

Press Release

Embargo: Immediate



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Sir Samuel Whitbread KCVO

“HOLES IN THE GROUND” MOVING CLOSER FOR BEDFORD & MILTON KEYNES WATERWAY (B&MK)

- ❖ **Project embedded in Milton Keynes Council strategies**
- ❖ **“Momentum building big time:” Mayor of Milton Keynes, Councillor Catriona Morris**
- ❖ **“Continuous progress” made in Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough**
- ❖ **Potential impact and significance of an “iconic” structure at Brogborough**
- ❖ **MK could have the nation’s deepest lock**
- ❖ **Bedford community boat about to be ordered**

Like a searchlight picking out hidden activity, the scale and scope of the support and commitment of local councils, as part of the consortium driving the B&MK waterway project forward, shone during the third annual partnership conference of the B&MK Waterway Trust. Its chairman, Graham Mabbutt, described what he heard as “uplifting, inspirational, enlightening and encouraging”.

Some 100 delegates from councils, businesses, education and community groups gathered at the Open University to hear Councillor Morris say she was delighted that Milton Keynes Council continued to support and be committed to the waterway project, and that this continued in the Council’s core strategy. She looked forward to things beginning to appear.

The Mayor was an early supporter of the 26km waterway link between the Grand Union Canal at Milton Keynes and the River Great Ouse at Bedford and recalled “small meetings in my lounge”. Living close to the route of the waterway she recognised the benefits and pleasure of a waterside environment.

“I congratulate the B&MK Trust, the Canal & River Trust and the project partners for persevering with the project. Although I don’t see a hole in the ground yet, I see momentum building big time. I have no doubt that we shall see that waterway and we will all enjoy the pleasure it will bring,” she said.

Milton Keynes & Bedford Borough councils

Nick Fenwick, chairman of the MK Waterway Park Steering Group, and Paul Vann, Economic Development Manager at Bedford Borough Council, both highlighted



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significant sections of the A to Z delivery plan for the project. Mr Fenwick said that in Milton Keynes they were looking at about 11 km from the Grand Union to the M1.

There were no holes in the ground as such but planning was proceeding in a number of places. Detailed options were under scrutiny and discussions with landowners and developers were taking place. It was important to have a robust planning base first, **he said. The project was in the Council's core strategy and corporate plan. "This means the shoulders of the councillors and officers are right behind it."**

In the context of Milton Keynes expansion, opportunities for the waterway would be safeguarded. The Council had also ensured planning permission was in place for next five years.

Mr Fenwick said he was excited about the opportunities the waterway could create. **"We have got it recognised in the core strategy and the Council's corporate plan. So what we need to do now is get things happening on the ground and work with developers."**

Commenting on Willen Lake, Mr Fenwick said various points of entry for the waterway from the Grand Union were being looked at. This could incorporate the deepest lock in the UK at 11 metres. This would be another feature along the route which would open up commercial opportunities for the lake itself.

Paul Vann, who is also the B&MK Consortium secretary, spoke of Bedford Borough **Council's planning policy commitment to "support, contribute, aid and ensure" the safeguarding of the route and how developments in the Marston Vale could create potential opportunities for the waterway.**

Construction of linear ponds as part of the Marston Vale Innovation Park "is getting closer and closer. I hope this will be next summer," said Mr Vann. One of the issues at this location had been the two years it had taken to secure the great crested newt licence to allow development to proceed.

Another feature of this and nearby developments would be to use the clay extracted from the sites for the Bedford western bypass A428-**A6 link road. "The trick will be getting the timing right, permissions and contracts in place; also getting finance in place as well," said Mr Vann.**

National Cycleway 51 – **"University Way"** – would also be a marker of the route through Marston Vale. Significant development related funding was coming for the **cycleway's construction.**

Concluding, Mr Vann said: "Progress is being made. It can be painfully slow at times but is continuous."

Bedford community boat

An order is to be placed imminently for the building of a 60 plus seat trip boat, which the B&MK Trust will operate initially on the River Great Ouse in Bedford on behalf of



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community groups, schools and colleges, businesses and individuals. Don Allison, **finance director of the Trust, said that "fantastic progress" had been made in planning and funding for the boat**

Roger Crews, a director of the trading company set up by the Trust to operate the boat, said the project had been a major challenge but Bedford Borough Council had recognised the importance of such a boat as part of its Waterspace Study, and had offered a loan to support the project. The full cost would be just under £138,000, enough of which has been raised for the boat to be ordered. More donations were needed to cover the last costs of getting the boat operation up and running.

More than 70 people had volunteered to become involved in various ways and a clarion call is being made for more volunteers, especially with specialist skills.

"We really are confident that we will have a boat on the river by next Easter," said Mr Crews.

Iconic structure

Jim Stirling, former technical director of British Waterways (now the Canal & River Trust), who persuaded the Government to fund the repair of the Caledonian Canal, then led the campaign to restore the Lowland canals in Scotland, said that canals were not just industrial archaeology, they were as relevant today as when they were first built in terms of the bigger picture they create.

What had been achieved in Scotland, including the iconic Falkirk Wheel boat lift, could translate to the B&MK. Stamina and resolve were called for as such projects always suffered set-backs. **"Be bold and have some fun as well,"** he urged.

Canal & River Trust – first 123 days

John Best, regional chair and National Council member of the C&RT, explained how the transfer of British Waterways into the C&RT and a charitable trust had **"transferred a bit of Government into the community and voluntary sector" with its national headquarters in Milton Keynes. The B&MK had always enjoyed the support of the former British Waterways and this would continue closely. "I think the future will be very rosy",** he said.

A similar message was echoed by Richard Rutter, head of Enterprise South of the C&RT, who said the Trust was now the guardian of a 200-year-old working heritage of waterways in England and Wales. The Trust would build on projects such as the B&MK. A ten-year waterway strategy had begun and consultation would begin next spring before adoption in the summer.

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Notes to editors



B&MK 3rd Annual Partnership Conference speakers at the Open University on Friday 2nd November 2012, left to right: Roger Crews, Paul Vann, Graham Mabbutt, Nick Fenwick, Don Allison, Cllr Catriona Morris, Jim Stirling and Richard Rutter.

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| Roger Crews | Director, B&MK Waterway Enterprises Ltd |
| Paul Vann | Economic Development Manager, Bedford Borough Council and B&MK Consortium Secretary |
| Graham Mabbutt | Chairman, B&MK Waterway Trust |
| Nick Fenwick | Assistant Director of Planning, Milton Keynes Council and Chairman of the MK Waterway Park Consortium Steering Group |
| Don Allison | Finance Director, B&MK Waterway Trust and B&MK Waterway Enterprises Ltd |
| Cllr Catriona Morris | Mayor, Milton Keynes |
| Jim Stirling | former Technical Director, Canal & River Trust |
| Richard Rutter | Head of Enterprise South, Canal & River Trust |

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

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