

## There Are Signs of the Waterway Appearing...



The newly arrived signs awaiting installation

Following on from the successful installation of the signage on the Milton Keynes Waterway Park section, the Eastern Projects Group reviewed the feasibility of installing signage between the A6 viaduct in Kempston and Green Lane, Stewartby (Steve Waring writes).

Three Eastern Project Group members undertook the task of planning and carrying out detailed site inspections at five nominated locations in order to ensure the signage could be installed on existing street furniture (a Bedford Borough Council (BBC) stipulation). After agreeing the locations, a sign design, which included the B&MK logo, was submitted to BBC for approval.

The intention of the group was for the route to be marked with signage that depicted the B&MK Waterway Park rather than the normal Canal brown signs. The signs have now been delivered and will be installed in early April.

These signs will only be erected on roads controlled by BBC (your editor adds). While it would be ideal to have signs on the A421 near our existing underpass, this road is in the jurisdiction of National Highways. Erecting signs on their roads is much more complicated and expensive and so wasn't part of this exercise. This remains on the "to do" list, as we begin to talk to the councils in Milton Keynes and Central Bedfordshire about signs in their areas. ●



One of the new signs

### Bedford Radio Business Expo

At the recent Bedford Radio Expo, the Trust and *John Bunyan* community boat had a stand to promote our activities. Those who visited our stand were extremely interested in the Waterway Park.

The Expo also provided the *John Bunyan* the opportunity to promote the 2025 season public cruises and charters, and also to advertise the open vacancies in the management operations team.

During the Expo Simon Clewlow, the Trust's Chair, was interviewed and broadcast over Bedford Radio during the radio show.

Listen to Simon's Bedford Radio interview:

[https://bit.ly/Expo\\_BMKWP](https://bit.ly/Expo_BMKWP) or scan the QR code. ●



## View from the Chair



Simon Clewlow  
Trust Chair

I spoke in my last column about ensuring that the planning of the East West Rail line and the Grand Union Canal Water Transfer scheme takes into account the benefits of the waterway and will facilitate its delivery. The Trust responded to both informal consultations expressing support in principle for each project while also identifying, particularly in the case of East West Rail, that elements could be amended to ease delivery of the waterway and its future use.

Consultation is very much a theme surrounding infrastructure planning and delivery at this time, with Central Government recently proposing a raft of changes to how the built and natural environment will be shaped to facilitate economic growth rather than frustrate it. Sometimes policy changes by Central Government generate a lot of political noise but in practice have only a limited effect as to how things actually get done. After navigating my way around town planning policy and legislation for more than thirty years in my professional career I can certainly testify to the fact that little has happened in that time to make it easier while a lot more has been done which slows the process.

Ordinarily such policy changes are only likely to have a limited effect on the waterway and its prospects for delivery. On this occasion, however, it's my opinion that the policy shift is more fundamental than anything that I have seen previously and has profoundly improved the prospects for the waterway. Matters which in the past frustrated the granting of formal consent for the waterway in Milton Keynes, in that instance the production of an unaffordable environmental impact assessment, will not be required in future under the proposed Planning and Infrastructure Bill. An environmental outcome report will suffice and feed into determining an appropriate contribution to the Nature Restoration Fund to invest in strategic nature recovery. Indeed it's possible that the waterway could itself represent the type of project which would benefit from such investment. It is clear therefore that there are new emerging routes to delivery of the waterway.

At the same time there has been the launch of the independent Water Commission call for evidence, which closes in April. The Water Commission's chair, Sir Jon Cunliffe, has opened up discussion on just about every aspect of how water is managed in

this country. One of the Trust's partners, Water Resources East, reports that it believes it could act as a regional scale "system planner" looking across catchment and local authority boundaries to develop fundable cross-sector investment plans, working closely with all relevant organisations in the region. The waterway is tailor-made for promotion under such an approach due to the multi-faceted nature of the solutions it offers.

The Trust also secured an invitation to attend the local roadshow considering how the National Integrated Transport Strategy should put people at the centre of transport policy in a way which is ambitious and innovative. With the opportunity to contribute, I emphasised how waterways, through their role now in active travel, are often key links in networks providing short and long journey options away from road traffic, and so need supporting. The role of waterways in ensuring the resilience of the transport network was also a theme taken up with the Department for Transport representatives.

