

## Volunteering with the BMK Trust

Our volunteers are the lifeblood of the BMK Trust. We have over 120 volunteers, working on the *John Bunyan* and *Electra* Community Boats, contributing to our Eastern Projects Group, and helping with communications, event management, maintenance, business management and planning activities supporting our activities. Our Trustees are also all volunteers, with leadership roles in the organisation. On Saturday 24th January 60 of our volunteers from all parts of the organisation



attended a conference at the Forest Centre, Marston Vale. They heard presentations about the two boats, and achievements to date and future plans for the new Waterway Park, mainly funded from the income generated by the volunteers on the boats. James Russell, Director of the Forest of Marston Vale Trust, briefed the volunteers on the work of his organisation, and how the BMK Waterway fits into the plans for Marston Vale.

We are always looking for new volunteers – we provide training for those crewing our boats and are always looking for people who can bring their existing skills to help us with our planning and management activities. Our volunteers enjoy the open air, meeting new people, serving passengers and guests on the boats and being involved in the smaller construction projects we undertake. They have the opportunity to make new friends and to contribute to an interesting project. If you would like to volunteer with the BMK Trust, please email [volunteer-ing@johnbunyanboat.org](mailto:volunteer-ing@johnbunyanboat.org) or complete the registration form on our website at [Volunteering Opportunities | Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway Park](#) ●



Hilary Chipping and James Russell of The Forest Centre speak to the meeting

## View from the Chair

I hope that 2026 has started in a good way for you all despite the rather bleak weather!

There is certainly a lot to report for the Trust. At the beginning of January the Universal Theme Park was granted a Special Development Order (SDO) allowing the Government to expedite the planning process. Early work on the site, including investigations and environmental preparation, has already begun. The Theme Park is set to open in 2031. This provides great opportunities for the Waterway to offer sustainable access to the site, a source of non-potable water and a complementary visitor attraction in this area.

The Board held its first meeting of the year on 21st January at Box End Park. At this meeting we agreed the new structure for the Groups with Terms of Reference and Key Performance Indicators and set the budget for the year ahead.

On 24th January we held a meeting for all our Volunteers at the Marston Vale Forest Centre. This was very well attended and provided an opportunity for those from *Electra* and *John Bunyan* to get to know each other. There was a lively discussion about how to attract more volunteers from a diversity of backgrounds with a wide range of skills and expertise to enable the Trust to deliver its Vision: 'To create a nationally recognised navigable Waterway Park linking Bedford and Milton Keynes for social, economic and environmental benefit'.

Volunteers are at the heart of everything that we do and we are most grateful for their hard work and commitment. At the end of the meeting I was reminded that I am the 6th Chair of the Trust and I stressed what an honour it is to hold this position. We were also reminded that it all started as a result of local enthusiast Brian Young bringing together an informal group of volunteers in 1995.

I am very grateful for the support of Alexe Rose, who has recently joined the team to provide much needed administrative support. Alexe has a wealth of experience from previous roles with the Greensand Trust and Forestry England. She brings energy, enthusiasm and a 'fresh pair of eyes' to the work of the Trust from her home near Campbell Wharf.

Trustees continue to meet with our partners including the Marston Vale Community Rail Partnership and East West Rail. At a recent meeting with Milton Keynes City Council we combined with MK Canals and the Buckinghamshire Canal Society to make the case for water transfer using existing and future canals.



Hilary Chipping  
Trust Chair

The two boat crews are busy preparing for the start of the cruising season ensuring that the boats are in good condition and that timetables and rotas are ready. I know that the *Electra* crew will be very sorry to see Jane Wolfson stepping down from her operational role at the end of March, but I understand that she will still be available to provide business advice when needed. We are most grateful for Jane's significant contribution to the Trust over many years.

Let's hope that the weather picks up soon and as Easter approaches we will be able to enjoy the local countryside and its waterways without rain overhead and mud underfoot (especially significant for dog walkers!) ●

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## John Bunyan News

The *John Bunyan* Community Boat team are busy finalising the plans for the 2026 cruising season which begins in April. The boat has returned from maintenance at Earith, and is being prepared for the season. Tickets went on sale at the end of February, and the diary for charter bookings is already nearly full. We have made some minor changes to the timings of some cruises, enabling passengers to have longer to enjoy their fish and chips on the lunch and supper cruises, and we plan to introduce a new 'Explore Bedford' cruise offered in conjunction with a visit to one of the museums in the town. Our popular range of evening music cruises will be expanded with the introduction of a 'Seventies' music cruise.



