

Milton Keynes Community Boat



In the months since the October Newsletter, the *Electra* Operations Team have been busy in the back office, along with John Best and Steve Ashley from the Trust and BMKWEL Boards, developing all aspects of the business while we monitor the build and wait for delivery (writes Jane Wolfson, Volunteer Chair, *Electra* Operations Team).

Choosing a name

The public hunt for a name was led by our 'media man' and Lead Cabin Host James Clifton. James was interviewed on BBC Three Counties Radio on Wednesday 9 December, with a repeat call for names on New Year's Day. Then he was interviewed for a third time, on the breakfast show on 29 January, when the chosen name was announced on air, and a call made for more volunteers.

Over 200 suggestions were received in all. The name *Electra* was unanimously agreed by the volunteer MKCB Management Team responsible for commissioning the boat and endorsed by the Trust Board. *Electra* was suggested by two people: local radio listener Sheila from St Albans and Don Allison, one of the Trust's most long-standing volunteers. Other suggestions included Boaty-MK-Boatface, Bright Spark, Alan Turing, Tranquillity and Milton Queen.



Kitting out the boat

Because *Electra* is all-electric, we've specified the power to run a whole range of onboard kit. We're delighted to report that our electricity supply at our berth in Campbell Wharf marina is 100% renewable – plus of course the sun powering our solar panels. Here's some of the kit we'll be installing.

In the cabin, we've got an internet router with external wireless aerial, PC for live trip reporting plus information videos etc, with a wall-mounted TV monitor screen plus amplifier and speakers. There'll be USB outlets by each table and electric panel heating for those cold early mornings and winter trips; plus mood lights (inside) plus cabin-side lights (outside) so guests can see out at dusk.

In the galley, we're installing an industrial dishwasher, fridge and freezer, water boiler, induction hob, water filter, and microwave. We'll have an electronic till system and take contactless payment only from the outset – safer, quicker, and more hygienic – with a QR code for donations.

Building our team online

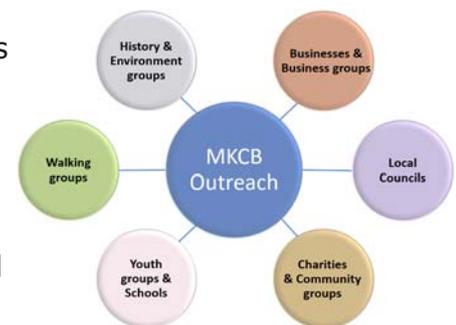
We have 22 crew in training, or about to train – a mix of Skippers, Cabin Hosts and Boat Assistants, including several people who are keen to work flexibly in two or all three of these roles. All inductions, meetings and theory training are being successfully held in Zoom. Denise and Christian Taylor say: "From being Zoom 'newbies' and a bit tentative at the beginning, we've become fans. Added interest to sessions has been given by cats, dogs, phone calls and even other halves joining us all on camera. Fortunately, nobody has appeared inappropriately dressed, although the trainers did appear in one session in their Morris dancing kit ..."

Our Operations Management Team is getting near to full strength with the welcome addition of Frances Craven and Chris Bent as joint Volunteering Leads and David Wolfson as Lead Skipper. We're currently recruiting a small Marketing and Outreach team, and then we just need to find a Maintenance Lead. A big thank you to this team which is working long and hard to get everything in place before our launch.

We are grateful, too, to Rotary MK, who not only provided a grant for *Electra* but have 'adopted' us as their development support project for the coming six months. Rotary MK members are providing practical set-up support in areas such as design, marketing, sales, policy development, recruitment and outreach – helping us to network right across the city.

