

Press Release

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Community Ideas Welcomed by Waterway Park Planners

Walkers, anglers, boaters, cyclists, nature lovers and anyone else interested in the development of urban landscape are being asked to offer ideas for the design of a new seven kilometre waterway park in Milton Keynes - known as the Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway (<http://www.b-mkwaterway.org.uk>).

This major recreational feature will combine facilities for leisure, health, education, conservation and economic sustainability. It will enhance the quality of life for local communities and visitors alike. Water festivals, angling competitions, athletic events and arts projects are among the activities likely to take place in the park.

Aimed for completion by 2010 after three years of building, the park will have up to 14km of pathways together with wildlife observation posts, a marina, pubs, cafes, public sculptures and educational facilities.

The waterway will be navigable and will include a dozen locks, several bridges, at least one weir, embankments and possibly a 120-metre aqueduct. From the Grand Union canal near Campbell Park in the heart of Milton Keynes, the waterway will stretch through the city's eastern expansion area, to a point close to junction 13 of the M1 motorway. Ultimately it will become part of the proposed Milton Keynes-Bedford canal – the first new canal to be built for over a century.

All the structures will be designed to be aesthetically pleasing and stimulating as well as functional. The planners intend that, in every way, the waterway park will be a visually stimulating environment for leisure and tourism in the 21st century.

Conservation and the encouragement of flora and fauna will have a high priority. There could be 5km of canalside wetland and scrub, six kilometres of continuous hedgerow, seven hectares of open water, reed beds, new woodland and grasslands. These habitats are expected to attract a wide range of wildlife and plants including greater crested newts, various warblers, song thrushes, otters, water voles, fish, butterflies and moths, bats and water plants.

At present, six technical, economic and environmental studies are taking place, financed by a £250,000 grant from the Big Lottery Fund. The studies will be completed in December 2006. When the results have been examined, a second stage bid to pay for most of the scheme will be made to the Lottery Fund in May 2007.

The project is being spearheaded by a new local charity, the Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway Trust, in partnership with almost 30 bodies such as Milton Keynes and Bedford councils, Bedfordshire County Council, British Waterways, East of England Development Agency, Sport England and Wildlife Trust.

John Bint, interim chief executive of the Milton Keynes Waterway Park, says: "Over the past few years, there has been tremendous public support for this project. The Trust is extremely anxious that everyone possible should be aware of what we have in mind and let us have any comments or suggestions."

He adds: "For decades to come, the park will be a facility for everyone, whether



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British Waterways
Country Land & Business
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East of England
Development Agency
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young or old, active or infirm, nearby residents, day-trippers or holidaymakers. There'll be people simply taking a stroll, watching wildlife, having a picnic or using the paths as part of their everyday lives. In addition, the park will attract joggers, cyclists, long distance walkers and water users such as canoeists, boaters or anglers. We would like to hear from all these people, with their ideas of exactly what features and facilities they would like us to include in the final design."

Mr Bint can be contacted by writing to him c/o British Waterways, Witan Gate House, 500-600 Witan Gate, Milton Keynes MK9 1BW or by e-mail at john.bint@britishwaterways.co.uk. The website is www.b-mkwaterway.org.uk

Notes to editors

The Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway is a proposed linear Water Park, to be developed in conjunction with the Forest of Marston Vale and Milton Keynes Parks Trust. It will provide enormous benefit to the area in terms of stimulating the economy, providing people with attractive places to live and work, and improving the quality of the local environment.

The project started in 1995 as a Millennium Fund proposal for a 'Waterway for All', celebrating the history of canals and their new role in the 21st century in terms of environment, tourism and leisure. The project was shortlisted but failed to gain funding, despite strong community support.

In 2001, British Waterways created a Partnership of over 20 organisations which support the development of the Waterway, and provided a project manager for three years. For the last three years, volunteer members of the Trust have taken on the management of the project while continuing to build public awareness and support (the press have called it a YIMBY project – 'yes in my back yard').

The project has made significant progress over the last five years. Partners have invested some £200K in development studies, and nearly four times that amount has been contributed in pro-bono professional work and volunteer time. This year the Trust has become a charity and limited company.

The project has a 20-year timescale. The Waterway will be built as opportunities become available on an agreed and secured route, and funding can be found through public, business, charitable and development sources. Plans exist to build first in Milton Keynes, then in Bedford and finally through Marston Vale.

The Waterway is now securely in the Milton Keynes Local Plan, is included in the draft East of England plan, is in the draft LDFs of Mid Beds and Bedford, and is actively supported by the county in terms of contributing, along with the forest, to economic development and the 'green corridor' in the Vale. The Milton Keynes Waterway Park has been shortlisted under the Big Lottery Living Landmarks fund and the Trust has been awarded a £250K development grant to undertake further studies that will support a full bid for £25m in 2007.

For further information please contact
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