

Press Release

Embargo: Immediate

BEDFORD & MILTON KEYNES WATERWAY AT THE HEART OF LOCAL PLANS

Consultation imminent on Bedford Waterspace Strategy



"After nine years of lobbying, this small voluntary body (B&MK Waterway Trust) has placed the waterway at the heart of local plans and onto the agendas of the ten bodies that have the resources and the scale to make it happen.

"This is a momentous achievement and a tribute to the sustained and unwavering commitment of Trust members that this project is worth doing and doing well."

So said Jane Wolfson, chair of the Trust at its annual general meeting in Newport Pagnell last evening (Weds 19th May) - and on the eve of the creation of the consortium of local authorities and agencies which will "lock the project up to the next level" to create 26 km of the "missing link" between the Grand Union Canal at Milton Keynes and the River Great Ouse at Bedford. Thanking the project partners, Jane added, "Together we built the vision and proved viability to the point where the consortium is taking over."

The Trust's priorities are to support the consortium and then rethink and refresh how the Trust works with local people and partner organisations to make sure that it continues to shape the vision for the waterway, build support and hold the consortium to account on progress, said Jane.

Bedford Waterspace Strategy

Additionally, the Environment Agency (EA) is about to launch a consultation on a waterspace strategy for Bedford, where the Borough Council has pledged 50% funding. The EA is working with Bedford Borough Council and in consultation with the B&MK Trust and other key stakeholders who are committed to preparing a strategy for the navigable corridor of the River Great Ouse through Bedford, from the junction of the B&MK waterway link near Kempston Weir, downstream through the town to Willington Lock. It is hoped that the strategy will be completed within a year.

Amanda Spivack, waterways development team leader with the EA Anglian waterways team, outlined the key objectives of the strategy, which include:

- Helping to redefine the Great Ouse through Bedford as an opportunity for waterspace activity and, in conjunction with the proposed B&MK waterway, develop the town as a "waterway destination".

- Informing and complementing the Borough Council's vision for the regeneration of the river corridor in order to maximise economic opportunity.
- Identifying opportunities to promote access to new or enhanced water-based activities, including associated services and infrastructure.
- Capitalising on the river corridor as a recreation, tourism and transport resource and identifying further physical, environmental and recreational improvements, which will sustain and provide new jobs and economic opportunities.
- Creating a series of destinations and focal points, which will bring life and vitality back to the river corridor. This will include the assessment of potential mooring sites within the town centre and local communities.
- Improving the provision for rowing, canoeing, boaters' facilities, slipways and visitor moorings across the study area in preparation for the increased waterway traffic generated by the B&MK waterway link.
- Informing investment and decision making in order to support bids for external funding (capital and revenue) and encouraging private sector partnership investment.

"We are also going to identify how it can provide sustainable transport – water taxis will tick a lot of boxes," she added.

Amanda also explained that market research would be carried out to assess potential boating demand and activity on the river, and consider which waterway businesses could be developed locally to enhance the area and make it more attractive to water users. Opportunities would also be reviewed for developing non-boating activities such as cycling, walking, bird-watching, fishing.

Pointing to what could be possible for Bedford, Amanda highlighted the example of the Northampton Marina, where it is proposed to transform a disused boating lake into high quality public space which will transform the image of the town and the way it relates to the River Nene.

Earlier, Jane Wolfson expressed thanks to Shan Hunt, who has resigned as a director of the Trust.

ENDS



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Notes to editors



19 May 2010: The Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway Trust AGM with Trust Directors Richard Wood, David Fowler, Graham Mabbutt, Jane Wolfson (Chair), Marilyn Leask, Neil Hayes, Don Allison and Hilary Goldsmith.



19 May 2010: The Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway Trust AGM with guest speaker Amanda Spivack, Waterway Development Team Leader for Anglian Waterways at the Environment Agency addressing the Trust Membership.



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