

Leadership Change

The 2025 AGM took place recently at Box End Park where it was announced that Hilary Chipping would be taking over as chair from Simon Clewlow. You are probably aware that, in common with most companies, you (the membership) choose who will sit on the board, and it is then up to the board to decide who takes each position.

Simon is to concentrate on his new focus as Project Lead for the Waterway Project.

Those directors retiring under the three-year rule, Simon, Beryl Bennett and James Barbour, were re-elected and Tom Tagg (who had been co-opted onto the board during the year) was elected.

Simon gave a review of the period since the last AGM (more than a year, as we have changed the date of the AGM). Simon mentioned the publicity the project has received over the period - several mentions on the BBC website, good coverage (including the front page of the MK Citizen) for the publication of the business case. Blake Stevenson MP mentioned us in the House of Commons on more than one occasion, and was a speaker at the Annual Partnership Conference (see last BMK News for more details).

We have erected signs where the Waterway will cross roads in Bedford Borough, and are investigating doing the same in Milton Keynes and Central Bedfordshire. We have created "visualisations" showing what the Waterway could look like at various points along the route. These have already been useful when discussing our plans. We have also introduced scorecards, giving the board an at-a-glance picture of how the boats are performing against expectations.

Hilary then explained how she intended to lead the Trust in the future, and the strategic aims and objectives to help us achieve our goals. The plan is to deliver the project through advocacy and partnerships. Potentially to create a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) an organisation created with the local authorities specifically to construct the Waterway. And there will be smaller works which can be led by the Trust.

We need to ensure that everyone involved with the Trust feels valued and understands how what they do contributes to the delivery of the waterway, and encourage new volunteers to join and contribute. Whilst also strengthening relationships with our stakeholders, improving our communications and focussing on delivery. ●



Hilary telling the AGM about her plans



The board presented Simon with a small token to express thanks for the excellent work carried out as Chair.

View from the Chair

I am writing this, my first 'View from the Chair', following a very successful AGM held at Box End Park on 14th October, where I was delighted to take on the role of Chair from Simon Clewlow.

I have been a passionate supporter of the waterway project for many years. In my role as chief executive of the South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership (SEMLEP) the potential value of the waterway to the local economy was recognised. I am also a canal enthusiast having spent many family holidays on the canal when my children were young and still enjoy walking our dog along canal towpaths near to where I live in Buckinghamshire.

It is an exciting time to be taking over as Chair. The level of interest in the waterway is increasing and the prospect of delivery in the next few years is greater than ever as the waterway is seen to complement other major projects in the region.

My focus over the next year will be to make sure that the Trust is in the best possible position to take advantage of the opportunities that are on our doorstep, particularly with the prospect of the new Universal Theme Park, East West Rail and two potential new towns in Tempsford and Milton Keynes.

Since taking up my position as Chair, I have been speaking to as many people as possible about their interest in, and contribution to, progressing the project. I have been amazed by the passion and enthusiasm amongst our Trustees, Members and Volunteers. The combined skills and experience of our Board members is impressive. The commitment of our volunteers to give their time, week in and week out over the summer months is amazing and the support of our Members, many of whom came to the AGM on a cold dark night in October is essential. I very much enjoyed talking to people that I had not met before and hearing why they are so committed to delivering this waterway.

The level of interest and support from our local MPs is increasing, as you saw from Blake Stephenson MP at the Annual Partnership Conference and reported in the last Newsletter. Local authority leaders, especially Mayor Tom Wootton, understand the importance of the waterway for their local communities.

Our task over the next few months is to raise awareness of this exciting project with our friends, neighbours, local councillors, schools, MPs, environmental groups and anyone else with an interest in delivering this waterway for the benefit of future generations in our area.

Please do let us know if you would like me, as Chair, or Simon as our Project Lead to attend and present at your local meetings.

We are now much closer to delivery thanks to your support over so many years. Now is the time to pull together and move forward to the next stage!

I am excited by the prospect of working with you all. ●

AGM: Editor's Note.

The number of members attending the AGM was lower than usual, and we would like to know why, and what we can do to encourage more people to be there.

If you usually come, but didn't this year, please let us know why.

If you never come, what could we do to encourage you? We do realise that many members live too far away to make attendance practical.

This year we moved the AGM to October from the usual time of around June. As our financial year finishes at the end of March, it was very difficult to have the accounts ready for a June meeting. Sometimes it was impossible to have the accounts signed off by the independent examiner in time for them to be circulated before the meeting. We decided to make sure that you had good time to examine the accounts before the meeting, by delaying it. As we didn't want the meeting to clash with summer holidays, this meant moving it to late September or October.