Building the funds to set-up *Electra*

The boat build is fully funded, so since October we've been working to raise £26K (ex VAT) to cover set-up costs, principally funding all the equipment, licenses and initial marketing needed for be able to offer public cruises; equipment, training and qualifications for 30 new volunteer crew; and, in



bmk news

PATRON
Sir Samuel Whitbread
KCVO

View from the Chair

Welcome to the first newsletter for 2021. Without doubt we are facing another challenging year. As I write this, we are gaining a little more clarity about the steps ahead to edge back toward some sense of normality. Over the winter months I have spent a lot of time walking alongside the river in Bedford, from Kempston Mill to Priory Marina, and am constantly reminded how much we need to see the *John Bunyan* back in action. The JB team is raring to go once we get a better idea of the timing and the restrictions we will need to work within.

My walks have also reminded me of the other benefits which the Waterway Park will bring. Just being out in the fresh air and getting some exercise has become a very valuable activity. The health and mental wellbeing impacts of walking by water and through greenspace are proven and all the more important when our other activities are limited. It is good to see so many people walking and cycling along the riverside. The closure of Kempston Mill bridge has also served as a reminder of how important the walking and cycling routes are for linking communities. Its only when a familiar route is closed that we realise how crucial it can be. I have been in touch with the Council to see if the work needed to repair Kempston Mill Bridge can provide an opportunity to raise it – one of the Trust’s longer-term ambitions which would enable larger craft like the *John Bunyan* further up the river to turn and eventually to reach the start of the new Waterway. Understandably the priority is to restore the essential link between Kempston and Great Denham but we remain keen to work with the Borough Council, Kempston Town Council and Great Denham Parish Council to investigate options.

The recent floods which were the most extensive and highest in many, many years also served as a reminder of the potential flood management benefits which the Waterway Park may be able to bring to the area. In the last edition I mentioned that we are waiting for the Environment Agency and Water Resources East to begin some important work on flood risk management and water resilience. Unfortunately, the extensive flooding has set the timescales back again as all resources at the EA understandably had to be focussed on the immediate emergencies. Hopefully this work will get underway soon.

Despite being locked down the Trust remains very active in promoting the Waterway Park. During March we will be supporting the latest proposals from developers O&H for a series of new villages in Marston Vale, including what could prove to be the first significant section of the Waterway Park. We have recently updated Councillors in Milton Keynes and Central Bedfordshire and MPs in Bedford and North Bedfordshire. We continue to contribute to work which will eventually feed into long term planning for the Oxford to Cambridge Arc and seize every opportunity to join events (online of course) where we can raise the profile of the project. Its unique nature and potential wide-ranging benefits are what

makes the Waterway Park so exciting. However, it also makes it difficult to argue the case for investment as it doesn’t fit comfortably with all the usual mechanisms whereby the case for building new infrastructure can be evaluated. We frequently read about the case for or against a new road or railway, but the ground rules for evaluating a new waterway simply do not exist in the same way so we have to build our evidence bit by bit.

Over the past few years our income from the *John Bunyan* has been critical in commissioning an Economic Analysis, updating the build costs and undertaking an initial appraisal of the potential contribution towards reducing flood risk. The result is greater recognition of the Waterway Park at a strategic level. Last October the Waterway Park was included in an important submission to Government by all the Local Authorities across the Oxford to Cambridge Arc – just a few words in the Arc Prospectus but none the less important.

The Government has very recently responded to the Prospectus by setting out how it intends to arrive at a high level “spatial framework” which will guide the levels and locations of investment in growth. You can read more at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/planning-for-sustainable-growth-in-the-oxford-cambridge-arc-spatial-framework> A lot of jargon perhaps but this is a huge opportunity for us! We really need to see the Waterway Park included in any plans at this level and we will need everyone’s help to make this happen. There will be public consultation during the summer of 2021 and more next year. The Trust will keep you in the picture about what you can do to help raise the Waterway’s profile as this work moves ahead. Hard evidence about the environmental benefits of the Waterway Park is going to play a very big part in this process.

With this in mind some of the Trust directors have been meeting with a range of organisations including Natural England, the Environment Bank and Local Nature Partnerships to try to understand how best we can use new approaches to evaluating “natural capital” and demonstrating that the Waterway Park can contribute to an increased biodiversity – now an important element of the Government’s policies and any case for investing in infrastructure.

