bmk Waterway Park

bmk news

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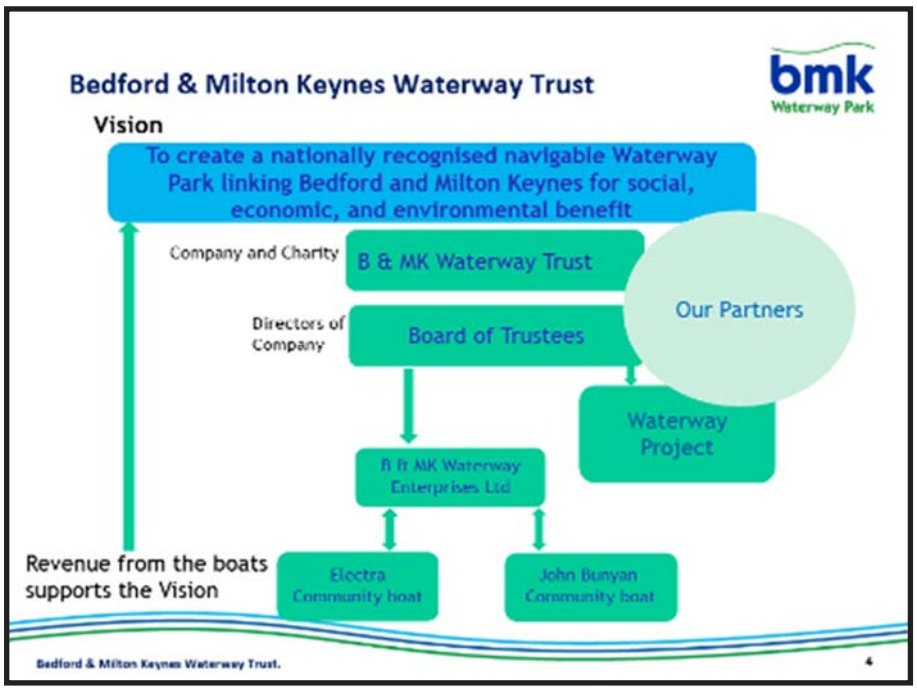
Another Successful APC

The 2026 Annual Partnership Conference was held in May at Cranfield University. Those present heard an update on Trust progress and plans, and talks from Water Resources East (WRE) and Encyclis as well as reports from AECOM on the work we have commissioned from them.

Reports on the talks can be found later in this edition - Paul Leinster (WRE) on Water: The Imperative of Purposeful Progress (P3), Nick Henderson (Encyclis): From Bin Bag to Light Bulb (P6) and AECOM: Discovery Phase and Concept design (P4) and Natural Capital (P4).

Hilary Chipping introduced the session, explaining how the various parts of the Trust fit together with our partners to achieve the Vision.



She went on to remind us that the Waterway Park will bring multiple benefits including:

Multi-use recreational routes, health and wellbeing including walking, wheeling, cycling , canoeing, rowing and paddle-boarding. It will enhance the quality of the local environment whilst also helping with water management and water transfer while, of course, creating a new navigable link for boats.

The focus for 2026 is:

1. Ensuring that the waterway project is ready to be delivered when funding becomes available.
2. Continuing to raise the profile of the waterway project with our partners.
3. Understanding the importance of the waterway for water transfer and water management.
4. Exploring the opportunities for further environmental improvement along the waterway.
5. Working with Universal Studios to demonstrate the benefits of the waterway for the new Theme Park.

Hilary also introduced the new 5 year business plan. Most readers will find the summary is all they require, and this can be found on the website: www.bmkwaterway.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/BMK-Summary-Business-Plan-2026_2031.pdf (or use https://tinyurl.com/8s929skw) if you need the full Plan, use the Contact Us link on the website.

Hilary addressing the APC

View from the Chair

Hilary Chipping
Trust Chair

I hope that by the time you are reading this that summer has really arrived after an unseasonably hot May followed by a cold and wet June!

The work of the Trust to enable the delivery of the waterway continues at pace! The Annual Partners Conference (APC) on15th May was a great opportunity to launch our new Business Plan with a revised Vision and Strategic Objectives. Please follow this link to the Business Plan on the website.BMK Summary Business Plan 2026_2031 The speakers at the APC (please see the full coverage of this event elsewhere in the newsletter) all emphasised the importance of the Waterway for the transfer of water from wetter to drier parts of the country and the positive environmental impact of creating a blue-green corridor linking the Grand Union Canal at Campbell Wharf to the River Great Ouse in Bedford – 16 miles of new navigable waterway to be enjoyed by all!

We had a productive Board meeting towards the end of April and are looking to bolster our Communications team, led by Beryl Bennett, with some professional support so that we can clarify our narrative and key messages in order to engage more effectively with partners and stakeholders.

Also, we are very excited about a new project called 'Meet in the Middle' which will help to mark the route of the waterway with information boards and artwork. This is being led by John Best. It is envisaged that we will hold a walk from either end of the proposed route to the Forest Centre at Marston Vale in the Spring engaging with local communities and encouraging media attention.

