



Members gather before the meeting

Second Members' Evening

We held our second Members' Evening on 13th October aboard the John Bunyan at her base in Priory Marina, Bedford. The evening was quite well attended, and fortunately we did not have to turn anybody away because of the maximum boat capacity.

The meeting was addressed by Jane Hamilton, who first of all explained the strategy that we are using to put the case for the Waterway Park to the decision makers in the region.

Jane mentioned the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC), who are preparing a report for the government on infrastructure needed to support economic growth in the Oxford—Cambridge corridor. Although their interest is expected to be mainly on roads and rail, we see the Waterway Park as an essential part of the infrastructure plan as it will bring visitors and investment to the area, help improve the environment through better water management and help create more attractive places to live and work with a clear sense of identity.

We have made a submission to the NIC enquiry and been supported by the submissions made by some of the Bedford to Milton Keynes Waterway Consortium members although not all our partners remembered to include a reference to us. The time available to prepare a response to the NIC questions was quite short.

Copies of the Vision Document, which was launched at the AGM and Partnership Conference in May (and explained in the last B&MK News) were available, and Jane mentioned a few of the main points it raised. She explained that it, and a lot of our current activities, are aimed at promoting the Waterway to local and national government and important agencies. We must continue to highlight the economic, health and environmental benefits that the Park can bring. We need to produce up to date evidence to support our case. The last economic impact study was undertaken some years ago and needs to be updated and expanded.

Jane also mentioned that, in light of recent events, the charity sector is being more closely examined than in the past. Therefore it is important that we have, and can demonstrate, proper governance. To do this we are making sure that we have clear policies in all relevant areas so that potential grant-givers can review them.

(Continued on page 4)





View from the Chair

As we move towards the autumn now is a good time to reflect on what we have achieved this year. First and foremost – the John Bunyan. Despite some very difficult weather early on in the summer the John Bunyan has had another very successful season. The crew and volunteers were especially busy during the Bedford River Festival back in July. Well done everyone!

Turning to the Trust, we have been working hard on meeting our Business Plan targets especially influencing key stakeholders and seeking wider support for the Waterway Park.

Top of the list has been making a submission to the National Infrastructure Commission – an organisation charged with advising the government on the delivery of key national infrastructure projects. The NIC are conducting a study into the future infrastructure needed to promote sustainable economic growth in the Oxford/Milton Keynes/Cambridge Corridor. In May the NIC asked for evidence to help them with their studies and the Trust put forward a robust argument that our project should be considered as a key driver for growth in the region. Our full submission can be viewed on the BMKWP website but, in summary, we argued that the Waterway Park will provide the missing link in the wider regional Anglian waterway network thereby opening up major tourism opportunities and providing a significant boost to the local and wider economy and to the Marston Vale area in particular. We said that the new link will bring with it the potential benefits for regional water management such as improved water storage and transfer as well as improved flood defences. And finally that the wider Waterway Park will provide significant new healthy lifestyle and leisure opportunities and, at the same time, increase biodiversity as it links major wetland sites.

We are waiting to see an interim report from the NIC which is expected in the autumn. A final report will be published late next year. If account is taken of our evidence, then it would mean a major boost for the project. The Waterway Park would be drawn to the attention of the government as warranting serious consideration as potentially important regional infrastructure.

In late October I will be speaking at a conference organised by the South East Midlands Enterprise Partnership (SEMLEP) themed around infrastructure to continue to promote the arguments we submitted to the NIC. SEMLEP are one of our partners on the BMKWP Consortium and have a key role in promoting regional economic growth

and controlling the allocation of government funding to local projects.

At the more local level we have been making great use of our new brochures which I hope many of you will have seen on the John Bunyan, at the AGM and at the recent members' evening. We have used the content of the brochure to update our presentations so that when we meet with important stakeholders we have the right information to brief them on progress to date.

Over the past few months both I and fellow Board members have met with 3 local MPs – Mark Lancaster, Alistair Burt and Richard Fuller. We hope to meet with more before the end of the year. We have had several positive meetings with the Environment Agency regional team, we continue to meet regularly with officers and elected members from the 3 Local Authorities in the Consortium and also with developers who are promoting projects along the route. Since we, as Trust, are not in a position to build the Waterway Park ourselves it is absolutely critical that we convince those who can help build it that this is a "must have" project.

Steve Parker, our Programme Manager, continues to work on our Programme Plan and to create more structure for projects such as the Head of Navigation. Getting better organised is important for us when we bid for funding from charities and other sources. Our funding sub group is preparing bids for small scale projects such as our initiative to 'Mark the Route' of the Waterway but even that requires a great deal of time and a lot of information – hence the need to structure projects and be clear about what we can do and what we expect our partners to do in support.