You can read all about our local activities elsewhere in this edition, especially the all-important launch of “*Electra*” in Milton Keynes. However, to achieve our overall ambition and see the Waterway built, we will really need to pull out all the stops over the next 2 years as all the strategic planning progresses. We are going to need the support of all of our B&MKW Consortium partners, our members, our volunteers and as many other organisations and individuals as we can enthuse!

Once again, thank you all for continuing to support us. Keep up with our news on the website. Stay safe and well.

Jane Hamilton

EASTERN PROJECTS GROUP UPDATE

Landing Stage at Kempston Mill

As you will all be aware, our activities have been severely curtailed by the Covid pandemic (Julian Armitage writes). However, some progress has been made in the following areas:

Design

We have been in close consultation with both Land and Water (our preferred contractor) and Hewson (their selected Consulting Engineers). We are asking for small changes to be made to the design and are negotiating with the designers with regard to price for the additional work.

Grants/Costings

Land and Water have given us firm prices for the design to date submitted by Hewson. We are not yet at the stage where we can approve either the design or the contractor's price and will be seeking alternative prices from other contractors.

In fact this is a condition of the grants so far awarded by Bedford Borough Council, Wixamtree Trust and Kempston Ward Councillors. We will be submitting these prices to the Council before the end of this tax year for authorisation.

Environment Agency Permit

Our application for this has been sent to the EA. This after extensive discussions with various departments in the EA and help from Ian Bliss to obtain approval for suitable deposit areas for dredged gravels so that they formed riffles to promote fish spawning.

Timescale

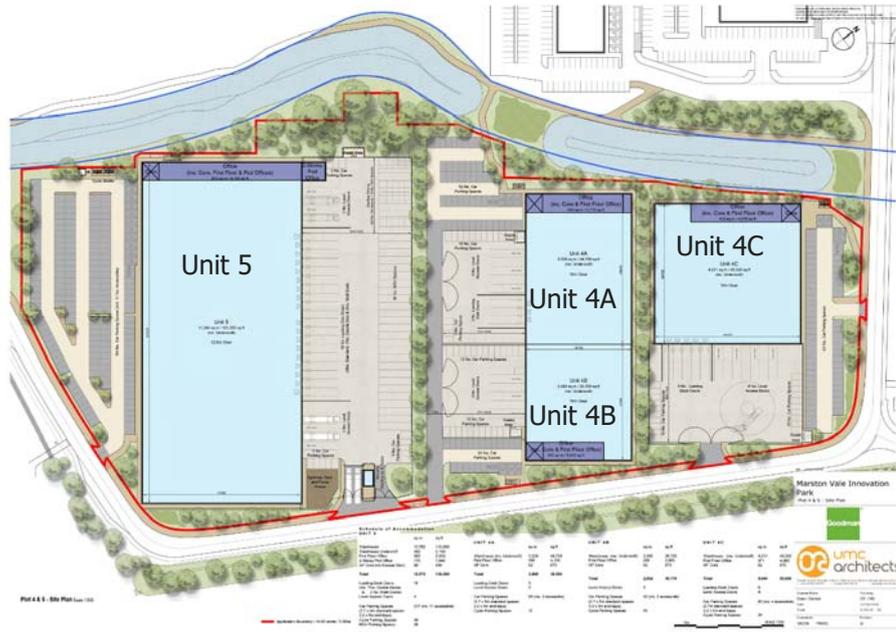
We hope to complete phase one of the construction in September 2021.

Fields Road Development

Construction of the Marston Vale Innovation Park near Fields Road, Wootton continues. The developer has recently cleared all the

land, and our latest information concerns 3 large warehouses which will to be built between the Waterway and the A421 Trunk Road.

