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A 200-year dream is

CHARLES Short might be turning in his grave knowing his vision is still a blur.

The on-off scheme has had a chequered history but it received a significant kiss of life in 1994.

Brian Young, a member of the Inland Waterway Association, had the idea of marking the new Millennium by promoting A Waterway for All.

He saw a reinvention of canals for modern day use to serve new industries of leisure, tourism, and communications.

He founded the Bedford & Milton Keynes (B&MK) Waterway Trust as an informal group and it was short listed for funding by the Millennium commission but the plan foundered because any grant could not be matched.

However 2000 was marked by British Waterways joining the trust to investigate its feasibility and now there is renewed optimism for its future.

Hopes were further raised at the beginning of this year when the waterway was taken into consideration as part of a planned development for the first time, in a proposed extension of the Magna Linear Park, currently home to the John Lewis and River Island warehouses in the east of the city.

Plans included as part of the project would mean that, when finished, Milton Keynes could boast the UK's deepest lock, at



IT IS 200 years since Charles Short put forward a plan for a 26km waterway to link the Grand Union Canal and the River Great Ouse, which, when finished, will mean Milton Keynes boasts the UK's deepest lock. MK NEWS finds out more.

around 11 metres, which would be part of the waterway near Willen Lake.

Recent Bedford Waterspace and Economic Impact and Opportunities studies described

the scheme as a 'strategically significant project'.

In it Bedford Borough Council agreed to support an 11-point plan as a strategic infrastructure link benefitting everyone.

ever closer to reality



The site: The underpass beneath the A421 where the canal will run

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 waterway from the Grand

Union Canal at MK to the Great Ouse at Kempston. It also complements strategic plans to open up a wider Fenland waterways link. "The waterway is for tourism,

leisure, relaxation and enjoyment of the countryside.

"It will bring in extra revenue for the businesses in the area and create extra jobs."

Neil Hayes, the external communications director of the B&MK Waterway Trust, added: "An economic assessment of the project carried out in 2009 highlighted the huge benefits to the locality and wider region.

"Over a ten-year period visitors to the waterway and linked facilities, restaurants, campsites, cycle-hire and a host of other enterprises could pump between £167million and £265million into the local economy.

"Then the place-shaping of new businesses and additional economic activity, together with the uplift in property values along the waterway route could generate as much as £97million to £373million.

"This has been given extra muscle with the Bedford Waterspace Study. The economic, environmental and social benefits of developing the B&MK Waterway are the constant threads running through the study.

"Essentially the waterway could bring huge benefits environmentally, socially and economically, in terms of 'place shaping'."

The waterway link could be in operation in 15 years. The project has been plain sailing, but the dream of Mr Short is closer than ever to being realised.

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