

Press Release

Embargo: Immediate

BEDFORD & MILTON KEYNES WATERWAY AT HEART OF NEW "WATERSPACE" STUDIES



B&MK waterway included as a "strategically significant project"

The economic, environmental and social benefits of developing the Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway are constant threads running through the recently published Bedford Waterspace and Economic Impact and Opportunities studies. The Trust's planned community trip boat could provide an "early visible symbol of change".

The studies, which have the full support of the B&MK Waterway Trust, were launched last Friday (30 September) by Bedford Borough Council (BBC) and the Environment Agency (EA), who jointly commissioned Richard Glen Associates to carry out the work. This focuses on the corridor of the River Great Ouse from Old Bromham Bridge, downstream to the junction of the proposed B&MK waterway link near Kempston Weir and eastwards through the town centre to Willington Lock.

The BBC and EA are both members of the consortium of local authorities and agencies which was set up just over a year ago to drive forward the B&MK project. Mayor of Bedford Dave Hodgson is its chairman.

The Economic Impact and Opportunities Study (which complements the main study) asserts that the economic impact of the River Great Ouse is estimated at £250,000 per mile per annum. "Bedford as an urban area should be able to considerably exceed this figure with a potential benefit from its stretch of river of £4.5million per annum."

Key extracts from the Waterspace Study:

- ***The Borough Council will support the creation of the Bedford to Milton Keynes Waterway park as a strategic green infrastructure link benefitting the borough as a whole, but particularly important to the delivery of sustainable growth in the northern Marston Vale.***
- ***Where appropriate, development will be expected to contribute towards the creation and delivery of the waterway.***
- ***BBC and EA wish to develop the river's economic, environmental and the social benefits of water-related***

recreation in advance of the long-term aspirations of both the B&MK Waterway link and the Fens Waterways link.

An 11-point approach seeks:

- To act as a catalyst and focus for area regeneration.
- To reflect the value of waterside sites to water-based sport, businesses, recreation and tourism.
- To **enhance the range of moorings available and associated boaters' facilities.**
- To promote activity on the river and access to the river corridor for canoeists, walkers and cyclists.
- To promote sustainable river related development which aids flood risk management by the improvement of adjacent riverine spaces, sustainable transport and climate change adaptation.
- To promote landscape and ecological enhancement by managing the relationship between increased water-based activities and the environment.
- To manage riverside vegetation to allow visibility and access to the river.
- To improve water quality to enhance biodiversity/habitat creation and support the principles of the EU Water Framework Directive.
- ***To prepare for the Bedford to Milton Keynes Waterway link's contribution to the local economy in developing and reinforcing existing community and business connections.***
- To support and complement land-based activities and create opportunities for greater diversity of mixed use, recreational activity and successful business.
- To achieve public access and activity on the river in a well-designed and stimulating environment. This will create tourism opportunities with associated employment, contributing to an increase in the quality of life along the Great Ouse and the promotion of Bedford as the quintessential riverside town.

The economic and opportunities study points to the potential for a trip boat. Jane Wolfson, vice-president of the B&MK Trust, said during the study launch that the community boat, for which an appeal has been running for five months, could be "a social enterprise milestone" project.



"This boat could be one of the most visible symbols of change. It is a 'quick win' idea and we need ideas and suggestions on how to close the £75k funding gap for 2012." (The appeal currently stands at over £40k).

Commenting on the study, Graham Mabbutt, chairman of the B&MK Waterway Trust, said, **"This study provides an action framework which anticipates the creation of the B&MK missing link of 26km of waterway from the Grand Union Canal at Milton Keynes to the Great Ouse at Kempston. Additionally it complements strategic plans to open up a wider Fenland waterways link.**

"We have always believed that improvements and restoration of the Great Ouse through Bedford would be the catalyst for developing the river westwards linking with the proposed waterway. This study couldn't have come at a better time in focusing on the huge benefits of water-based regeneration and fits like a glove with the Trust's ultimate aim of creating a 21st century 'waterway for all', although it would be unrealistic to ignore that these proposals must compete for resources in a challenging economic climate. That is why the B&MK will be developed in 'bite-size chunks' as resources become available.

"The study shows how the river can be defined as the town's primary tourist attraction and opens the door to start planning for projects such as 'park, ride, stride'-and-glide water taxis, as well as community boats like the Trust boat we hope to launch in the near future. We welcome these studies and look forward to being members of a new 'waterspace partnership' that will make these proposals a reality."

Earlier, Councillor Doug McMurdo, BBC portfolio holder for leisure and culture, said there was much in the **report which was deliverable.** "There are things happening in the Borough now which will enable and facilitate delivery." He said that much of the programme was about improvement. "It just needs a bit of innovation and will."

He added that the Great Ouse was often described as Bedford's jewel in the crown. Turning this imagery around, he said: "The river is the crown with lots of jewels around it and we need to join them up."

ENDS

Notes to editors



“A revelation” – “not a bit like Milton Keynes”.

Oh, yes it is - and it might not be too long before these sights become just as familiar along the River Great Ouse in Bedford following the Waterspace Study.

These were just some reactions from more than a few of the guests aboard the Ocean Princess for the B&MK Trust’s annual Grand Union Canal trips recently. These aim to give representatives of local councils, community groups, commercial enterprises and educationalists an insight to the contrasts and benefits of a waterside environment.

The 2-hour return journeys started at Campbell Park and took in the canal-side development at Pennyland and Great Linford, courtesy of James Griffin Wyvern Shipping, Linslade.

Names of those pictured above, from the left:-

- *Cllr Doug McMurdo, Portfolio Holder for Leisure & Culture, Bedford Borough Council*
- *Mick Callanan, Trustee, Connolly Foundation*
- *Patrick Hall, Director, B&MK Waterway Trust*
- *Cllr Sue Oliver, Portfolio Holder for Children's Social Care, Bedford Borough Council*
- *Cllr Colleen Atkins, Portfolio Holder for Performance & External Relations, Bedford Borough Council*
- *James Griffin, Wyvern Shipping*
- *Graham Mabbutt, Chairman, B&MK Waterway Trust*
- *PCllr Paul Harbottle, Aspley Guise Parish Council*
- *Gareth Lloyd, Reporter, Three Counties Radio*
- *Cllr Ken Matthews, Executive Member for Sustainable Communities - Strategic Planning & Economic Development and B&MK Waterway Consortium representative, Central Bedfordshire Council*
- *Dr Tony Wood, Chairman of Ouse Valley Branch, English Speaking Union*
- *Neil Hayes, Director, B&MK Waterway Trust*
- *Erin Witcomb-Vos, Fens Waterways Link Partnerships Manager and B&MK Waterway Consortium representative, Environment Agency*
- *Darren Gray, Growth Coordination Manager, Milton Keynes Council*
- *David Fowler, Director, B&MK Waterway Trust*



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