The developer drains surface water from the six industrial sites into 5 Balancing Ponds. These ponds will form a part of our waterway. The developer has now prepared his

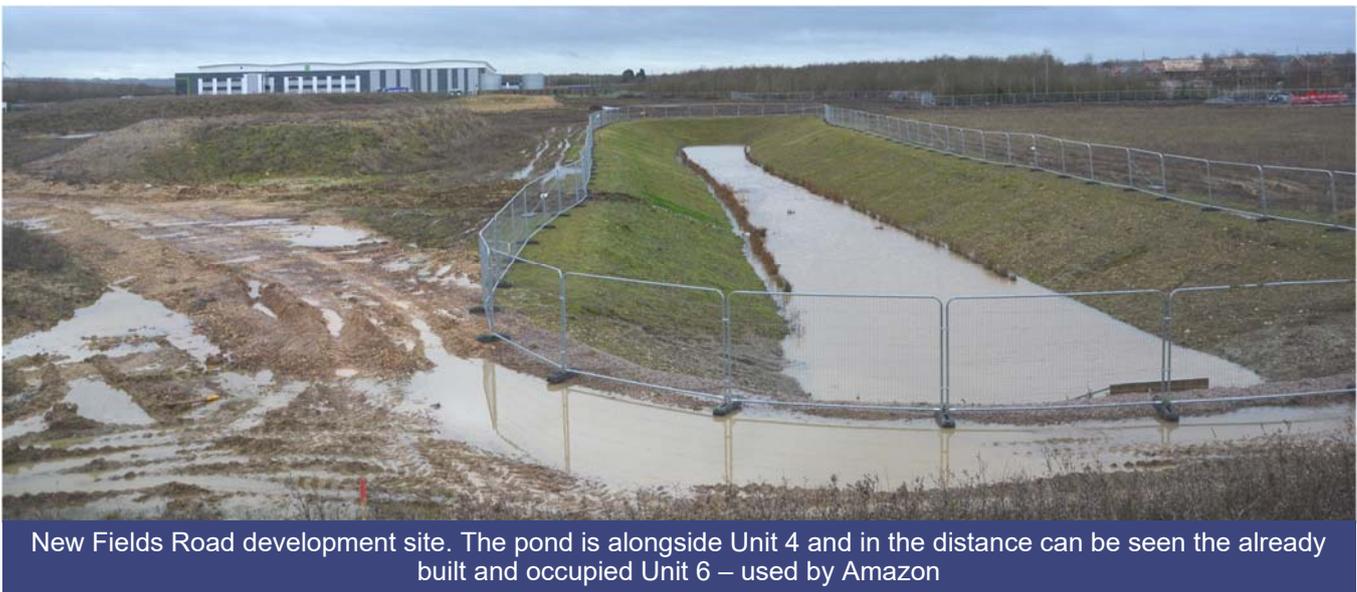


Architect and Master Plan drawing

remaining land, ready to construct units 4A, 4B, 4C and unit 5. It looks as if the final balancing pond is about to be built, alongside Unit 5.

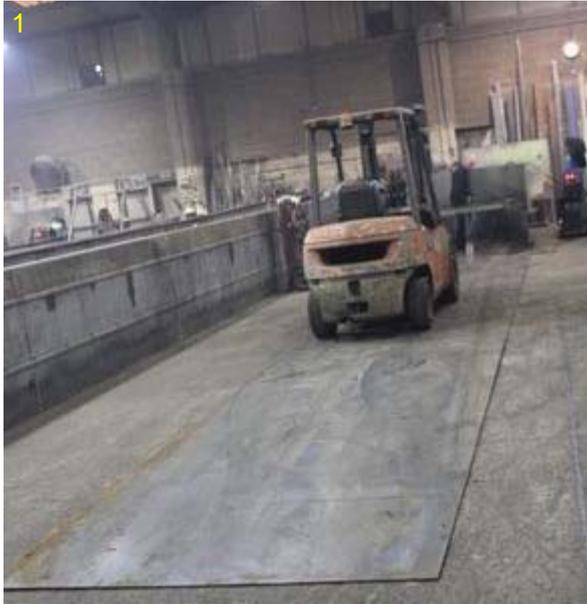
These balancing ponds are not continuous, but the depth of the excavated ponds is in accordance with a future use as a navigable waterway. The water depth would be increased if used by boaters, and different arrangements to deal with flood-waters will be necessary.

