridor of devastation totalling in the order of 200 acres
- **isolation of three pockets of SSSI Levels countryside** – between Bishton & Llandeveyny, around Tatton Farm near Nash college, and to the south of Duffryn – to form islands of habitat where the wildlife interest is likely to waste away
- **catastrophic pollution from the construction impacts**, which will ripple out along the reen system across the whole of the Levels
- **the inevitable drip-drip of road run-off pollution** – however state-of-the-art the motorway drainage water treatment may be – which will also pervade the whole of the Levels - especially at times of heavy rainfall.
- **restriction of range for rare species**, especially the aquatic species of the reens themselves, with an impoverishment of their vital habitat quality through pollution

These effects will be compounded if further development follows. Land around any motorway junctions across the Levels will suddenly sell at a premium and be in demand for out-of-town development. This is also a historic landscape, with a statutory designation to recognise its importance in this respect. I fear also for the future of Newport, if it is by-passed on both sides by motorways rushing everyone to Cardiff or Bristol.

Encouraging car-use by providing this new motorway, rather than investing in public transport and sensitive housing and economic developments which reduce the need to travel, I fear a ripple of gridlock radiating out from the M4 corridor.

The new M4 would also represent a further commitment to the road-based economy which pumps out so much carbon dioxide, and looks set to give us galloping global warming. Surely we can't allow ourselves to be pushed further down this road (no pun intended – absolutely **nothing** about this motorway proposal is in the slightest bit funny). This road proposal looks to me to be **the** test of Wales' commitment to Sustainable Development'. Build this road and, environmentally, we are asking to be damned.

So why is 2008 so critical if we are to avert this Sword of Damocles hanging over Wales' finest wetland landscape? Well, the Assembly road-supremos have been promoting this road whole-heartedly for the last couple of years without a business case. When this is produced, it is crucial that we study it and probe its weaknesses – the very economic basis for the road may be severely flawed, based on old thinking and assumptions that we should carry on having cheap fuel which we can burn with impunity as if there is no tomorrow. And this year should also see production of the Assembly's Environmental Impact Assessment for the scheme. If a decent job has been done on this, the full account of the impending destruction should be laid out for all to see.

Equally importantly, the final go-ahead can only be made after the Public Inquiry which is expected in 2009. The evidence for our arguments against the road needs to be gathered this year. We also need to influence the politicians and public opinion. If CALM – an alliance of local people and environmentalists (indeed, I would go as far to say anyone who cares about the future of Wales and the World) – is to save the Gwent Levels, we all need to do all we can, and **now!** Perhaps we can get the Assembly to rethink the scheme before the heinous waste of money and time in an all-consuming Public Inquiry. And if it goes to Public Inquiry, we shall need a wave of support to reinforce the powerful arguments for our sensible approach to sustainable development.

## Recent Events



## Magor Fair - Saturday 5th May.

Steve Rawlings reports: What a super day! Those manning the stall (Alan Williams, Nikki Williams, Dave Yates, and I) were delighted at the level of interest shown in our GWT/CALM stall at the Magor Fair .

There was very little opposition to our campaign, and no one complained about the siting of our 10 ft banner on the railings, right in the middle of Magor Square! The support for CALM is indeed very strong in and around Magor, and confirms earlier reports that the majority of Magor & Undy residents don't want a new M4 motorway.

The display boards and visuals worked very well. Having the large, coloured map showing the proposed M4 route was really important in drawing people toward us, and providing a focus for discussions. Many CALM and GWT leaflets were handed out during the day, and some donations to CALM were received. **(Photographs by members of the CALM team)**





**NO - it hasn't happened yet, but this is a computer generated mock-up of how things could look if we had the M4 Relief Road across the reens. I think the swans would be a lot more concerned than this if it really did come about!**

### **Update on the Outline Business Case (OBC)**

There have now been many requests for the business case, such that it now seems that it may not have been published yet.

We recently had an official response from Ieuan Wyn Jones:

*"Thank you for your letter of the 11th March on behalf of NGOs requesting disclosure of the Outline Business Case (OBC) in advance of general publication, so that it could be independently reviewed by an individual nominated by*

*yourselves. I am giving your request consideration, and will reply in due course"*

This is a positive result, in that our request is being taken seriously. The vagueness seems to indicate that the business case has not yet been published. Please feel free to make your own request directly or through your Assembly Member.

### **Lobbying**

- **Fringe Events** - The RSPB attended 'fringe events' at the recent party conferences, lobbying on several issues including the M4. The main events to note were from the Labour conference and the Sustrans event - 'Road Building - a way out of poverty?'