Lastly, on the theme of consultation and co-operation, the Bedford Water Management Alliance held its inaugural meeting in February hosted by the Mayor of Bedford. This brought together many if not all parties interested in bettering the management of water through the Borough and limiting its scope for damage and disruption. It was initially pleasing to know that, simply by being invited, the waterway is seen as having a genuine role in helping solve the challenges of water management. The interest shown in the waterway by those present from key organisations not currently affiliated with the Trust offered further encouragement that the waterway will be part of the solution.

In closing I would like to include the final paragraph of a quote from me that accompanies a press release by AECOM, the consultants currently advising the Trust,

"The Trust will continue to focus on the overall vision for the waterway by collaborating with all its partners and build on the work from this appointment, which it should be remembered has only been possible through the hard work of the Trust's volunteers and support from the public who cruise on our community boats on the Grand Union Canal in Milton Keynes and the River Great Ouse in Bedford."

I extend the 'Thank You' to everyone reading this who, in their own way, is also helping the waterway become a reality. ●

## Business Case Update

The Trust commissioned, at the end of last year, infrastructure consultants AECOM to develop an Outline Business Case (OBC) for the entire waterway route (Hilary Chipping writes).

The OBC is designed to update previous work on the economic rationale for the Waterway and demonstrate the case for further investment should an opportunity arise to access funding. The OBC, which is a tool recognised by the Treasury, will outline the strategic rationale for the scheme, assessing costs and benefits to establish value for money and identifying potential funding, delivery and management options, including an option for constructing the whole route in one comprehensive package.

The work is progressing well. An experienced team has been assembled by AECOM and they have met several times with the steering group from the Trust. A draft report will be available at the end of March with the full Report expected at the end of May.

The Trust was able to fund this work from the revenue raised from supporters, as a result of the hard work of our volunteers on the two trip boats. We are also grateful for contributions from Bedford Borough Council and Milton Keynes City Council.

An update on the project will be provided at the Annual Partnership Conference in May.

# AECOM

As Julian mentions on the back page, another recent development at the eastern end is the commissioning of a design study by AECOM to look into the feasibility of joining up the drainage ponds at the Bedford Commercial Park at Wootton. This would provide a leisure facility for the local community as well as forming a part of the future waterway. We are hoping that section 106 funds will be available from Bedford Borough to make this a reality in the near future.

The press release issued by AECOM has generated a lot of interest. It triggered the BBC item (see p7), and also made the front page of the New Civil Engineer website.

<https://www.newcivilengineer.com/latest/aecom-appointed-to-carry-out-feasibility-of-new-26km-bedford-milton-keynes-canal-20-03-2025/> ●

## JOIN OUR TEAM ON THE JOHN BUNYAN COMMUNITY BOAT IN BEDFORD



The *John Bunyan* community boat is entirely run by volunteers who are central to the success of the overall project by raising our profile with the public in Bedford and providing the Trust with a source of income. To keep our cruises running and delivering an outstanding experience to over 7,000 guests throughout the season is a fantastic team achievement involving many volunteers both onboard and on shore, as well as within our Operations Management team.

We are recruiting NOW for volunteers to support *John Bunyan* boat cruising. Join our warm and welcoming group of volunteers who make the *John Bunyan* boat possible.

We are recruiting the following roles:

### Onboard:

- Deck and Cabin Crew
- MCA Certified Boat Masters

### Operations Management Team:

- Chairperson
- Commercial Manager
- Marketing Manager
- Customer Liaison
- Cabin Operations Manager

### Shore-based:

- Event volunteers

If you are interested and are willing to offer some of your time to our community enterprise then we would love to hear from you, so please get in touch to find out more.

The *John Bunyan* community boat is crewed by five or six volunteers on each trip and we are always looking for enthusiastic individuals to join our team both on and off the water.

