

Press Release

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Sir Samuel Whitbread KCVO

REAL PROGRESS ON PLANS FOR B&MK WATERWAY BUT "TRICKY ISSUES" AHEAD

- ❖ **BEDFORD COMMUNITY BOAT TRIPS IN JULY**
- ❖ **"INTERESTING EVOLUTION" OF MILTON KEYNES SECTION**
- ❖ **QUESTION MARK OVER COVANTA FUNDING**
- ❖ **B&MK CHAIRMAN GRAHAM MABBUTT TO STAND DOWN**

A close-up view of the "A to Z" plan for the Bedford and Milton Keynes Waterway is pointing up real progress over the past year - and some tricky issues ahead. "Everyone is working really hard on it and we are making progress. Another year has passed and next year there will be more progress."

This was the assessment of Paul Vann, secretary of the B&MK Waterway Consortium, at last evening's B&MK Trust annual general meeting in Newport Pagnell. The eight-member Consortium, which includes the local authorities of Bedford Borough Council, Milton Keynes Council and Central Bedfordshire, is driving forward plans for the 26km of waterway between the Grand Union Canal at Milton Keynes and the River Great Ouse at Bedford.

Councillor Brian White, newly-appointed Mayor of Milton Keynes, praised the enthusiasm of Trust members – "people who have kept the project alive through all the difficult times."

He spoke of the effort that had gone into the Trust gathering information and supporting his colleagues to make the case for getting the project into planning documents and core strategy. However, there had been a request to modify part of the route in Milton Keynes and this had resulted in a delay to the Council's core strategy.

In a detailed overview of the proposed route, Mr Vann, who is also Economic Manager for Growth at Bedford Borough Council, identified achievements and complexities. He spoke of the need for flexibility and responsiveness to developments. Referring to the Milton Keynes area he noted the "interesting evolution" of some of the sections and "tricky issues" being addressed around this "key delivery area" for the waterway.

Mr Vann noted a number of other complexities as he highlighted sections of the route through Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough. A more detailed study was taking

place on how to bring forward sections of the waterway through the proposed Innovation Park in Marston Vale including indicative costs and implications for wildlife.

Summing up, Mr Vann said the “fundamental tools” were in place and the Consortium needed to be constantly vigilant, responsive, convincing, opportunistic and flexible.

Covanta

The Covanta waste-to-energy development is obliged to provide a section of waterway as well as two bridges beneath roads that cross the line of the waterway. This amounts to some £3.375m of funding – when the plant is operational.

In answer to a question, Mr Vann said Covanta did not appear to have won a number of contracts they were hoping for and had decided to dispose of their UK assets. If a buyer emerges they would inherit the same obligations in the planning permission. So it was a question of wait and see,” he said.

Bedford Community Boat

Don Allison, Finance Director of the Trust, said progress on the boat project over the past two years had been “absolutely amazing”. Construction of the boat John Bunyan was nearing completion and despite delays it looked like delivery by the end of June. Trips on the Great Ouse in Bedford should begin in July. Crew training was well underway with nine trainee boatmasters about to take final examinations.

Buckingham Canal Society

Helen Preston spoke about progress on restoration of the Buckingham and Old Stratford Arms of the Grand Union Canal, including the imminent re-watering of a length of canal near Buckingham. She said there should be closer working between her society and the B&MK as there are parallels between the two projects.

“Opportunism is also one of our essential strategies as well as constant awareness of changing circumstances,” she said.

The Society’s aim is to create a rural canal, creating a green link from Cosgrove to Buckingham which might also mitigate some of the flooding problems in the area. Public awareness of the social, economic and environmental benefits of the project has grown owing to the hard-working volunteers who are the essence of the Society. This has led to developing partnerships within the community.

Graham Mabbutt and Claire Gathard

Graham Mabbutt announced that he would be standing down as Trust chairman during the coming year. “I have enjoyed the past two years immensely but the volume of work and the level of commitment it takes are also immense. However, the results make it worthwhile.”

After the community boat launch, Graham’s next project is to form a team of volunteers, identify parts of the route that the Trust could get, or already have



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planning permission for, and to encourage the Inland Waterway Recovery Group to assist in a self-dig-out-the-channel scheme. "Ambitious it sounds, but doable."

He added that the Trust was in a strong sound financial position but appealed for additional directors (three vacancies) and volunteers to drive the project forward.

Earlier he paid tribute to Claire Gathard, who is retiring after six years as the Trust's project officer. She had been an "absolutely wonderful" support to the Trust, the members and volunteers.

Councillor Brian White made a special presentation to Claire.

Directors

The following directors who had completed a three-year term were re-appointed: David Fowler, Hilary Goldsmith, Richard Wood and John Best.

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Notes to editors



Paul Vann, secretary of the B&MK Waterway Consortium and Economic Development Manager (Growth), Bedford Borough Council



Trust Chairman Graham Mabbutt applauds as Milton Keynes Mayor, Cllr Brian White, makes a presentation to Claire Gathard, B&MK Project Officer

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

For further details contact

Name: Neil Hayes, External Communications Advisor, B&MK Waterway Trust

Phone: 01234 826216

Mobile: 07968 097359

Email: media@b-mkwaterway.org.uk

Website: www.b-mkwaterway.org.uk