A 3m wide path will be built from here, alongside the waterway route, on the right of the ponds which may become part of a long-distance cycleway and footpath.



New Fields Road development site. The pond is alongside Unit 4 and in the distance can be seen the already built and occupied Unit 6 – used by Amazon

The Building of *Electra*



1,2 Where it all began. In week 1, the base and stern were built.
3,4 In weeks 4 & 5 the sides are finished and superstructure added.
5 Week 6 added the windows, and week 7 saw the first paint.



6,7 In week 8 the lining started and the bilges and weedhatch were in place.
8,9 By week 13 the second layer of paint, and interior spray foaming was in place.
10 By week 15 the lining was coming on apace.
11 Week 18 saw the many batteries in place along with
12, 13 wiring in the cabin, then deckhead (ceiling) in position and
14 the lift (for wheelchairs) installed.

All pictures by Colecraft



(Continued from page 1)

keeping with our commitment to diversity, undertaking outreach activities so that we start to engage with isolated and disadvantaged groups in the city and enable them to experience the benefits of a cruise on the Grand Union through Milton Keynes' parklands.

Over the summer we were awarded a grant



of £9,000 from the Postcode Community Trust, supported by the players of the People's Postcode Lottery. Since then we have raised a further £10,350 in grants from a range of local sources including canalside parish and town councils, Ward councillors, Rotaries, and the Milton Community Foundation. This leaves just £6,650 to raise to meet our target by the end of June. A big thank you to our funders and to the team who have made presentations and written bids.

Cruise Types and Sales Calendar

We have developed our Year 1 cruise range and tested this with volunteers, with groups we talk to about *Electra*, with Kat Allen in the JB office, and with Graham Mabbutt, drawing on his extensive experience of the JB and the commercial world.

We plan to trial five different types of regular public cruise and to run 'seasonal specials' in the autumn, linking up with Heritage Groups and the Parks Trust and celebrating Halloween. We'll be offering simple charters bookable online, and also 'bespoke charters' to respond to specific customer requests. We're also running a pilot programme of at least seven 'sponsored' charter cruises where a charity or business organisation funds a cruise for a group that for a range of reasons would not otherwise get out onto the water ... a three-way win.

Regular public trips

TUESDAY

SCHOOL HOLIDAYS

MINI-ADVENTURES

Keep kids busy on the look-out while you relax with a cuppa on a one-hour, one-way cruise.

Then take a leisurely self-guided walk back, stopping where you want on the way.

Cruises run from Campbell Wharf or Linford Manor.

WEDNESDAY

WALKERS HOPPER

Explore the city's canal and parks in a 'walk and glide'.

Three one-hour 'hops' from Campbell Wharf to Cosgrove. Choose which 'hops' to walk and which to rest onboard. Café/bar available.



FRIDAY AFTERNOON

DIGITAL DETOX

Start the weekend early with a relaxing 2 or 3.5 hour cruise. Put your phone away and look out as we glide along. Café/bar on board.

FRIDAY EVENING FISH 'N' BUBBLES

Round off the week with a 2-hour cruise. You'll be welcomed onboard with a glass of bubbly and served fish 'n' chips later. Café/bar available.



SUNDAY AFTERNOON

CREAM TEA CRUISE

Treat yourself to a leisurely 2 or 3.5 hour cruise with a cream tea served to your table.