We are working with the Marston Vale Community Rail Partnership to support 180 years since the line was completed, later this year. The Waterway will run close to the rail line along much of its route especially near Ridgmont station, where we are planning to install a new information board.

The two Community Boats have made a good start to the cruising season despite the extremes of weather. I am most grateful, as ever, to the volunteers who manage and operate *Electra* and *John Bunyan*. An awful lot of work goes on behind the scenes as well as on the cruises. Without the revenue from the two boats we would not be able to continue with our work to enable the delivery of the waterway.

We are watching with interest the announcements around the Universal Theme Park. Its official name will be Universal United Kingdom Resort. Work has started on site and the Chancellor, Rachel Reeves, visited in May and announced Government investment of £1.3bn in regional and local community infrastructure to ensure that the park can operate successfully with improved transport links that will benefit local residents and visitors.

We are working collaboratively with MK Canals and the Buckinghamshire Canal Society to support the case for a blue-green corridor running from Buckingham to Bedford. Milton Keynes City Council are becoming increasingly interested in the opportunity for water transfer from west to east with Milton Keynes at the centre. This complements the Grand Union Canal Transfer Scheme where Affinity Water and Severn Trent are working with the Canal & River Trust to bring water from the Midlands to the Southeast. For more information on this project please look on this website. Home - Grand Union Canal Transfer

The Route Development Group, led by Simon Clewlow as our Project Director, has had some productive meetings over the last few months with council officers in Milton Keynes and Bedford, who are keen to support progress with the waterway project, and with Water Resources East and other water focused organisations.

We also have a meeting shortly with the Lord Lieutenant of Bedfordshire following an event at the Marston Vale Forest Centre to launch the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Bedfordshire. She is very interested in the potential for the Waterway to support local businesses creating new jobs in the area.

Overall, as a result of continuing combined effort, we are making positive progress towards delivering the project. Thank you for all of the support from Trust members and volunteers.

I hope that you all have a great summer with plenty of opportunities for enjoying the local waterways!

AGM: Editor's Note.

Thank you to those who let me know your thoughts about the AGM.

Of those who expressed a preference about the location, more were positive about Box End, than negative. So, we will be meeting there again this year.

There was concern about the timing, so we have brought the meeting slightly earlier in the year, and earlier in the day. We will meet this time at 6pm on 9th September. I hope that you will find that more convenient. The official notice calling the meeting is on page 5. After the meeting, please feel free to let me know your thoughts on the new arrangements.

Water: The Imperative of Purposeful Progress

Dr Paul Leinster CBE spoke to the APC. Paul is the chair of Water Resources East (WRE) and chair of the Upper and Bedford Ouse Catchment Partnership. He is also chair of the Bedford Water Management Partnership, and a previous chief executive of the Environment Agency (EA), and a resident of Bedford Borough for over 30 years.

Paul gave us some background on the environmental condition of the area and the Great Ouse corridor. This area has been part of a designated growth area under several names, from Ox-Cam Arc onwards, so we need to plan for the implications for water.

Because this is an area where there is a lot of road transport, the air quality is poor in many parts. Transport is responsible for 46.8% of total CO_2 emissions in the area compared with 36.6% nationally.

Coming to Bedfordshire particularly, it is one of the most nature depleted counties in England. In terms of protected sites (Sites of Special Scientific Interest and National Nature Reserves) it has less than a fifth of the national average. Woodland cover is about half the national average, though as we have heard in previous years, the Forest of Marston Vale is helping to correct that.

We know that flooding is an increasing risk, but people still build on floodplains, so if you are considering buying a house, and you see it's in some place called Swanspool, Water End or Watersmeet, beware! Too often building goes ahead against EA advice.

The Great Ouse has growth areas planned in Milton Keynes, Bedford, Tempsford, Biggleswade, Huntingdon and Cambridge.

It has abstraction points at Clapham and the main intake to Grafham Water is near St Ives. This abstraction point is the source of virtually all the supply to Grafham Water. There will be another at Earith for the new Fens reservoir. All the growth will lead to discharges via waste water treatment plants into the Great Ouse.

There are pressures on the environment, population and housing growth, economic development and climate change. There is also the complexity within policy and delivery landscape. It is sometimes difficult, even for those who have been working in the field for years, to understand what the policy and legislation is driving at, and what is or isn't covered.

When water resource planning happens, it takes into account growth which is in the local plans. It cannot include growth ambitions that aren't in the plans yet. The Milton Keynes extension and Tempsford new town aren't in any current plans, and Universal didn't go through the local planning system. How do they get captured, so the water companies can include these in their plans to submit to Ofwat, to approve funding? Something needs to happen to this system, Paul says.

Many of the wastewater plants are running at or near capacity, and there are a lot more of them than you might think. Cambridge for example has 28. Lack of capacity is not necessarily a reason to reject a planning application - the water company must handle it somehow.

Dr Paul Leinster CBE

The discharges from the wastewater plants are just one of the pressures on the Great Ouse . Agricultural waste is responsible for as much of the low quality water in the area as the wastewater plants and sewage outflows. Sometimes the nitrate levels are so high in the river that water cannot be abstracted for Grafham Water.

