

## **Citizen's Jury response to the new waterway project**

As part of its widespread community consultation programme, the Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway Partnership convened a Citizen's Jury from 29 November to 2 December to consider the proposal to build a brand new waterway between Bedford and Milton Keynes. After three days of information gathering and discussion, the Jury praised the project and called for increased community involvement as it develops.

The group of 15 people, who live in the area of the proposed routes of the new waterway, were selected by independent market researchers and asked to consider what is important to the public in developing a waterway for everyone and what issues need to be addressed.

After listening to evidence over the course of three days from inland waterway experts and representatives from various groups including those involved in the scheme and those with concerns about it, the Jury presented a brief summary of their findings and conclusions to representatives from the B&MK Partnership.

These findings were summarised under five headings:

### **1. Involvement of all communities in all stages of the project management**

The Jury asked for continued and more widespread involvement of local communities and stakeholders in the project. They welcomed their opportunity to become involved in the project and wanted to continue this direct involvement in the future. They called for a raising of the profile of the project and for all sections of the community to be given access to relevant information, including schools and colleges as young people will be the users of the future.

### **2. Cost & resourcing**

The Jury called for more research to be carried out into the cost of constructing the new waterway. They also asked that the project managers work closely with other agencies to ensure the development is synchronised across road, rail and other public projects.

### **3. Promotion of positive outcomes & values for whole region**

The Jury saw the potential to create enormous community benefits with the project and an opportunity to deliver a prestigious project bringing fame to the whole region. They called for managers to ensure that the canal would be of the highest possible standard with an innovative and exciting design. Part of this process would include a thorough environmental impact assessment for the project and an examination of the potential hazards.

### **4. Assisting the development of Bedford**

The Jury called for an holistic approach to the costs & benefits of the project from all public sector organisations, for example Bedford local authorities to fully consider and integrate the new waterway in their development plans. They wanted the Jury's energy and enthusiasm for the project to transfer out across the region and even nationally and globally.

### **5. Balancing multi-user facilities**

The Jury wanted more information about where planned development would appear along the routes and where hot-spots for tourist attractions could be positioned. They also called for an independent group to be set up to consider, balance and co-ordinate the needs of all the different potential users of the waterway – walkers, cyclists, rowers, canoeists, boaters, anglers, bird watchers, etc.

A full report by the Jury was submitted to the Project Partnership in January 2003.