

News Release

Embargo: Immediate

An evening with the Waterways Minister

Jonathan Shaw MP, the Government Minister with responsibility for Waterways was an official visitor and special guest at a fund raising and awareness raising evening hosted by Bedford MP Patrick Hall to highlight and promote the work of Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway Trust.

'I'm still fizzing' and 'What an inspiring evening' were just some of the comments of guests in aid of Bedford and Milton Keynes Waterway Trust on 17 July. Patrick Hall had invited Waterways Minister Jonathan Shaw, the Mayors of Bedford and Kempston, other local dignitaries and senior staff in private and public bodies, such as British Waterways, Renaissance Bedford and Nirah, and Trust volunteers, to hear the latest news about the Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway.

Patrick Hall's support in holding the event for the Trust and the level of attendance at the meeting was evidence for the Waterways Minister of fervent local support for the project. In his talk Jonathan Shaw defended the government's record on the waterways and assured the meeting of his personal support. He spoke of the need for co-ordination between organisations including government departments. He himself chairs a new interdepartmental committee where he will be pressing for support for inspirational national projects that cross departmental and organisational boundaries, such as the proposed Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway.

On behalf of the Trust, the Chair Jane Wolfson, presented a DVD narrated by Kevin Whately. This showed the project's enticing vision for the transformation by water of a landscape blighted by landfill, clay pit and the embers of the brick industry.

Jane used the example of the Trust, driven by the commitment of volunteers and working in partnership with many organisations as one to be supported by government. Every 1% of public funding would pay dividends backed by the strength of volunteers and project partners and supporters.



Bedford & Milton Keynes
Waterway Trust

www.
B-MKWaterway.co.uk

Bedford Borough Council
Bedford Group of Drainage Boards
Bedford River Users Group
Bedfordshire County Council
British Marine Federation
British Waterways
Country Land & Business
Association & NFU
Countryside Agency
Cranfield University
East of England Tourist Board
East of England
Development Agency
English Nature
English Partnerships
Environment Agency
Forest of Marston Vale
Great Ouse Boating Association
Grand Union (South) Angling Club
Inland Waterways Association
Mid Bedfordshire District Council
Milton Keynes Council
Milton Keynes Parks Trust
Renaissance Bedford
South East England
Development Agency
Sport England
Sustrans
The Ramblers Association
The Waterways Trust
The Wildlife Trust for Beds.
Cambs, Northants & Peterborough



The meeting closed with the compliments of the Minister for the inspiring presentation, endorsed by those present.

ENDS.

NOTES TO EDITOR:

The Trust has been working hard since the mid 1990s to put in place the vision first proposed in 1810 by Samuel Whitbread, then Bedford MP, to link the Grand Union Canal at Milton Keynes to the River Great Ouse at Bedford, thus joining the inland canal system to the Fenland Waterways and the sea by the most direct route.

Last year over 400 organisations applied to the Big Lottery Fund 'Living Landmarks' section. The Trust was one of the 11 projects considered viable to fund, but unfortunately money could only be found for 3 projects. Nevertheless a development grant of £250,000 gave impetus for detailed studies and outline planning permission for the Milton Keynes end of the Waterway.

Richard Wood has been seconded from the Department of Communities and Local Government to work with The Trust and other partners to gain planning permission for the Bedford and Marston Vale sections and to provide vital evidence of the progress of a brand new waterway on the ground.

Next year will see the first section of the waterway actually dug when a wide tunnel designed for use by the Waterway, a footpath and cycleway, will be created under the newly dualled A421. It will join the Marston Vale Millennium Country Park with Berry Wood, Wootton.

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The DVD can be viewed on: <http://www.youtube.com/BMKWT>