If you are interested in joining us you can see more details and an application form at

<https://www.bmkwaterway.org/johnbunyanboat/volunteering/>

If you are interested in finding out more about volunteering roles please get in touch by emailing Janet Goodland at [volunteering@johnbunyanboat.org](mailto:volunteering@johnbunyanboat.org)

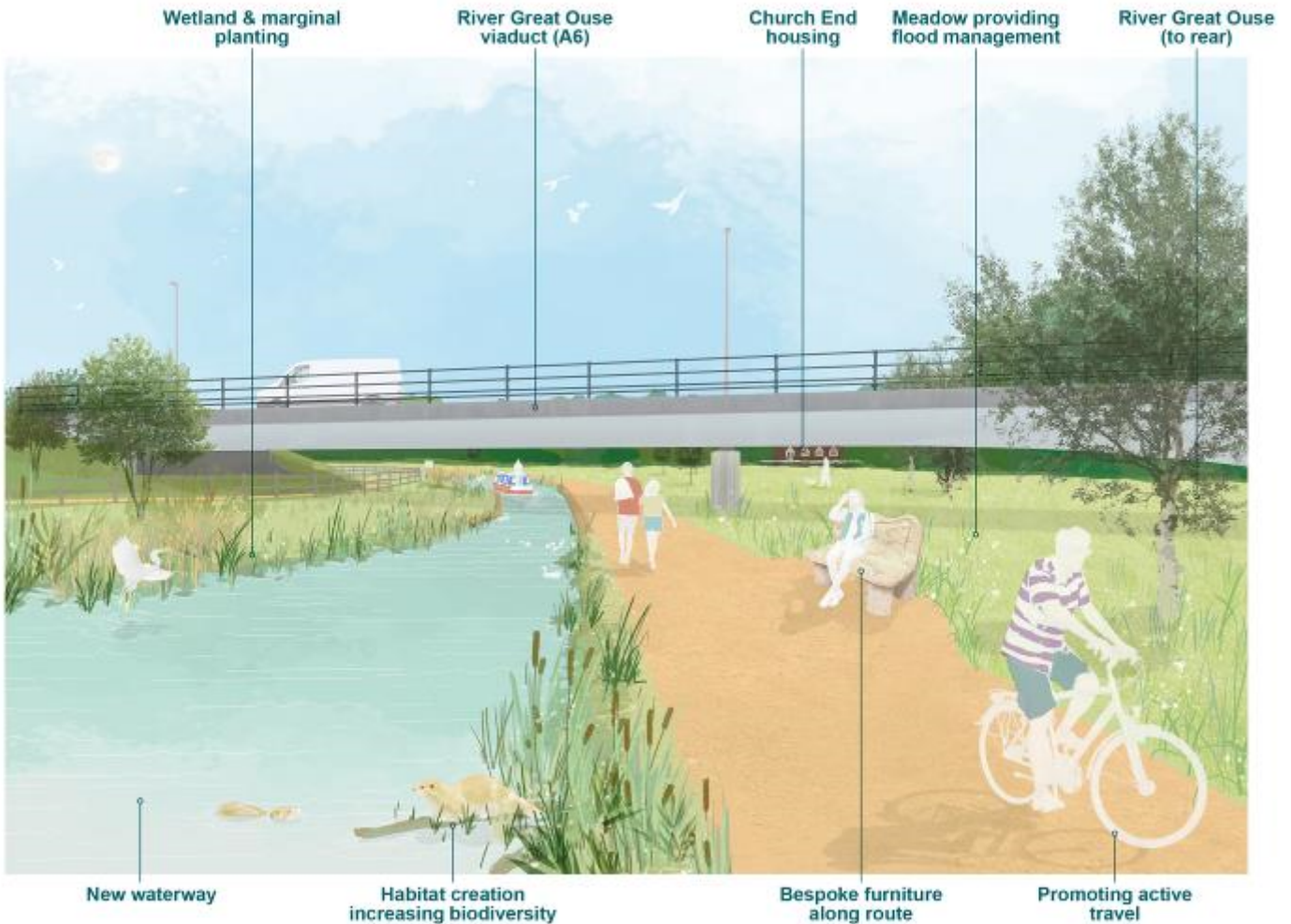
## Contact Us.

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

[www.bmkwaterway.org](http://www.bmkwaterway.org)

# Visualisations of the Waterway

We have commissioned “artists impressions” of what the Waterway will look like at various points on the route. We currently have some visualisations of the Bedford area, and have commissioned more covering Milton Keynes and Mid-Bedfordshire. We intend to share these with you as we have space in BMK news.



Kempston: The view towards the A6 viaduct and (below) as it currently appears



## Thanks to MK IWA

The Milton Keynes branch of the Inland Waterways Association has made a generous donation of £300. This is the latest in a series of donations from the branch, and we are very grateful for their support.