Covid Impacts

We are developing our formal Risk Register this month. Covid poses our biggest risk in terms of

- some supply chain delay to the build, with a consequent delay in all our onboard/cruise/e-boat local training



- delay in delivering training qualifications, because NCBA are unable to accredit our trainers until at least mid-April, so our

Initial cruising range from Campbell Wharf



trainers in turn can't accredit our skippers for our CRT licence

- uncertainty about the speed with which social distancing regulations may relax over the summer, which affects planning of occupancy numbers and length of cruises
- uncertainty about whether we can trade through the winter, as Covid rates are currently predicted to rise again then, alongside other winter respiratory disease.

What next?

Currently, we're looking at April delivery; May and June for final equipment, learning about *Electra*, training and 'sea trials' with fellow crew, friends and family; public cruises and charters starting from July, after we have heard the results of the Government's social distancing review in June. We do hope to be on the water in July and welcoming all our funders and supporters on board, as well as starting to give guests a great experience on public trips and private charters. But clearly, our plans need to be kept under regular review.

Members' Evening

The next Members' Evening will be held online on 8th April. Zoom Meeting code: 849 1748 7107 Passcode: 532040 See back page.

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bmkwaterway.org

How the 'shopfront' online for Electra bookings may look

Getting through to communities through our Community Boats

John Best writes: The Trust has always had a good relationship among waterway and boating communities, with good member support (well illustrated by financial contributions to both our boats, 8 years apart – thank you!) and excellent relations with boating businesses and organisations on our patch. As we've built up the trip business around the JB, we've developed a wide and loyal following in Bedford that has delivered 50,000 passengers so far, and is valuable as we develop a corresponding following in MK. Our experience in the last 12 months in opening up MK to *Electra* points to some useful learning for the Trust as a whole.

Starting out in MK

For years we wondered how and when we'd get the opportunity for a trip boat for MK, with the year-round potential on the Grand Union, the UK's fastest growing 'city', and no established trip boats to be seen on the MK pounds. When the opportunity came along, in the form of a far-seeing developer who was anyway contributing to local community facilities through the planning gain processes, we needed no encouragement. The time was right, the funding seemed within reach, we had enthusiastic people and we got going . . .

Raising awareness of the waterway

The public context for such a project needs to be right. I knew from my time with the Canal and River Trust (regional chair 2012-2018) that MK was conflicted over its waterway. The way the MK Development Corporation designed the banks of the Grand Union Canal into an iconic waterside setting marked by a signature line of Lombardy Poplars creates canalside at its best. But you see how the neighbouring communities nearly all turn their backs on the canal. (The exceptions were around MK Marina and at Pennyland, since joined by new schemes at Wolverton Park and Campbell Wharf). That's in contrast to other towns such as Oxford, Cambridge, Daventry – even Aylesbury, all of whom face the water and celebrate it. In Bedford they celebrate it with the River Festival. So stage one was to develop a forum for people who want to nurture and promote MK's Canalside. In 2016 we started the MK Canalside Forum, initially under CRT but since then independent. In 2017, for MK's 50th birthday celebrations, the Forum oversaw a spectacular Illuminated Boat Parade. For the last two years the Forum has been pressing for the Community Boat for MK, while establishing itself as a force promoting improvements to, and use of, waterside activity. Waterway organisations, parishes, waterside businesses all attend, including the Trust, and I retain the chair. The Forum has added momentum to the boat project, and to the Trust's wider aspirations. We're now exploring how we can develop something similar to draw together diverse interests in Bedford and in the Central Bedfordshire communities in between.

Raising the Capital cost

The next stage, once we had the idea of a Community Boat, was developing a spec, selecting a builder and raising the cost. We

wanted something special, so *Electra* is not a cheap boat, but with state-of-the-art all-electric propulsion, full wheelchair accessibility and the best quality build. It was precisely that quality that made fund-raising possible. As a not-for-profit social enterprise bringing community benefit to MK, MK Community Foundation was first off the blocks, persuaded by the sustainable propulsion and great accessibility to all members of the community. They were closely followed by the People's Postcode Lottery and our own generous Trust Members. The more organisations we involved in the project, the more marketable became our proposition. The biggest chunk of construction funding came indirectly through the developer who negotiated with the Council to ensure his planning gain contribution went to a project he was comfortable with and which would benefit people living in the new scheme.

