

Report to Project Board 10 JULY 2002

**A Public Involvement Plan
for the Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway**

1. Introduction

This report presents proposals for wider community engagement in the development and implementation of the B&MK Waterway project. This continues the process of local community involvement during 2001-2002 which included roadshows and talks along the route, and consultation meetings in the parishes on route options identified in the feasibility study.

A vision for a community canal

An integral part of creating a modern Waterway is that it should be developed with the active involvement of those whom it will directly affect – local people and water/waterside users – using innovative consultation and public participation methods suited to the 21st century. This new Waterway presents an opportunity to benefit from an early community perspective on its construction and operation.

Our vision for 2010 and beyond, after the Waterway has opened, is that

- ? local people support, are involved in and actively care for 'their' Waterway
- ? there is extensive and contented use by a range of users
- ? there is harmony amongst users and between users and local people.

The proposals below are designed to enable local and user involvement in decision making from the outset, moving to a local level as the project progresses. Each activity should help to influence the planning agendas for the next stage of project development.

2. Proposals

Stage 1 – Citizens Jury November 2002

It is proposed that effective public involvement in relevant aspects of the scheme over the overall programme to 2010 is tackled in stages, beginning with a Citizens' Jury.

A Citizens Jury will bring to bear the common sense of lay, interested but impartial members of the public, representing the different communities of Milton Keynes, Mid-Beds and Bedford, on how best to develop the vision and route of the new Waterway.

The Citizens Jury will be posed a core 'question' to consider around the theme of 'what is important to you in developing a Waterway that will benefit the public, and what are your concerns that must be overcome?'

The primary output of the Citizens Jury will be a considered response to the core question or questions, together with a detailed schematic of how they reached that response. Since they represent the public and not interested parties or professional groups, Juries often add riders that draw the commissioning body's attention to issues of importance or concern to the public that have been overlooked, or at least undervalued, in the project planning process.

The Jury's recommendations will not be binding on the Project Board. However, experience shows that bodies commissioning Juries are pleasantly surprised by how helpful and reasonable their findings are.

The Jury exercise and report will generate valuable publicity for the Waterway, and for the Board's commitment to making a reality of community participation from the outset.

The recommended budget for this Citizens' Jury will be £12k including contingency. This figure excludes part of the cost of professional facilitation which will be provided by the B&MK Waterway Trust. Participation in the Steering Group together with provision of some logistical support (photocopying, meeting facilities during the preparation phase, postage, some telephone calls etc) will be provided by The Waterways Trust at a cost of £2k.

Stage 2 – A 'Public Involvement Plan' within the Implementation Plan

The wide partnership represented on the Project Board should have ownership of the public involvement process and understand its merits in the next stages of the project.

A 'Public Involvement Plan' will encompass a range of activities within the overall project in which local people and users can have a positive influence. It will not be a separate set of elements, but would add value to the core project and will benefit from being distinctly identified and resourced, at what will be a modest cost for high long term returns within the overall scheme of the project.

The Project Board will decide the appropriate scope of activities and consider resourcing implications.

The approach will help to achieve a broader awareness and involvement in the project by key beneficiary groups:

?? *Local groups* – those who live/work in the canal corridor vicinity

?? *User groups* – have specific interest in the project e.g. boaters, walkers, anglers etc.

Activities during 2003-2006 for example might include Planning for Real? or similar events undertaken with groups at MK, Bedford and central areas, to help draw together users and local people to feed into project development at an early stage.

During 2007-2010 there might be an increasing number of 'local patch' activity to define the waterway environment at a highly local level, fundraise for patch facilities, increase the involvement of schools, and prepare structures for a smooth transition to community and user liaison and involvement after the waterway opens.

The ownership and contributions of project partners in this work will be critical.

3. Funding & Implementation of continuing Public Involvement

The Project Implementation Plan appears the most appropriate vehicle for taking these proposals forwards, linking to the section on funding to ensure activities are integrated into the budget planning process.

This would include external funding bids and could extend to contributions from the private sector through the planning process. To what extent can Local Authority Statutory Plans support a Public Involvement Plan, for example, by the adoption of a '*% for the community*' from Section 106 contributions?

A range of partners could collectively develop the Public Involvement Plan, with voluntary sector groups best placed to lead the process.

4. Recommendations

The Project Board is asked today to:

- ?? Recognise public involvement activities as a legitimate essential and integral part of the B&MK Waterway project
- ?? Endorse the incorporation of a 'Public Involvement Plan' within the Project Implementation Plan to set out the expectation and scope of community involvement, such that the core project delivery is not adversely affected, but benefits from it
- ?? Ensure an effective contribution is made to realising opportunities for public involvement initiatives throughout the implementation programme