Trust members and supporters in the area might like to consider the monthly meetings of the branch, which are held on the 3rd Thursday of the month from September to April at Bletchley Conservative Club.

The April meeting will be a talk by a representative of the Canal & River Trust. Room available from 19:45, talk usually begins around 20:00.

More details are at:

[waterways.org.uk/waterways/branches/iwa-milton-keynes-branch](http://waterways.org.uk/waterways/branches/iwa-milton-keynes-branch)

# Meeting our MPs



Blake Stephenson, the MP for Mid Bedfordshire, has mentioned the Waterway in Parliament on multiple occasions (see the previous edition of BMK News).

This led to a meeting with him on 13th February where Simon was joined by Hilary Chipping and James Barbour.

It is very encouraging to have Blake's support, and we look forward to meeting the rest of the new MPs on the route soon.

Blake has agreed to be at the Annual Partnership Conference in May. Although, of course, an MP's movements are never totally in their own control, we hope he will be able to be there. ●



Simon Clewlow with Blake Stephenson MP

## In the News Again

The Waterway has featured in another article on the BBC website, reporting the work Aecom are carrying out for us.



### Waterway 30 years in the making moves a step closer



The waterpark would provide leisure activities and a chance for nature "to recover" the Bedford and Milton Keynes Waterway Trust previously said

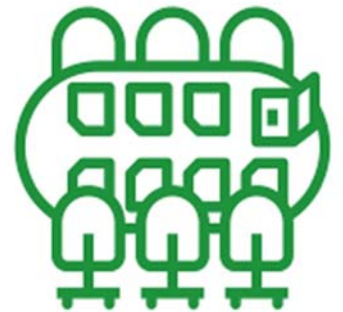
Alex Pope  
BBC News, Bedfordshire

The article reminds us of the A421 closure (see last edition) and talks of the water supply and flood relief benefits we will bring, as well as the ability to "improve biodiversity, water quality, climate resilience and provide new wildlife habitats and leisure activities".

Also featured are one of our visualisations (though not the one opposite) and a picture of the underpass.

The article is at: [www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c2012z7vg76o](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c2012z7vg76o) ●

## Join the John Bunyan Boat Operations Management Team



We are seeking to fill the following roles:

### Chair

Location: Bedford (Land-based)  
Experience: Leadership, Organisational development, Business reporting, Working with volunteers, Familiarity with boat operations would be useful but not essential.  
Hours required: 5-6 hours per week

### Commercial Manager

Location: Bedford (Land-based)  
Experience: Commercial management, Sales, Planning and pricing, Customer service  
Hours required: 5-6 hours per week

### Marketing Manager

Location: Bedford (Land-based)  
Experience: Sales and Marketing, Developing and implementing marketing campaigns, Graphic design, Social Media  
Hours required: 5-6 hours per week plus ad hoc events

### Cabin Ops Manager

Location: Bedford (Land-based)  
Experience: Customer care, Hospitality, Stock control, Working with volunteers  
Hours required: 5-6 hours per week



For more information contact:  
[volunteering@johnbunyanboat.org](mailto:volunteering@johnbunyanboat.org)  
[bmkwaterway.org/johnbunyanboat/volunteering](http://bmkwaterway.org/johnbunyanboat/volunteering)



# Drone Footage of the Waterway Route

The Trust has begun mapping the waterway park route using drone services from Greenwood Drones. The aim is to capture the entire length from Campbell Wharf on the Grand Union Canal to Kempston Mill landing stage.

Video footage and still images from the River Great Ouse at Kempston Mill to Stewartby Lake were captured in late October when the river was in flood. These are being added to the Story map on the website.

The next phase of drone footage will cover M1 junction 13 to Stewartby Lake. We will start in April at Campbell Wharf and schedule for M1 Junction 13 in May.

Using drone aerial images to document the route helps us understand the terrain the waterway will cross and any hidden difficulties that are hard to see from the ground. It also lets us document the waterway route before and after construction. ●



Above: Kempston Mill Pond proposed winding point. Below: Start of Waterway just before Kempston Mill Weir



Above: Bedford Commercial Park  
Below: A421 Culvert



Stewartby Lake



Kempston Mill Bridge and landing stage (under water due to river in flood )



Bedford Commercial Park

# Landscaping the Mooring at Fenny Stratford



Funding has been acquired to improve and tidy up the towpath where *Electra* moors at Fenny Stratford. The plans are to create flower beds containing plants, herbs etc which will require little maintenance.