However, this also means that the meeting was held at a time of year when darkness falls earlier. Was this a factor? Is that why you didn't come? Please let us know if so.

Recent meetings have been held at Box End Park. We do not have a history of rotating the AGM as we do the Annual Partnership Conference, and for many years previously it had been held in Newport Pagnell.

Box End has many advantages. It has plenty of free parking, the room we use is quiet and well equipped for talks, and the refreshments afterwards are excellent (in your editor's opinion). As Box End is owned by great supporters of the project we also get it at an excellent rate.

However, it is a bit out on its own. Is this a problem? In questions after the meeting there was a suggestion that next year's meeting should be Milton Keynes. Would that help? Would you be more likely to come? We would be unlikely to find a location as suitable at a similar price, but that need not be a deciding factor.

Please let me know your thoughts at editor@b-mkwaterway.co.uk ●

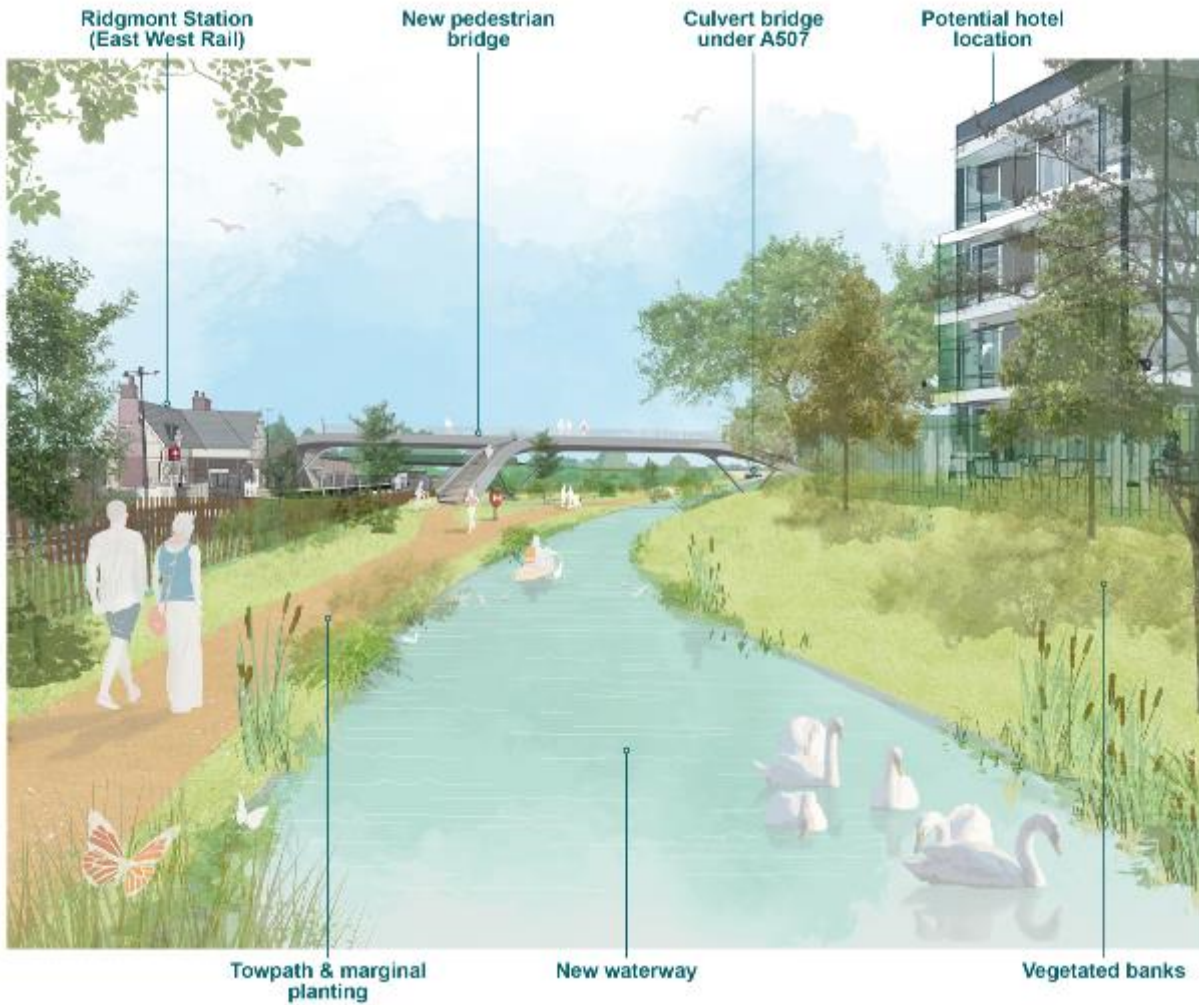


Hilary Chipping
Trust Chair

Visualisations of the Waterway



We have commissioned “artists impressions” of what the Waterway will look like at various points on the route. We intend to share these with you as we have space in BMK news.



