

Electra wins regional tourism award

Electra scooped the silver award at a glittering ceremony in Brighton on 12th December in the 'New Tourism Business of the Year' category.

According to the judges, this is "in recognition of a high performing new tourism business, demonstrating excellent understanding of their market, exceeding the expectations of their customers with clear plans for future development".

The actual Award was presented to *Electra* volunteers at the boat's Campbell Wharf mooring on 14th December, by Kim Hallett, Tourism South East's Board member.



Accepting the award, chair of the *Electra* volunteers team, Denise Taylor, said: "We are thrilled to bits by this wonderful recognition of all the hard work our 40-strong team has put into *Electra* since the idea of an all-electric community boat for Milton Keynes was first mooted in 2019. Together we've created a successful social enterprise with growing impact in the locality."

Volunteer cabin host, James Clifton, said, "We were delighted to be recognised, alongside Bletchley Park, as one of only two finalists from Buckinghamshire. So far, 6,000 people have been able to experience a completely different view of Milton Keynes. Our peaceful cruises on the Grand Union Canal have wide appeal. We are also growing our programme of sponsored cruises for schools, care homes and community groups in need."

More *Electra* news: P4



The *Electra* crew welcoming the silver award from Kim Hallett (in the red scarf).
Credit: Adrian Court

Notice of AGM

The 18th Annual General Meeting of the Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway Trust will be held on 25th June 2024 at 19:30 at Box End Park, Bedford, MK43 8RQ

Meeting documents will be released nearer the time. ●

View from the Chair

You will already have read about the good news from Electra and its tourism award success. Great credit goes to all the volunteers who have helped establish the Electra boat as a '5-Star' visitor attraction in Milton Keynes and I would like to thank them on behalf of the whole membership of the Trust for their efforts. The success of the Electra is also a reflection of the appeal of Campbell Wharf as a new 'go-to' place in MK. This shows how important the role water plays in people's sense of well-being and as a generator of interest. Indeed, perhaps it's just my biased impression, but are the local TV news outlets increasingly using the very impressive bridge and Electra berth as their backdrop when sending out their reporters to speak about MK issues? It's certainly recognition that water is key to place-making, of which Campbell Wharf is a very fine example.

I am also reflecting on my first nine months since taking on the position of Chair and, in order to renew the Trust's focus on promoting the strategic significance of the waterway, the Trust's organisational structure has been renewed to 'sharpen its elbows'. A number of groups have been set up, each led by a Trustee, with all Trustees involved. Each group's purpose is either to advocate for elements of the Waterway Park and engage with those who can make it happen or to assure the Trust as a whole that its activities are in line with its business plans and operating obligations. The Groups can comprise other members with a particular skill or knowledge so if you wish to contribute or know more, please get in touch.

Unfortunately I have to report that one of the Waterway Park's keenest supporters, the South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership (SEMLEP), will cease to exist from April following Government reorganisation. As a member of the Consortium formed to implement the Waterway Park, SEMLEP had a key role to play and SEMLEP's Chief Executive, Hilary Chipping, unwaveringly championed our cause. However, the demise of SEMLEP is not

all bad news as Hilary has agreed to become a Trustee and so will continue to bring her enthusiasm for the Waterway Park and her vast experience of the local economy and politics for the Trust's benefit. The Board looks forward to welcoming her formally in June.

To advance the case for the Waterway Park the Trust is now being advised by two renowned consultancies on a couple of very important topics; its future obligations and opportunities to provide biodiversity net gain as well as to update its on-line messaging via the GIS Storymap. If anyone has any anecdotes or images which bring out the Waterway Park's potential and which they would like to share with others via the Storymap, please get in touch.

Lastly, as you will read elsewhere, can I urge supporters to become Individual or Family Members. The cost is relatively small but the dividend of influencing others via the breadth of our membership could be potentially huge - just think of the investment in the area which a positive decision by Universal Studios will bring, and how close its site is to the line of the Waterway Park. ●



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Topographic Survey Work at Fields Road

Following the successful construction of the Landing Stage at Kempston Mill, the Eastern Projects Group (EPG) continue to seek opportunities to promote and develop the Eastern part of the Waterway. The current focus is on the Fields Road area of the Waterway. Over the last few years, BMK have worked with Bedford Borough Council and their developer, Goodman, who have now built the Bedford Commercial Park (BCP) beside the A421 near Wootton. The future Waterway route will be from the A421 underpass, through BCP and then under Fields Road.

At BCP, five long “ponds” have been constructed as part of BCP’s Sustainable Urban Drainage (SUDs) design. These ponds lie on the modified route of the Waterway through BCP and will involve BMK in linking these together in the future to form a part of the Waterway route.

