

News Release

Embargo: Immediate

First section of the Bedford to Milton Keynes Waterway could be cut late next year.

The Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway took a major step forward towards becoming a reality when Bedford Borough Council voted unanimously in favour of allowing construction company Balfour Beatty to use clay from a local wood in exchange for cutting channel for the canal.

The Mayor of Bedford, Frank Branston, championed a motion at a full Bedford Borough Council meeting to approve an innovative deal that would see a section of the waterway (potentially up to 10% of the route) constructed in parallel with the new A421.

The scheme approved by councillors will involve the creation of a stretch of the Waterway and a new lake, and for the duration of the road works, a 'borrow pit' for the import and export of soil. By exploiting the synergies between the Waterway and road developments, the Council will also substantially reduce the carbon footprint of the road construction by avoiding the need for the bulk movement of material along the public highway and regenerate an area of woodland to create a new country park, open up new public access routes, and take Sustrans Route 51 off-road.

Bedford mayor Frank Branston described the decision as "a big step forward". "Getting it done will require the Bedford-Milton Keynes waterway group to get planning permission and technical details approved by 30 September next year. By Christmas 2009 the first length of the first new canal to be built in Britain in 200 years could be cut."

Commenting on the decision, the Chair of the Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway Trust, Jane Wolfson said: "This is a pivotal moment for the project; it takes us a real step closer to the first section of the Waterway



Bedford & Milton Keynes
Waterway Trust

www.
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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





being dug. Of course, there is a great deal of work still to be done - but by continuing to work in partnership I know we can achieve this. We're delighted that the Mayor of Bedford and Bedford Borough Council have shown their continuing support for the project in this very practical way. Hopefully next year we will be able to talk about first sections in Central Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes too!"

ENDS.

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NOTES TO EDITOR:

The decision was taken by Bedford Borough Council on Wednesday 8th October 2008. The proposal before the council was for Balfour Beatty to dig clay for the embankments from the council-owned Berry Wood at Wootton. The clay is needed to build embankments along a section of the A421. The aim is that the 500-yard section could be cut by Christmas next year, with planning approval needed by the end of next September.

The scheme will capitalise on the new 30m tunnel the Highways Agency has already committed to deliver to take the Waterway under the new A421, and establish the Waterway as a deliverable project that will shape and transform the character of Central Bedfordshire and bring economic and social benefit all along the route over time, as it is completed in a series of sections that join up to create the whole 24km link.

This is an example of how vision and enterprise, combined with real partnerships that transcend political and local authority interests, can deliver something of real public and environmental benefit.

Media enquiries to: Richard Wood (Project Manager) 'Phone 01525 404444 - Mobile 07515 450488 or Jane Wolfson (B&MK Waterway Trust Chairman) Phone: 07771 607579