It was with great sadness that we heard early in the New Year of the death of one of our long-serving volunteers, Neil Gower. Neil joined the team when the boat was launched, and was well known to volunteers as a very experienced

helm, who trained many other volunteers. He was also a key member of the maintenance team, and on Mondays was often found in the engine or the bow locker mending or maintaining something. When the *John Bunyan* went to Earith in October, he spent some time there doing various maintenance jobs whilst the boat was out of the water, and the rudder was more accessible. Over thirty past and present volunteers attended Neil's funeral, which had a strong boating theme. He will be missed by all the *John Bunyan* volunteers. ●

# Events Calendar 2026



May 15	Annual Partnership Conference
September 9	AGM (details to be confirmed) Box End Park, 6pm



Other speakers at the Volunteer Day:

Left (from top):  
John Best  
Janet Goodland  
And  
Simon Clewlow



Right (from top)  
Denise Taylor  
James Barbour  
And  
Tom Tagg.



## New Recruit Alexe Introduces Herself:



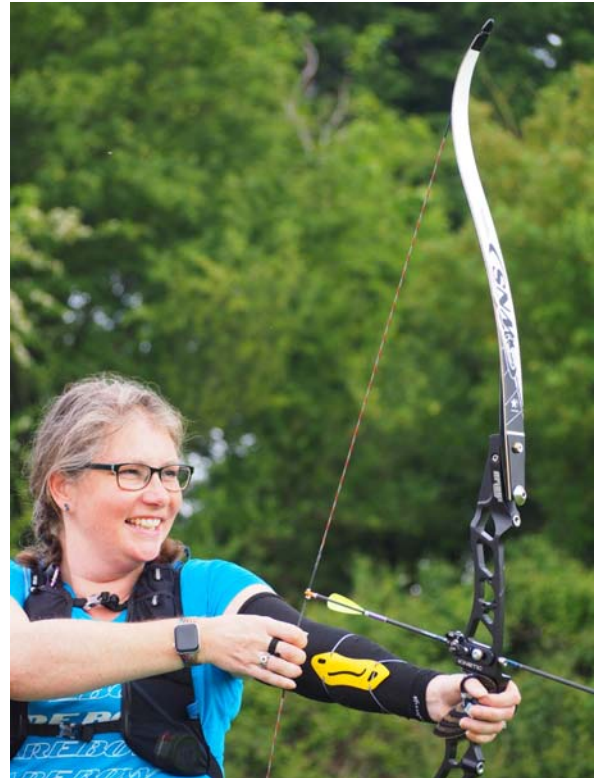
Hello, my name is Alexe and I provide Senior Administrator services to BMK Waterway.

I have worked for 25+ years in the environment sector, successfully creating and implementing numerous green space enhancements for both rural and urban communities. I'm an experienced volunteer manager with a background in community development, outdoor education and recreation. I've worked in a variety of different sized organisations from small environ-

mental charities (including the Greensand Trust) to Forestry England and operations management in the private sector.

My ambition is to protect the environment and make it easily accessible to everyone on their doorstep. Having worked on green space partnerships with government agencies, charities, town and parish councils, volunteers and community members, I'm excited to see the progression of the BMK Waterway Park.

I work a few hours a week to support on administration tasks for BMK so I'm mostly available Monday – Wednesday.



Outside of work, I love the outdoors to go hiking/running, I volunteer as a Trustee for a local community project foodbank and I'm an archery coach. If I'm not doing any of that I'm probably doing some arts and crafts or knitting. ●

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## AGM: Editor's Note

Thank you to those who replied to my question in the last edition about the timing and location of the AGM.

Box End Park seemed to be acceptable to most people, and actively preferred by one or two, so we will meet there again this year. Thanks to the Barbour family for accommodating us.

There was some concern about driving in the dark. There is only a limited amount we can do about this, given that we have decided to hold the meeting after the summer holidays to ensure that the accounts are ready in good time and to not clash with holidays.

However, we have brought forward the meeting date to early September, and the meeting time to 6pm, which I hope will help a little.

As usual, we will have a guest speaker on a topic that we hope will interest members. The official notice of meeting, together with agenda and accounts will be published nearer the time, but for now, please put the date in your diary:

**18:00 on 9th September at Box End Park.**

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

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