Raising the fit-out cost

With the bulk of the up-front costs covered, we moved our focus to more local organisations, starting with parishes (the whole of MK is covered by statutory parish and town councils who can spend their own Council Tax). There are eleven Parish Councils along the Grand Union, and they'll be the first to benefit, and benefit directly, from the community boat. Five of those have already responded to a call for contributions towards fitting out the boat and setting-up the teams to run the boat safely. Reassured by the involvement of the Community Foundation and Postcode Lottery, they've so far contributed over £4000, and we're confident that other parishes will contribute another £4000 in coming weeks. We've also had smaller contributions from individual MKC councillors who have donated over £1400 in addition. People and organisations who give to the cause expect to see tangible benefits flow from their donation and want us to be successful. They also have an ongoing relationship with the project that forms the basis of future collaboration and support going forward. It's these local partnerships and others like them that will underpin the future both of the MK community boat, and the wider and more strategic B&MK Waterway Park project.

Building ongoing partnerships

We may have secured more partnership action than we expected and successful partnerships require ongoing input from both sides. Part of our proposition to parish and town councils is that we'd like them to help us finance our exciting community-facing project and then, moving forward, we'd like them to set aside money in their budgets to drive use of their stretch of the canal. We are proposing an ongoing partnership with each of them, under which we produce a joint vision for their stretch of the waterway. This will include improvements to their waterside; additional facilities for mooring, embarkation and, for us, charging; support for community initiatives that might benefit from access to canal trips or waterside celebrations; and, crucially for us, drive local demand to make

(Continued on page 7)

Events Calendar 2021



| | |
|--|---|
| 8 April 2021 | Members' Evening (Zoom) See Page 8 |
| 24 June 2021 | AGM (Zoom) See Page 8 |
| Regrettably, all in person events are currently suspended, due to Government restrictions. We hope to meet face-to-face again soon. | |

(Continued from page 6)

use of *Electra*. While this is a really promising start we need to be sure we don't over-promise, both in our ability to support these new relationships and our ability to deliver the cruises people want. And since every partnering organisation will know that we're promoting the BMK Waterway Park, this programme will be great for raising general public awareness of our strategic project.

Bringing extensive benefits to the community

We will run *Electra* as an MK-based social enterprise with a locally recruited volunteer team – itself a community benefit for MK. We will also hold an annual stakeholder forum to review what we've achieved and to suggest new ways of generating benefits. All our main partners will be offered a place at that table, including our founding partners, Crest Nicholson and the Parks Trust, parish councils in partnership with us and our main funders. Our programme will offer regular cruises, specialist cruises (eg wildlife, heritage) and bespoke cruises (for organisations, businesses or families). We will also arrange targeted cruises for deserving groups in the community, such as the elderly, health workers, looked after children, for which we may fund-raise. We already have contributions for these from the Postcode Lottery and from MK Rotary. These cruises will align well with our local partners and further build awareness and support both of our community boat and our Waterway Park.

Where that leaves us

The community boat is demonstrating the power of community engagement and the benefits of offering a community-facing service, in this case through *Electra*. It may have unexpectedly benefited from a Coronavirus pandemic which has made people value spending time in their local green spaces, prompted them to look for new activities to fill their lives, possibly caused an underspend in parish budgets that are therefore more available to us, and encouraged people to dream. Whatever the reason, we're launching a really exciting project just as people move out of lockdown and into their long-awaited summer. The connections that are emerging between the Trust and communities in MK are new and potentially helpful in promoting the Waterway Park. We need to see how we could build comparable connections in Bedford. Any readers who could unlock a connection with a community group or organisation who could benefit from either boat, contact me at john.best@b-mkwaterway.co.uk. We'd love to hear from you.

