

Press Release

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Sir Samuel Whitbread KCVO

BEDFORD & MILTON KEYNES WATERWAY PROJECT (B&MK) GIVEN RENEWED BOOST BY "CHAMPIONS"

- **"Massive support, emotionally, spiritually and as part of being a champion:" message to the Trust's annual general meeting from Dr Ann Limb, Chair of SEMLEP – South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership.**
- **Sections of the waterway to be cut within twelve to eighteen months.**
- **Sir Samuel Whitbread, the new Patron of the B&MK Trust, wants to help complete what his forebear, also Samuel, tried to start with a waterway over 200 years ago.**
- **Bedford Community Boat – plans for 2013 launch.**

Dr Ann Limb told members and supporters of the B&MK Trust at its annual general meeting in Newport Pagnell (Thursday, 17th May) that she hoped the project would eventually be taken forward – and perhaps accelerated. "If I can do that, I will as your champion."

SEMLEP is the public partnership of business, commerce and local authorities responsible for driving forward the economic regeneration of the region, and the waterway fits into its aims for the economic regeneration of Marston Vale and Bedford town centre. Dr Limb described SEMLEP as "a coalition of the willing" with eleven local authorities serving 2 million people who "need to be connected".

She said: "What we share in common is a desire to see the benefits of growth activity which are working to better the environment, new housing, better housing and transportation links for the wider economic benefits of the region. The waterway is not just about digging a canal; it is very much more than that."

Highlighting the business opportunities, leisure activities and economic and environmental benefits the waterway would generate, Dr Limb said she had no difficulty in trying to support the aims of the Trust. Acknowledging the difficult times and the absence of vast amounts of money it was important to make sure that "a climate of collective endeavour" prevailed by bringing partners, including developers, together. "We can drive and champion your cause. You need advocates to move that cause forward."



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Dr Limb said the Trust should take heart from the Government's green light for the east-west railway project from Oxford, Bletchley, Milton Keynes and Bedford – a project which had started as a passion from a small group of people and a project which had parallels with the B&MK. "Things can turn round. Money can be found."

She added: "So, massive support for you, emotionally, spiritually and as part of us being a champion of your cause."

Sir Samuel Whitbread, B&MK's new Patron

Earlier, Sir Samuel, recently retired Lord Lieutenant of Bedfordshire, said: "I am honoured and delighted to be part of this august organisation."

He went on to outline a brief history of his great, great, great grandfather's vision to create the waterway between the Grand Union Canal and the River Great Ouse in Bedford, a scheme which stalled until revived in the 1990s. The earlier Samuel was MP for Bedford.

"My hope is the current scheme will have more success. If there is anything I can do to forward it I will do so."

B&MK Consortium

Paul Vann, secretary of the B&MK Waterway Consortium – local authorities, Government agencies and community bodies who are driving the project forward – outlined its progress.

Mr Vann, who is also Economic Development Manager for Growth with Bedford Borough Council, spoke of the substantial economic potential of the waterway, part of which would be cut in and around the proposed Marston Vale Innovation Park as a set of linear ponds. They would be dug in the next twelve to eighteen months.

The three local authorities which are also members of the Consortium – Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes councils – all have the waterway in planning policies.

Additionally, as part of planning permission for 600 houses in Wootton, Persimmon Homes must transfer land to the Borough Council, including funding for the management of the land as open space. The company is required to offer to install the cycleway/towpath parallel to the waterway cut, or make a financial contribution to the Council, which is responsible for making the full waterway cut.

Contractors appointed to construct the A6/A428 link of the Bedford western bypass are to make the full waterway cut and use the **clay/soil as "fill" for the road works**. There is also funding for expanding the Forest of Marston Vale, which is vitally important to the waterway environment, said Mr Vann.



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He also highlighted the Bedford Waterspace Study, published jointly by the Borough Council and Environment Agency, which recognised the importance of the waterway project as part of the potential for regenerating the river and town centre to promote **the riverside as a tourist destination**. "Progress on this is an interesting example of **how difficult things can sometimes happen if you have done the preparatory work.**"

Mr Vann said the project was all about "connectivity". The cycle route along the line of the waterway (Sustrans national cycleway 51) would probably happen earlier than the waterway itself and in a shorter space of time. These cycling and walking linkages would make the waterway cuts extremely valuable.

Bedford Community Boat

Don Allison, B&MK Trust treasurer, and volunteer Roger Crews, said that plans for the Community Boat were progressing favourably. The boat would be available for educational, business, leisure purposes and parties, with top range facilities. The launch is hoped for 2013 and a trading company to operate the boat would be set up in the near future. Fund raising is still the priority with grants, donations and pledges standing at £70k towards the target of £120k.

Mr Allison said that more opportunities for fund raising existed but a shortage of manpower meant some of these opportunities were being lost.

He and Mr Crews both made a plea for additional volunteers to get involved in the boat project in a range of roles from **fund-raising, to crew, to the boat's doctor!**

B&MK Trust directors

Graham Mabbutt (chairman), Marilyn Leask and Don Allison who had all completed three-year terms were re-appointed for another three years. Neil Hayes, who had also completed a three-year term, did not seek re-appointment but will continue as **the Trust's communications advisor**.

ENDS



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Notes to editors



Caption:
Sir Samuel makes his debut at the B&MK Waterway Trust annual general meeting

Please credit the B&MK Waterway Trust, if you use the pictures.

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