We are also working to improve our website and to spread the word about the project in any way we can, especially on social media such as Twitter and Facebook. We want to attract new members from a wide range of interests as ours is a Waterway for All. We want walkers, cyclists, horse riders, runners, kayakers, families and businesses to understand what a great difference it can make to the future of this area. I had a ride on the Falkirk Wheel during a summer trip to Scotland and it left me thinking what wonderful ideas might be developed as a solution to getting the Waterway over Brogborough Hill. Something for all of us to think about!

To keep raising the profile of the Waterway Park until it gets noticed at the highest levels is time consuming and very hard work. I want to take this opportunity to thank my fellow Board members who have been working very hard to take forward our Business Plan and help make the project

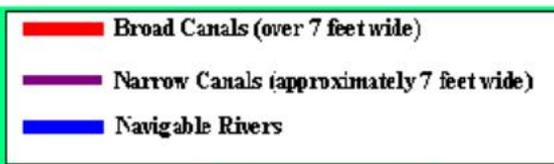
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happen. In particular having some new blood on the Board has really helped reinvigorate our thinking. However, the Board alone cannot do all the jobs we need to tackle, go to all the events where we need a presence and keep chasing all the people and organisations we need to influence. We need you, our members, to help.

The Trust values you, our members and supporters, so please let us know if you think you can spare a little time to help us.



B&M: The Bristol & Manchester Waterway?



A point raised at the Members' Evening is well illustrated by this map (thanks to Jim Shead - www.jim-shead.com). The Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway will not only connect Bedford & Milton Keynes, provide a loop for narrow beam boats to cruise and a way for broad beam boats to reach the Nene and Ouse, avoiding the narrow locks at Northampton, but also create a link between the north and south for broad beam boats.

At present there is no way to cruise from the northern canals and rivers to those to the south of Birmingham without a coastal voyage, as the band of purple across the Midlands on the map shows. Although it is possible to cross the Wash from Boston to the Nene, this does not provide access to the canal system. The B&MK will provide this link as well as all the other boating, environmental, health and other benefits we are well aware of.





Members' Evening (cont)

(Continued from page 1)

Whilst we have not updated the A-Z of the route, our programme manager, Steve Parker is building on the information we have and working with Consortium partners to ensure we have clear plans that can be brought into action to help promote the Waterway Park and set out the steps which need to be taken to make it happen on the ground. This includes not only individual projects along the route but also building an analysis of the Waterway Park's financial and commercial viability, ensuring we have a clear strategy for working with the relevant stakeholders, and considering any marketing and communications requirements and opportunities.

Jane then moved on to the current situation with sections of the route where the Trust is involved in developments.

Campbell Park: Developers Crest Nicholson are designing a new marina as part of a much bigger residential and commercial site. The Trust has been working with Crest Nicholson to ensure the development will provide the very first section of the Waterway linking into the Grand Union Canal. Although only a short stretch it will be a start. The scheme will be the subject of a planning application in the next few months.

A421 near Milton Keynes: The current plans for dualling the A421 south of Milton Keynes to Junction 13 of the M1 will result in the Waterway route being blocked. The Trust is proposing that there should be an underpass similar to the one created when the A421 between the M1 and Bedford was dualled. Whilst the Local Authorities involved support the idea the main problem is lack of funding for the additional work. We continue to work towards a solution.

Aspley Guise Triangle: The Trust is in contact with a development consortium who are interested in developing land around the Waterway route in the triangle of land south of Milton Keynes between the M1 and the East West rail line. A lot will depend on whether Central Bedfordshire Council consider this land should be included in their Local Plan as a potential development site. The Trust has argued that, should this happen, then the Waterway Park should be an integral part of any new development.

East West Rail: We continue to stay in touch with Network Rail and the East West rail team to ensure that their project does not compromise the Waterway route under the M1 and alongside Ridgemont Station.

Brogborough Hill: This is likely to be one of

the last parts of the route constructed, but could be an exciting project and tourist attraction like the Falkirk Wheel which received around 600,000 visitors last year. There are no clear plans at the moment but the Trust and partners will be looking for innovative technical ideas and how to finance an eventual solution. Being located just off the M1 and only 50 miles from London it could attract many visitors.

Marston Vale: This is another site where potential development around the Waterway Park very much depends on whether land is included in Central Bedfordshire's Local Plan. We are working with land owners and developers to ensure the Waterway Park is central to any scheme that might be put forward.

Bedford Innovation Park: Our A to Z shows the Waterway snaking through the middle of this important commercial development site which is owned by Bedford Borough Council. We are liaising with the Council to ensure that when a developer for the site is appointed their scheme incorporates the Waterway route as originally proposed.