The first stage was to clear the top vegetation so a group of nine volunteers set to. We spent two mornings before Christmas and from the photographs you can see what a great job was done! In between Christmas and the New Year Buckingham Canal Society came along and kindly took down the rest of the trees to ground level.

Watch this space for future developments and planting. ●



“Before” and “During” pictures of the Fenny work

## THE B & MK TRUST SEEKS AN HONORARY SOLICITOR

As the Waterway Park project is gaining interest from politicians and developers, we are looking to move the development of the project forward in partnership with potential funders, and are jointly commissioning more detailed development work. We would like to appoint an Honorary Solicitor to support us during this stage.

The role would involve:

- being an initial point of contact for general legal enquiries
- identifying when further legal advice would be needed and advising on how it should be procured
- reviewing and commenting on development contracts and partnership agreements.

We would be pleased to hear from any member who may be interested in helping in this way. Please contact Simon Clewlow, Chair, B&MK Waterway Trust if you are able to support us in this.

[simon.clewlow@b-mkwaterway.co.uk](mailto:simon.clewlow@b-mkwaterway.co.uk) ●

## Advertising in BMK News

We welcome advertisements in *BMK News*

Rates are:

Whole page :	£120
Back Page:	£150
Half Page	£80
Quarter page:	£50
Eighth page:	£30

Buy two, get one free! Book a place for three consecutive editions, and only pay for the first two. For details contact: [editor@b-mkwaterway.co.uk](mailto:editor@b-mkwaterway.co.uk)

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Editor.....	Leigh Willows
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[editor@b-mkwaterway.co.uk](mailto:editor@b-mkwaterway.co.uk)

## Reflections on my time with the Trust

It is nearly 10 years since I joined the Trust (Julian Armitage writes). This came about because a friend of mine went for a walk with Jane Hamilton, the then Chair, and suggested to her that I might have something to contribute. I have decided that it is now time to move on so will be leaving in a couple of months.



Julian Armitage will be retiring from the board soon.

During my time here, I have seen a few changes. We moved from one boat to two; both of which have made a huge contribution to awareness of our mission plus being the prime source of the Trust's income. I'm sure the whole Board join with me in recording our thanks to all the crews of the *John Bunyan* and *Electra* for their cheerfulness, dedication and hard work.

My main involvement has been with the Eastern Projects Group, which was formed from a number of volunteers who, as the name suggests, were able to give their time to projects at the Bedford end of the waterway. The first of these was the landing stage at Kempston Mill. We had to lease the land from Bedford Borough Council before finalising the design and obtaining quotations from potential contractors. Having decided on our preferred option, work started in November 2021 and was completed just before Christmas and the floods arrived. This was primarily funded by the Trust with grants coming from Ward Councillor funds, the Wixamtree Trust and Bedford Borough Council.

The maintenance of the landing stage is an ongoing responsibility for the Trust, but eventually we hope to give up the lease and donate the landing stage to the Council.

It had been hoped that the *John Bunyan* could extend its cruise repertoire by making a journey to Kempston, but this has not yet been possible due to water depth and turning issues. The JB team and the Environment Agency are now in discussions on how to keep the River Great Ouse navigable up to Kempston.

Another recent development at the Eastern end is the commissioning of a design study by AECOM to look into the feasibility of joining up the drainage ponds at the Bedford Commercial Park at Wootton. This would provide a leisure facility for the local community as well as forming a part of the future waterway. We are hoping that section 106 funds will be available from Bedford Borough to make this a reality in the near future.

In summary, I have very much enjoyed my time with the Trust and see the next few years with great positivity. We are all more aware of the need to look after the environment, the changing requirements for water demand and the focus of the government on the Oxford to Cambridge growth corridor and East-West rail. These things coupled with the strong possibility of the Universal theme park & resort development taking place, all give rise to the hope that there is a real chance that the waterway will happen.

Thanks to everyone and good luck for the future.

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## 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 2025 will receive membership until May 2026.

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Contact us at [enquiries@b-mkwaterway.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@b-mkwaterway.co.uk)

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