

Press Release

Embargo: Immediate

Waterway Project Outgrows Charity's resources - Consortium to take over



Negotiations are underway for the Bedford and Milton Keynes Waterway Trust (B&MK) to hand over responsibility for driving the project to a consortium of local councils and agencies. The Trust will be a founder member of the consortium and maintain its core role as a campaigning and community involvement body.

"As the project moves forward different organisational structures are required," said Trust chair, Jane Wolfson. "The project has made tremendous strides but it has grown and matured beyond the capabilities of a single charitable trust. The time is right for our partners to share the lead in delivering the waterway."

Under the Trust's leadership, working closely with partners, planning permission has been secured on a quarter of the route in Milton Keynes, and the entire stretch of the 26km missing link between the Grand Union Canal at Milton Keynes to the River Great Ouse at Kempston is protected in local and regional plans.

The first funded structure – an underpass beneath the new duelled A421 near Stewartby – was completed this autumn. Over £2m has been raised and invested by partners since 2001.

David Hackforth, Chief Planner (Special Projects) at Milton Keynes Council, is liaising with partners to set up the B&MK consortium. "It is closely modelled on the well-established east-west Cambridge to Oxford rail consortium and is designed to ensure that key partners work effectively together to progress the project," he said.

Terms of reference for the new consortium are to secure the route, undertake preliminary planning and design and obtain planning permissions as pre-requisites to the delivery of the waterway via the creation of a "single purpose vehicle" delivery agency. When complete, the waterway will pass into the care of consortium members funded to maintain it in perpetuity.

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Notes to editors

The waterway – the first major new-build project of its kind this century – will create a green corridor linking local communities along the route. Together with traditional canal facilities, the waterway and multi-user path network will be engineered to include water management and flood alleviation, low carbon transport for passengers and freight, plus a multitude of leisure and tourism activities centred on locks and dramatic boat lifts.

Prospective Founding Members of the Consortium

- Bedford Borough Council
- Central Bedfordshire Council
- Milton Keynes Council
- Environment Agency
- British Waterways
- Renaissance Bedford
- Milton Keynes Partnership
- Milton Keynes Parks Trust
- Marston Vale Forest Trust
- Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway Trust



Autumn 2009: Completion of the first waterway structure – an underpass taking the route of the canal (to the left) and multi-user path (to the right) under the new dualled A421 near Stewartby Lake.



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