Bell Farm: Planning permission has been granted for a distribution facility on land which was part of the Waterway route, however, a planning agreement has ensured that the route is protected and realigned onto land owned by the Forest of

(Continued on page 6)



Jane Hamilton addressing the Members' Evening

John Bunyan Update



As we come to the end of the boating season let's reflect on what we have done this year.

The John Bunyan approaching Sovereigns Quay at the end of a Thursday public cruise

Despite the uncertain weather we had in June which caused cancellations of cruises, we have more than made up for the lost income. In fact our sales reached our annual target well ahead of schedule. Our passenger donations are also well up above our budgeted figures, and this season alone by the end of October we will have carried 7,000 passengers. So far since we started cruising in July 2013 we have carried over 22,000 passengers!

Promotion is well under way for next year with stands at Wedding Fayres, and Street Markets already booked, plus for the first time we are partnering with colleagues in Heritage Bedford (we are part of the group) to bring coach tours to Bedford for a cruise on the river and a visit to some of Bedford's many attractions. If you would like to book the boat for a charter cruise we are offering B&MK Trust Members a special 10% discount if you charter the boat for the spring months April, May, & June. Please quote you membership number when contacting our charter hire office. (charters@johnbunyanboat.org or 0330 1239 511)

We have achieved all of this because of the service of our excellent volunteers who have staffed our many cruises, and the excellent voluntary management team ably led by Jane Wolfson and with the capable administrative support of Katrina Allen and Kristi Fletcher who keep sales and rosters in order.

Our cruises finish at the end of October and the boat will then be laid up until early next year when volunteers' training starts for the new season. A well-deserved rest for the boat crew, but the admin volunteers and the management team will just keep on going to ensure that 2017 is even more successful than this year!

For next year our plans are well advanced with our usual mixture of Thursday, Saturday and Sunday public and special cruises. We are keeping to the same successful pattern that has brought us so much success this year, a mixture of morning and afternoon public cruises, Afternoon Tea Cruises, Lunchtime Cruises, Evening Fish & Chip Supper Cruises and our highly acclaimed jazz cruises. Plus our charter hire cruises of which bookings are flowing in quite nicely. So if you want to hire the boat for a party, anniversary cruise or whatever, don't leave it too long or the date you want may already have been booked!

The John Bunyan boat exists to support, raise awareness and funds for the Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway Trust and their Waterway Park project. The boat is owned by the Trust and run on their behalf by B&MK Waterway Enterprises Ltd. the trading division of the B&MK Waterway Trust.

*Graham Mabbutt, Commercial Director,
B&MK Waterway Enterprises Ltd.*



Members' Evening (Cont)

(Continued from page 4)

Marston Vale.

Head of Navigation: The Trust continues to work on extending the head of navigation in consultation with the Environment Agency (EA) and other partners. As a first step we are bidding for funding to help cover the costs of dredging the river and constructing a landing stage at Kempston. Dredging is essential to open up the existing navigation to boat traffic.

Rolling forward our plan is to hold two members' meetings per year which, together with the AGM, should help to keep everyone up to date with what is happening. We intend to hold the next meeting early in the new year (probably February, but weather considerations may push it back to March) in Milton Keynes. If you have any suggestions for a suitable location, what you would like to hear about, or other events you would like, please let us know. Email editor@b-mkwaterway.co.uk or leave a message on the office answer phone (number at the back of the newsletter).



Alternative Payment Methods for Subs

I thought I would take the opportunity to repeat what we said in the last newsletter: You will be aware that, finally, we were able to accept alternatives for your payments of membership fees from this year. This has been remarkably successful, although a few people were not able to make the QR code work for them.

All the methods we introduced: payment on-line, direct debit and sending card details in to us have been used by some members, although about three quarters still prefer to send a cheque. Cheques are the cheapest method for us, all the others incur a processing charge.

It is too late now for direct debits for this year, as we have already processed this batch. The other methods are still available to anyone who has not renewed, a reminder will be with this issue. We will be making direct debit available again for next year's renewal.

If you have any comments about how this has gone, or any suggestions for other alternatives, please let us know to: membership@b-mkwaterway.co.uk



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Events Calendar 2016



February or March	Members' Social Evening— Milton Keynes. Details to be finalised.
Any time (to be agreed)	A talk by one of our experienced talks team members to your group, or any team of decision makers you can help us to meet.
June 2017	AGM - venue to be arranged
November 2017	APC - Central Beds, venue to be arranged



JB Boatmaster Bill Boddington presented Susan Beaumont, the 22,000th Passenger to be carried on the boat, with a bottle of bubbly and some flowers to mark the event.

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