We also previously assisted Bedford Borough Council and Goodman to ensure a bridge was built where the BCP access road crosses over the route of the future Waterway. Completion of this bridge and excavation below it, is also part of the future works needed.

The EPG are looking at how the Waterway route may be developed in this area. The

first stage is to be clear on what has been built and where, so we have been working with Goodman to acquire the “as-built” information for BCP. The information provided to date includes an old partial topographic survey of BCP. BMK have



therefore recently commissioned and had carried out, a topographic survey from the A421 underpass to Fields Road that checks and correlates with the Goodman information. The full survey results are due shortly, which will allow the EPG to next consider the options for Waterway development between the A421 underpass to Fields Road. ●



Carrying out the survey

Donations

Last season we started collecting donations, specifically towards developing our Family Specials Programme, to enable people who wouldn't otherwise be able to experience being on the water to come on an *Electra* cruise. Guests on board generously donated over £2,300, which translates into around 20 cruises in the new season.

The new Welcome Centre.

Work on fitting-out the Welcome Centre had been halted, as we have had problems with significant amounts of rainwater seeping into the unit. Over 200 litres have already been pumped out. Crest have been investigating over the last few months.

It appears that rainwater has been getting into the cavity of the outside wall and getting in under the shopfront, which had not been properly sealed by the subcontractor. Now the cause has been identified, Crest are working to cure it.

We are now in the process of recruiting volunteers to staff it. The Centre is planned to be open between 12:00 and 15:00 on Thursdays, Fridays, Saturday and Sundays, later this season, through until mid-December. Further details, including an Expression of Interest form, can be found at 'Volunteering with *Electra*' on our website www.bmkwaterway.org/electra/

es to Fenny Stratford or Cosgrove and see Milton Keynes from a whole new angle.

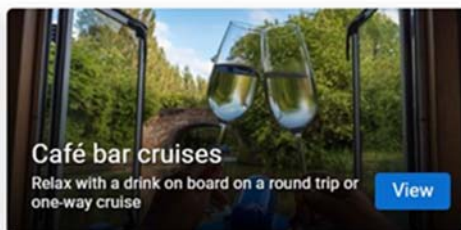
Private group charter cruises can be booked on mornings and afternoons on Thursdays and Saturdays. These can be made extra-special by adding coffee and cake, cream teas, nibbles trays or prosecco. Summer half day charters can also include a ploughman's lunch.

Gift vouchers are on sale. Let them choose, or opt for an Experience - 'Cream Tea' or 'Coffee & Cake' cruise for two, on the date of their choice.

Widening access

Schools are choosing trips on *Electra* as way of introducing pupils to a very special part of their local environment, finding out about local history, and discovering how battery technology can work on a boat. This year *Electra* is delighted to be hosting 4 Milton Keynes schools on board. We are also hoping to extend our Learning Partnership Programme to local scout and guide groups of all ages.

In addition, the *Electra* volunteer team has chosen to run a free cruise each year in memory of the late Graham Mabbutt, who kick-started the *Electra* project (as well as being a key player in the Trust and the *John Bunyan*). Residents of Camphill Community had a great time on board in November, thoroughly enjoying the



Cruising information

Bookings are now open for our cruises, which start on 18 April and run through to mid-December. See the website (above).

Why not be tempted by our food cruises – cream tea, fish & bubbles, ploughman's lunches, coffee & cake. You could enjoy one of our relaxing café bar cruises, or treat yourself to one of the half day cruises

experience. Clare Groves, their Support Worker wrote: "Thanks to the two kind crewmen, Rob and Mark. Residents enjoyed looking out for the various birds, sculptures and landmarks on the spotter sheets they were given. They really liked the tea, coffee and biscuits too! Thank you again for an amazing cruise.... What a treat!"

(Continued on page 5)

The *John Bunyan* community Boat will be back cruising from Mid-April to October, gracing the River Great Ouse in and around Bedford. Over the past 10 years 55,000 passengers have enjoyed cruising on various trips, from Kempston in the west to Great Barford in the east and enjoying cruising along Bedford Embankment. We are manned entirely by volunteers to provide enjoyable trips for the residents of Bedford and surrounding districts, enjoying the spring sunshine and calming waters of the river. It is hard to improve on a peaceful and tranquil meander through the countryside around Bedford or enjoy views of the town and Embankment from a new vantage point, whilst taking refreshments from the galley.

This summer the *John Bunyan* will be at the very popular Bedford River Festival on 20th & 21st July. You will find us next to Bedford Town lock on the lower river, running 30min taster cruises.

This summer look out for the History cruise along Bedford Embankment to learn about the history of Bedford's landmarks from the Upper River. Also, by popular demand we will be running our afternoon tea cruises in conjunction with Kingfisher pub, and fish & chip supper cruises.

