



## **Bedford and Milton Keynes Waterway Trust**

### **Comments on Central Bedfordshire Pre-Submission Local Plan (2015-2035)**

#### **Background**

The Bedford and Milton Keynes Waterway Park is a potentially transformational project which will provide significant and wide-ranging benefits to the immediate locality and the wider region as a whole. It will run from the River Great Ouse in Bedford through the Marston Vale to the Grand Union Canal in Milton Keynes. It will be the first new waterway in the UK for 100 years and a huge source of interest and innovation. It will provide a key 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. 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. 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.

In addition, the new Waterway Park can play a very significant role in establishing a sense of place for new settlements along its route. As an early part of a strategic approach it can provide a crucial cross boundary green/blue landscape framework to help structure and absorb pressure for growth. It can provide a recognisable heart for new communities and a focus for consistency in designing unique high-quality places in which people want to live and work.

In its recent study into the infrastructure needs of the Oxford/Milton Keynes/Cambridge corridor the National Infrastructure Commission recognised the Bedford and Milton Keynes Waterway Park as an “opportunity to create a green infrastructure asset” for the area. Development in the Marston Vale would deliver the first significant section of the Waterway.

The Bedford and Milton Keynes Waterway Trust (“the Trust”) is a charitable organisation which, along with a wider Consortium of Local Authorities and other agencies, seeks to promote the project for the benefit of the wider sub region.

#### **Central Bedfordshire pre-submission Local Plan**

The Trust strongly supports policies SA2 and EE10 both of which will support the delivery of a section of the proposed Bedford to Milton Keynes Waterway Park.

#### **Policy SA2**

The Trust strongly supports the principles set out in this policy. The Trust agrees that the scale of development proposed within the Strategic Land Allocation should facilitate a strategic approach to the provision of infrastructure required to support new settlements. The Trust specifically supports the strategic approach of creating a multifunctional green corridor through the entire length of the site in the form of a section of the Bedford and Milton Keynes Waterway Park. The Waterway Park should include provision for pedestrian and cycle routes. The Waterway Park will also be capable of enhancing local biodiversity and will act as a strategic drainage resource for new settlements.

Accordingly the Trust considers the wording in Section 3 of Policy SA2 should be amended to read as 'The development will deliver a multifunctional Green Corridor ...' rather than 'The allocation is expected to deliver a multifunctional Green Corridor ...'.

The creation of the Waterway Park will provide a strong sense of place and ensure that the impacts of hard infrastructure are mitigated. Placing it at the heart of new settlements in the Marston Vale will help transform the area in a positive sustainable approach.

The Trust therefore considers that further policy support should be given to early delivery of the Waterway Park as a means of deriving the inherent environmental benefits which the green/blue infrastructure will bring to the site as well as a tangible community asset for the existing residents in the Marston Vale and the first residents of the New Villages.

### **Policy EE10**

The Trust strongly supports Policy EE10.

The policy actively protects the route of the proposed waterway park and will ensure that any development along that route delivers the waterway by placing it at the heart of new development

- The Waterway Park is an important piece of green/blue infrastructure which can help transform the area in a positive way
- It can bring social and economic, leisure and health benefits
- It can play a strong placemaking role for new communities
- It can help with water and flood management
- And to achieve all of this it must be integrated into development

Policy EE10 is consistent with the Trust's objectives and will help ensure this transformational piece of new blue/green infrastructure is delivered, in line with the emphasis given to it in the recent NIC study, Partnering in Prosperity.