Simon thanks Gidon Freeman, Senior Vice-President, Government and Regulatory Affairs, NBC Universal International, our guest speaker, after his talk to the AGM

The *John Bunyan's* trip to Earith

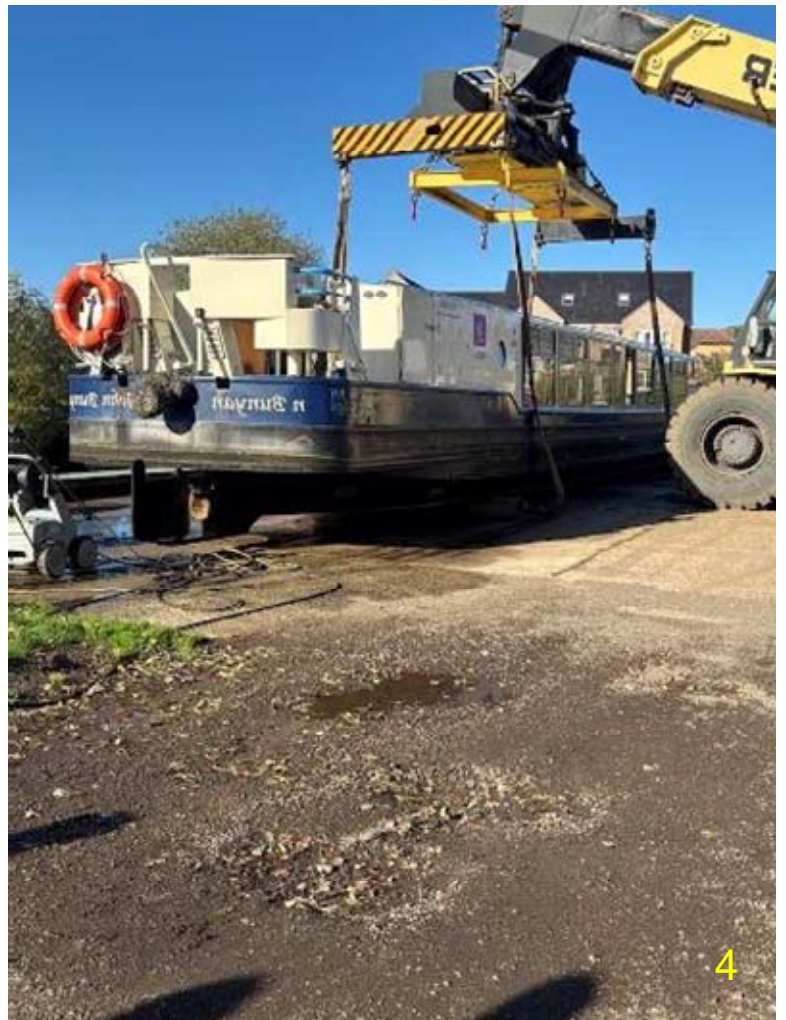
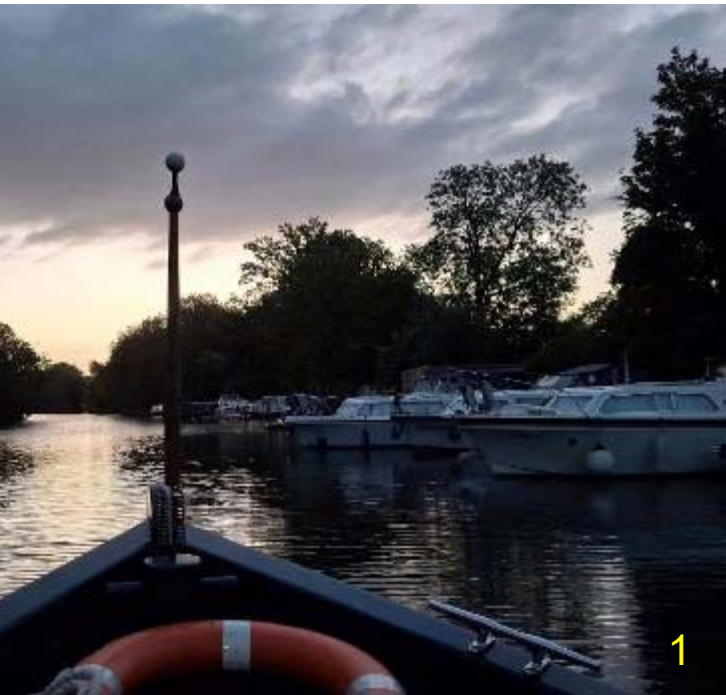
The *John Bunyan* is licenced by the Maritime & Coastguard Agency (MCA) who require that the boat has an 'out of water' survey every three years. The boat has to go to Westview Marina at Earith to be lifted out, and while it was there this year the maintenance team took the opportunity for some other maintenance and repair work to be done.