Our Popular Cruises:

Tea & Cake Cruise

While away an afternoon with family and friends as you cruise along the River Great Ouse from Priory Marina to the Embankment and return. Enjoy a delicious slice of locally made cake with endless tea or coffee. The selection to choose from includes; - Victoria, Chocolate & Coffee & Walnut cake.

(Continued from page 4)

Last year in numbers

The need to fit new batteries and undertake other upgrading works meant that cruising did not start until the end of June, resulting in a reduced 25-week cruising season, compared to 2022's 31 weeks.

Electra carried 1,982 guests on 207 cruises (8 of which were free, 199 income generating) delivered through 179 crewing sessions; overall occupancy 9.6. 45% of all public cruises were full. Wheelchair users were on board on 11% of cruises.

Of course, none of this could happen without our terrific team of forty volunteers on the boat and on the shore! ●

Irish Band Evening Cruise

Enjoy a lively music evening cruise featuring Inis Eire who are a Ceilidh band providing amazing music from the island of Ireland as we cruise along Bedford's Embankment. Inis Eire versatile trio of Irish musicians providing high quality classical, folk, pop and ceilidh performances.

Jazz Evening Cruise

Enjoy a relaxing evening of Jazz as the sun goes down on board the *John Bunyan* as we cruise along Bedford's river.

6th June - Richard Exall Trio

5th September - Gary Woods Trio

Evening Fish & Chip supper cruise

Enjoy a relaxing evening cruise as the sun goes down along The Embankment, past the 12th century Castle Mound, and under the historic town bridge - all whilst enjoying a traditional fish and chip supper from the Golden Chicken who supply our fish & chips - rated the best in Bedford. Departing from Priory Marina to pick up the fish & chips at Sovereigns Quay.

Special Afternoon Tea

This year we are running our special celebration Afternoon Tea cruise, we have commissioned a special afternoon tea from our caterers Crème Brew Lait, with it being served in 'proper' china cups and served as we cruise along the River Great Ouse. For those who would like a glass of prosecco, this can be ordered at the time of booking.

Volunteering

As ever, we are always on the lookout for new volunteers to join us – as well as the roles on the boat, we need people to help with marketing, communications, and people with planning, engineering or project management skills to help with our work promoting and developing the new waterway.

For those that like to be on the river we are always looking for boat crew in all roles to train in the cabin, on the deck to helm and to train to qualify as a boat master. For those who enjoy working with customers, train as cabin crew and work to be part of our purser team.

If you would like to volunteer or know others who would like to get involved, please email volunteering@johnbunyanboat.org. ●

Join the Trust

Although this newsletter is primarily designed for members of the Trust, many copies go to interested non-members. If you are one of those, we should be very pleased if you would join us in the Trust. Membership is inexpensive, and each member adds weight to our argument when bidding for influence or money. Individual, family and organisation members are all welcome.

See: <https://www.bmkwaterway.org/join-us/>

The membership year runs until 31 May. Anyone joining before the end of May 2024 will receive membership until May 2025.

Initiative to Eradicate Mink from Great Ouse

Over the years, invasive American mink have been seen in several areas of the Great Ouse around Kempston and Bedford (Alan Mayo writes). In the UK, mink in the wild have escaped from captivity, and are predatory mammals that feed on small animals such as water voles and small nesting birds. They are the cause of a significant reduction in the numbers of these native species, and hence the need for their eradication.



A mink at Bedford Town Lock

B&MKWT is joining an initiative by the Waterlife Recovery Trust (WRT) to ascertain the extent of the problem and eradicate the mink as required, making it possible for the native species to recover. Humane traps have been developed to capture animals so that the native species can be released unharmed, although their numbers will also be noted. People are asked to report any likely sightings to the WRT, so that these can be investigated.

The picture was taken about 10 years ago by one of the JB Boat Masters, Christian Taylor, when the *John Bunyan* was going through Bedford Town Lock. A word of caution -- when only the small black nose is visible above water, especially at a distance, it is easy to misidentify a mink as an otter, because that is what the viewer wants to see. ●

Landing Stage Maintenance

We are pleased to report that we have now managed to satisfy all the criteria necessary for the Council to pay us the £1,000 from Councillor Valentine's Ward Fund, which he kindly pledged towards the repair and maintenance of the landing stage at Kempston Mill.

This money should be in our account within the next few days and we hope to undertake the work as the river levels subside and better weather arrives in the early spring. ●

Contact Us.

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

www.bmkwaterway.org

Volunteers with technical knowledge wanted

For some years now the Eastern Projects Group has been working to try to make people aware of the likelihood that a waterway will be built by trying to build small sections of works along the waterway route.

