

# News-update - Annual Partners Conference

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## **LOCAL AUTHORITIES COUNTING DOWN TO BE 'FIRST DIGGERS' OF B&MK**

- ❖ Vintage Year for Milton Keynes Council, with 'Healthy Progress' being made.
- ❖ Milton Keynes Cllr John Bint "All the pieces are coming together."
- ❖ Uncertainty over Covanta project but Parliamentary Select Committee set precedence by insisting that Waterway must be part of any future development
- ❖ 'Steady As She Goes' in Bedford Borough, with further engineering studies planned
- ❖ Central Beds Council "Confident of Progress" in Marston Gate area
- ❖ John Bunyan Boat "Resounding Success"

There was a definite upbeat feel to this year's Annual Partnership Conference for the 60 guests who attended the Rufus Centre in Flitwick. All the speakers and guests expressed the view that this had been a good year with small but significant progress being made, although none of the authorities were yet in a position to say who will 'dig first?'

At the outset, one of the original Trust members – Jim Stafferton, presented the chairman with a cheque for the Trust of £1000, on behalf The Lovells Bury Masonic Lodge at Ampthill, of which he is the Chairman.

**Cllr Caroline Maudlin, Chairperson of Central Beds Council** opened the conference and stated her on-going support for the Waterway and the tourism and development opportunities it will bring to the areas of Marston Vale, Bedford and Milton Keynes.

**Bedford Mayor David Hodgson**, who is also chairman of the consortium of local authorities and agencies that will deliver the waterway project, congratulated the Trust on a successful year and reaffirmed that Bedford Borough Council's continuing major supporter of the B&MK and the John Bunyan Boat.

**Cllr Brian White, Mayor of Milton Keynes**, stated that the Waterway was at the forefront of the economic development of all three councils. Within Milton Keynes it was part of the adopted Core Strategy Plan that would ensure it being included in all plans as development occurred along the route.

**The Major of Flitwick Town Council, Cllr Phillip Thompson**, welcomed everyone to the Rufus Centre and wished the trust all success with the project, for the benefit of local people.

### **Update from Milton Keynes Council**

**Sarah Evans, Strategic Delivery Manager** at Milton Keynes Council stated that it had been a 'Vintage Year' for MKBC with the transfer of planning powers and the responsibility for the local investment plan, together with the creation of the MK Development Partnership. The council is now responsible for the Corporate Strategy, which includes the Waterway plan. For progress to continue they needed to 'disentangle' some planning permissions from the previous authority and be able to 'Match Fund' any EU money.

**Milton Keynes Cllr John Bint**, responding to a question from **B&MK Trust vice president Jane Wolfson** about which Council would 'Dig First?' said that the

transfer of the planning powers were very significant, together with the transfer of some land ownership to the council at the Grand Union/Willen Lake end of the route. Although he was unable to commit to a date, he did say "The pieces are coming together."

### **Update from Central Beds Council**

**Laura Kitson** admitted that the announcement by Covanta to withdraw from their planned development has created some 'Uncertainty'. However, she was delighted that the route of the Waterway has now been secured by the announcement by a Parliamentary Select Committee that any future development on the site must now include the Waterway. She claimed that this was unprecedented and required a considerable input from Central Beds Council to the Select Committee regarding the planning, strategy, support, benefit and involvement of the communities along the route.

**Andy Lewis**, also from CBC, stated that after meetings with Network Rail he was "Confident of Progress" with tackling the engineering and congestion issues at the Marston Gate and Station Road area in Marston Mortaine.

The council was also waiting final proposals from Barratt Homes for their planned development of 400 homes and the possible siting of a cemetery in that area (although there is no requirement for Barratt Homes to accommodate the Waterway as permission was granted in 2006).

He believed the major obstacle to the Waterway is the lack of any planned development along the route in the CBC area at the present.

### **Update from Bedford Borough Council**

**Paul Vann, BBC Development Manager and Secretary to the Consortium**, said there were a number of important and detailed engineering studies in progress and declared that it was "Steady as she goes." Engineering studies will take place along the route when any development occurs. These are vital to ensure the suitability of the land as route for the Waterway.

He quoted further work by Halcrow near the A421, for drainage, levels, locks and costing's and also further studies at the Persimmon Homes site. He was confident that by early next year, he will know most of the planned route through the Bedford Borough area

### **Update from Sustrans Route 51**

**Andy Knight** explained that Sustrans do not link towns together, but, linked Town to Countryside. He whole heartedly supported the Waterway and believed that there were some funding opportunities to build a cycle/walk way along part of the proposed route.

### **Keynote Speaker – Richard Parry. Chief Executive Officer. Canal & River Trust**

The nation had been left an incredible waterway legacy. The role of the Canal and River Trust is to enhance the waterway network of 2,000 miles, 1500 locks, 3000 bridges and 1,000 Wildlife Conservation Sites, 72 reservoirs and 35,000 licensed boats. In addition, there are 10m visitors, 20,000 people employed with a net benefit to the economy of £500m.

Government funding has been cut by a third to £40m, whilst the Trust were looking to increase commercial income and fund raising. There are major works planned, such as the £12m on towpath improvements. The key objective is partnerships, working with local communities and volunteers, for example the recruitment of 370 voluntary lock keepers and the local adoption by volunteers to improve and maintain their canals.

He was delighted to be working in partnership with the B&MK, where the Canal & River Trust are leading on the SEMLEP bid and engineering support, as well as supplying office space for Laura Jones, the B&MK Project Officer. He finished by saying that this was a unique opportunity to create a positive future for canals and rivers and people who value them.

In reply to a question from **B&MK director John Best**, he admitted that the national navigational authority for rivers, including the Gt. River Ouse at Bedford, was still the Environmental Agency, with the decision of when those powers are transferred to the C&T now deferred until after 2015. Meanwhile, he was seeking a commitment from the government to make the transfer as soon as possible.

**The Chairman of the Bedford and Milton Keynes Waterway Trust – Graham Mabbutt** noted that the John Bunyan Boat had been a “Resounding Success” with nearly 3000 passengers since July. He thanked all the sponsors of the boat project, particularly Bedford Borough Council for the provision of the loan and all the volunteers who give up their time to crew the boat or take the bookings. He finished by saying that the conference had been Enlightening, Encouraging and Interesting.



Chairman Graham Mabbutt presented with cheque for £1000 by B&MK member Jim Stafferton on behalf of The Lovells Bury Masonic Lodge, Ampthill



**B&MK**  
BEDFORD &  
MILTON KEYNES  
WATERWAY TRUST

PATRON  
Sir Samuel Whitbread KCVO



L-R. Guest Speakers at the B&MK Annual Partnership Conference

Laura Kitson – Central Beds Council  
Paul Vann – Bedford Borough Council  
Andy Knight – Sustrans Route 51  
Sarah Evans – Milton Keynes Council  
Andy Lewis – Central Beds Council  
Graham Mabbutt – B&MK



All the local Mayors were in attendance  
L-R Cllr Brian White – Milton Keynes  
Cllr Caroline Maudlin – Chair person - Central Beds Council  
Cllr Phillip Thompson – Flitwick Town Council  
Dave Hodgson – Bedford Borough Council

Graham Mabbutt  
Chairman – Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway Trust

**Website:** [www.b-mkwaterway.org.uk](http://www.b-mkwaterway.org.uk)

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