Pursers and the maintenance team emptied the boat of most of the furniture and galley stocks before the maintenance team set off from Priory Marina at 06.45 on Sunday 5th October, camping in the boat overnight at St Ives and arriving at Earith the following morning.

The boat was lifted out on Monday 6th, inspected, the hull was blacked, the propellor refurbished and new bearings were installed.

The *John Bunyan* was lifted back into the water on Friday 24th October, and the maintenance team set off, with another overnight stop and game of monopoly, to return it home to Priory Marina on Saturday 25th.

Maintenance work will continue over the winter, so that the *John Bunyan* is ready for refresher training for the 2026 season in March. ●



1. Setting off on 5th October
2. Arriving at St Ives for an overnight stop
3. The crew relaxing over a game of Monopoly
4. Lifting out

5. The hull was blacked

6. Refitting the rudder

7. Refurbished propellor with new bearings. The odd colouring on the rudder is where it was laid on the ground.

8. The maintenance crew ready to return



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 now will receive membership until May 2027.

Wolverton Park Accessible & Electric Boarding Point

MK Canals and the Trust, working with Wolverton & Greenleys Town Council, MK Community Foundation, Canal and River Trust, Inland Waterways Association and HC-GB Ltd have recently created a new accessible boarding point in Wolverton. This includes a charging bollard to increase the range of *Electra* cruises.

As the MK Canals press release says:

Before Wolverton was a railway town, it was a canal village (now Old Wolverton). After the canal opened in 1800 freight trade grew rapidly. A wharf and inn were built (The Wharf House, later The Locomotive, now The Gallion). In 1811 the Iron Trunk Aqueduct replaced 8 locks, making journeys faster.

In the 1830s Robert Stephenson needed a railway service point midway between London and Birmingham. The line was close to the canal here, so it was easy to bring in the building materials by boat. The Victorian new town of Wolverton developed quickly as the world's first railway town.

Canal trade declined in the 20th century as rail and road took over, and then the railway works declined. Some canalside buildings remain derelict, but most have found new uses as the town regenerates. Here, new waterside homes with a footbridge, statues celebrating Wolverton's rich industrial herit-

age, visitor moorings and this new boarding point are part of the town's bright future. ●

(See also back page)



Above and opposite: the work in progress. The completed bollard can be seen in the picture on the back page.



Map showing location of bollard (from MK Canals website)

Events Calendar 2025/6



May (Details TBC)	Annual Partnership Conference
October?	AGM details to be confirmed. You can help decide where and when our AGM will be - see box on page 2.



The work to install the electricity bollard at Wolverton. See opposite page and back cover for more details

Contact Us.

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

www.bmkwaterway.org

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editor@b-mkwaterway.co.uk

Electra plays a major part in Heritage Open Days, Milton Keynes

Electra has been very active during Heritage Open Days. In partnership with MK Canals, we have been proud to run 14 separate events spread over seven days, celebrating our city's fantastic waterway heritage.

There were "Talk-and-Glide" short cruises from Fenny Stratford, Campbell Wharf and Wolverton Park, offering a trip with a history-themed talk. We ran a brand new event in partnership with MK Council combining a cruise on *Electra*, a visit to Bradwell Windmill and a railway walk.

Over a hundred and forty people enjoyed a free of charge experience with the history of the Grand Union Canal at its heart. This story stretches back to the earliest days seven generations ago and looks forward as the Waterway Park plays its part in the water transfer and environmentally sustainable future our country needs.

And to cap it all, on Sunday 21 September *Electra* proudly moored at the brand new electric bollard at Wolverton Park (see P6). The event was a wonderful chance for all five project sponsors, including B&MK, to meet each other and to discuss waterway futures with local MP Chris Curtis. B&MK's new chair, Hilary Chipping, wrote: "It was a lovely sunny morning and everyone was really interested to hear about the history of canals and the potential for the future with water transfer."

The *Electra* team are now busy planning new cruises from Wolverton Park starting in May 2026. ●



Electra launching the new bollard at Wolverton Park with B&MK chair Hilary Chipping, Chris Curtis MP, Bridget Lewis, Mayor of Wolverton, David Wolfson (*Electra* and MK Canals) and all the project funders.
Photo: Christian Taylor

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Contact us at enquiries@b-mkwaterway.co.uk

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