Lee Waters spoke alongside Brian Gibbons and a chair from the Bevan Foundation. The M4 Ring Road came up in the question and answer session. The audience was made up of union staff and councillors, as well as other party members and Non Government Organization (NGO) staff.

**All** those that spoke were against the road - including comments like:

"this is not sustainable - where does it fit in with the Sustainable Development duty of WAG?"

"It will just move congestion along the road and will not help anyone"

"It is not the answer to this problem"

Brian Gibbons looked resigned to the road going ahead and was not able to come back with an answer to any of the comments made. And more worryingly, still seemed to think that the road was important for economic development and regeneration further west. All this at the end of an event which aimed to show how road building does not help people out of poverty!

- **South Wales Argus Web Site** - [www.southwalesargus.co.uk](http://www.southwalesargus.co.uk) - On Thursday 15th May, the South Wales Argus reported '**J28 Smash Causes M4 Queues**'. The accident had blocked one lane of the motorway slip road at Tredegar Park and was causing queues in the area.

Concerned that this might result in more calls for the by-pass, the Chairman checked the Argus Web Site for the comments listed there. Amazingly, there were no such comments - most people blamed bad driving. Instead, there were calls for improved public transport and a reality check about the reduction in available oil ('Peak Oil') with the consequent price rises and likely reduction in car use to just one lane of the M4, instead of three!

If you would like to add comments about articles in the Argus on their web site, go to the 'News' page, and select the story you are interested in. First, though, you need to register with them by giving your e-mail and a password. They will send a confirmation e-mail, and then you can go back in and have your say. **It is a great way to air your views - so get going straight away!**

### **Species Spotlight: Dragonflies and Damselflies (*Odonata*)**

**Dragonflies and Damselflies on the Levels:** There are at least 15 different species of dragonfly and damselfly to be found on the Gwent Levels. Some of these, such as the hairy dragonfly, are very rare. A dragonfly nymph will spend up to five years underwater before emerging as an adult insect.

**Motorway impacts:** Because most of their life is spent underwater, *Odonata* are very sensitive to pollution. Run-off water from a new motorway will enter the reën (ditch) system and degrade their habitat. At a wider level, dragonflies and damselflies are highly sensitive to climate change.



© Neil Wyatt

**Southern Hawker (*Aeshna cyanea*)**

### **CALM launches new website - [www.savethelevels.org.uk](http://www.savethelevels.org.uk)**

Our new-look website is now online. Not only does it feature the facts about the proposed motorway, information about climate change, and details on the wildlife of the levels, but most importantly, it lists the many ways that **you** can help the campaign.

We are hoping to keep the website up to date with reports of events and updates on campaign progress, so do visit regularly to see what's new. Please let us know if there is anything you would like to see on the website, and what you think of its challenging new look.

### **Publicity for CALM**

- **GWT Appeal** - The Gwent Wildlife Trust Council has agreed for CALM to be the focus of a GWT appeal, launching in June.
- **FoE Cymru magazine** - A double page article (and maybe the cover) in FoE Cymru magazine will be devoted to CALM. This will be distributed in June.

### **Talks to Groups**

Would your group like to hear more about the motorway proposals? Members of CALM can give a presentation about the potential impacts. Please contact CALM for more information.

### **Future Events**

- **St Mellons Fair:** St Mellons Fair (13th August).
- **Maindee Festival:** Newport FoE will be running a stand at the Maindee Festival (5<sup>th</sup> July), and will be giving out CALM information.
- **Chepstow Festival:** CALM is running a joint event with Chepstow GWT Group at the Chepstow Festival. On the 6<sup>th</sup> July, in the Drill Hall, there will be an exhibition of 'Local Conservation in Action' featuring displays, activities and short presentations.

### **CALM Committee Meetings in 2008**

All meetings are at Newport Civic Centre, starting at 7.00pm. Please feel free to attend.

• 18<sup>th</sup> June

• 17<sup>th</sup> September

• 19<sup>th</sup> November

### **Get in Touch with CALM:**

<b>Julian Branscombe:</b>	<a href="mailto:jbranscombe@gwentwildlife.org">jbranscombe@gwentwildlife.org</a>	Mob: 07748-321989
<b>Sorrel Jones:</b>	<a href="mailto:sjones@gwentwildlife.org">sjones@gwentwildlife.org</a>	Tel: 01600-740358
<b>Steve Rawlings:</b>	<a href="mailto:steve@alg.myzen.co.uk">steve@alg.myzen.co.uk</a>	Tel: 01291-625977