John Bunyan Update By Graham Mabbutt

During the winter months whilst the cruising season has ended the *John Bunyan* Boat management team spends its time looking forward and making plans for next season. At our monthly zoom team meetings we update one another with our activities and plans. Whilst the river was in flood mode our maintenance team kept a weather eye on the boat checking that it was still safely moored at Priory Marina where the water level was much higher than usual.

Our sales, marketing and operations team drew up the cruising plans for 2021 based on whether the COVID19 restrictions would still be in force, in which case the boat activities would be limited by the number of passengers we can carry under the "socially distanced" rules, with an alternative plan based on the licensed capacity of the boat (50 passengers) if social distancing comes to an end. Once we get an indication from the Government and the Environment Agency as to when river cruises can be resumed, then we can finalise our plans and a start of cruising date.

In the meantime our volunteer and training team are drawing up their plans for our volunteer crews to have their updated familiarisation annual training, so if you are a volunteer you will be hearing from us with details in the next month or so. Once this training is underway we will look at recruiting more volunteers and offering them foundation training. We are still looking for more volunteers to join our management team to help with sales, marketing, social media, boat operations as well as boat crew. Details from Sue Gilibrand -

JBVolunteering@johnbunyanboat.org

Some of us have also been very happy to help the Milton Keynes Team with their plans for the new MK Community Boat. The two boat teams can achieve so much more by working together.

Here's hoping for good weather this spring and not too much rain! Also with the vaccination programme working so well we hope a positive relaxation of some of the COVID19 restrictions.



NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT THE 15th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE BEDFORD & MILTON KEYNES WATERWAY TRUST

WILL BE HELD AT:

30 St John Street, Newport Pagnell

On Thursday 24 June at 3:00pm Adjourned meeting (if required) : 3:30pm

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, there will be no admittance to the meeting. All voting must be by proxy. All proxy forms must be received by 6pm on 22 June 2020. The Secretary will be the proxy for all members.

Zoom attendance will be possible using Meeting ID: 816 4371 7994 and Password: 362667

AGENDA

Ordinary Business:

1. To receive the Minutes of the 14th Annual General Meeting held on Tuesday 30th June 2020.
2. To receive and consider the Report of the Directors and the Statement of Accounts and the Balance Sheet of the Company for the year ended 31 April 2021.
3. It is proposed that the following longest serving Directors who have completed a three-year term be re-appointed for a further three years:
John Best – Stephen Ashley – Don Allison - Leigh Willows

Date: 1st March 2021

By Order of the Board

Don Allison – Company Secretary, Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway Trust, 30 St John Street, Newport Pagnell MK16 8HJ

Papers will be available on the website before the meeting. Members will be sent proxy forms closer to the meeting.

MEMBERS' EVENING

We will be holding the next members' evening via Zoom on Thursday 8th April at 7:30 pm. Please log in a little before to allow time to be admitted before the meeting begins.

Zoom Meeting ID: 849 1748 7107 Passcode: 532040

Contact Us.

For more information and to support or join the Trust, or volunteer with one of our boats, please see:

www.bmkwaterway.org

BMK News

Published by the Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway Trust.

Editor..... Leigh Willows
 Proof Readers..... Don & Jill Allison
 Photo enhancement. Keith Malone
 Steve Ashley
 Distribution..... Leigh Willows
 Printed by BCQ

Comments or articles for inclusion in the next edition should be sent to:
editor@b-mkwaterway.co.uk

Janet May

We were sorry to hear of the death of Janet May. John & Janet May have been some of our longest standing members, having the lowest membership number of any current member.

John kindly decided that the Trust should be the recipient of donations made in Janet's memory.

We thank him for his generosity and send him our best wishes at this difficult time.

BMK NEWS is published by the Bedford and Milton Keynes Waterway Trust, a non profit-making company limited by guarantee (No.5760839). Registered office: 30 St John Street Newport Pagnell, MK16 8HJ and a Registered Charity (No.1114294). Contact us at enquiries@b-mkwaterway.co.uk or Tel 01908 351 870 (Answer Machine)