In order to do this a high level of technical engineering knowledge is extremely helpful and the EPG has been fortunate to have a few chartered engineers in their number who have been able to advise.

If anyone is out there who lives towards the Western end of the waterway with similar skills, we would love to hear from you and try to form a Western Projects Group with similar aims.

If you think you can help, please contact julian.armitage@b-mkwaterway.co.uk ●

Events Calendar 2024



March 2024	Annual Partnership Conference. Cranfield University
25 June 2024	AGM. Box End Park
Other live	events are being planned. Watch this space.



iwa canalway cavalcade

4th - 6th May 2024 | Little Venice, London



#CanalwayCavalcade

There's something for everyone at Canalway Cavalcade; a vibrant canal festival in the heart of London's waterways. Whether visiting by boat or on foot, it's a bank holiday weekend of fun for the whole family!

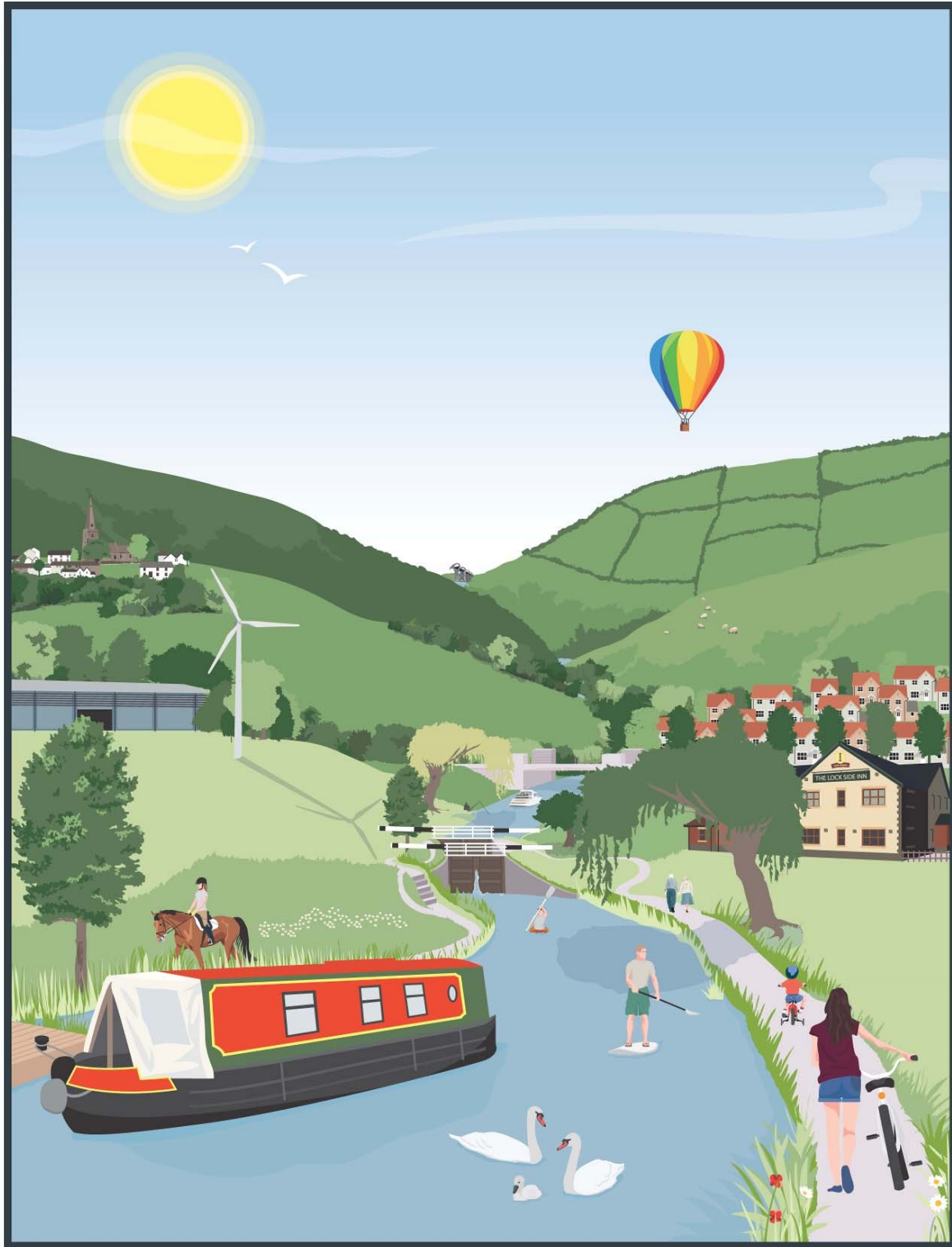
Free
entry



Visit our website to find out more about the event:

waterways.org.uk/cavalcade

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