When it stops raining, the farmers feel it very quickly. Later on, the environment starts to suffer, with low river flows affecting fish and wildlife. Public water supply is protected for quite a long time, maybe a couple of years, because of reservoirs. In times of water stress, the public supply takes precedence over the farmers and environment, which is not popular with those groups who suffer more quickly.

WRE has calculated a shortfall of 800 million litres of water per day (Ml/d) in the area by 2050 - roughly a third of future water needs.

They have developed a Best Value plan to close this gap. The main components are:

- Leakage reduction
- Wastewater re-use - there are perception problems with this, but they can be managed.
- Appropriate use - why use drinking water for irrigation and washing cars? This includes rainwater harvesting.
- Desalination
- Grand Union Transfer scheme to move water from Minworth to Affinity Water

Increasingly we will need to move water from wetter to drier parts of the country - water resources often requires a regional or national approach.

In the short to medium term, waste water treatment capacity is more limiting than water resources is, for development.

Dr Leinster was asked if there was sufficient rainfall over the country to meet future needs, even if it were moved around, and he was confident that there was.

AECOM: Working with the Trust

Two speakers from AECOM addressed the conference. **Martha Newman** is a principal engineer at AECOM and a chartered civil engineer. She has been working with the Trust for about 18 months, and reported on that work.

Martha Newman

The first task was the "Discovery Phase", collating all the information which is already available about the Waterway, and reviewing it.

This involved considering all the documentation in the Trust's library, discussion with interested parties, and a utility survey, creating a map of all utilities within a 50m strip around the route, for its full length.

This led to an Opportunities and Constraints Register, showing 70 opportunities for the Waterway, and 80 constraints to consider, it is specified by area, so the Trust can filter on location when a project comes up to see what impact it will have on us, or we can have on it.

AECOM also developed a GIS map similar to the one on the website, and included all the publicly available data sets, such as flooding, environmental information (eg tree preservation zones) and local authority and parish boundaries, as well as the utility survey mentioned above.

AECOM hope that we will commission them to carry out a concept design for the A421 to Fields Road section, through the Business Park, where we already have the waterway-shaped balancing ponds created as part of that development. Martha ran through some of the factors they would have to consider if this work went ahead. This would allow us to construct a demonstration section of the Waterway.

Natalie Yum

Later, **Natalie Yum**, Senior Environmental Economist, also from AECOM, spoke about the work on Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and nature-based solutions they have carried out for us.

Firstly, Natalie defined her terms. Natural Capital, according to the Green Book, is "stocks of the elements of nature that have value to society, such as forests, fisheries, rivers, biodiversity, land and minerals. Stocks of natural capital provide flows of environmental or ecosystem services over time…. [which] produce a wide range of benefit "

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is an approach to new development that aims to leave nature in a measurably better state than it was found. It is a mandatory planning requirement in England ensuring that new developments, specifically requiring a minimum 10% increase in biodiversity value

Nature-based solutions (NbS) are actions to protect, sustainably manage, and restore natural and modified ecosystems that address societal challenges effectively and adaptively, simultaneously benefiting people and nature.

The aims were to strengthen the case for the Waterway by building on the previous business case and provide evidence of environmental and social value by referring to the Natural Capital Assessment. To assess how to meet the 10% BNG requirement by identifying where habitat will be lost and created, and what additional habitat is needed. And, to Identify opportunities to improve design with nature, exploring NbS, enhancing benefits: flood protection, water, biodiversity, recreation and linking benefits to funding opportunities and partners.

For the BNG work, the team refined the red line boundary, to see what could be tweaked to improve the chances of achieving the required 10% uplift.

They refined the NCA assessment in the outline business case, and quantified benefits based on best practice. They also identified potential NbS interventions and carried out a high level cost-benefit analysis.

In constructing the Waterway we would lose some BNG units for the land we dug up, and gain some for the watercourse units that were created. Unfortunately the system does not allow these to be offset, so we would have to buy some land ("area") units and sell watercourse units. Even though watercourse units are rare and consequently expensive, there is likely to be a net cost. This could potentially be reduced by enhancing areas next to the route, eg creating wetland near the M1 crossing.

In valuing natural capital, they followed Government guidance, particularly Defra's. This shows the Waterway would provide around £84M in benefits over 60 years. Mainly this is from flood regulation and water supply, with other benefits from recreation and physical health, reduced by small dis-benefits from global climate regulation, air quality and food supply (we would dig up some arable land).

The Trust is only able to commission this work, which is essential to be able to take the project forward, thanks to the money raised by the *John Bunyan* and *Electra*, so thanks to the volunteers on the boat teams who make this possible.

Notice of AGM

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT THE 20th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE BEDFORD & MILTON KEYNES WATERWAY TRUST WILL BE HELD AT:

Box End Park, Box End, Bedford

At 18:00

On 9th September 2026

By order of the Board

[Signed] Simon Clewlow, Company Secretary, Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway Trust

The annual report and papers will be available on the website nearer the time.

Work already 'in the can' for July's Bedford River Festival

Bedford Radio is working on a programme about the history of the Great Ouse, for broadcast over the River Festival weekend. It is also putting together a companion show about the role of the river in the life of the town today. In early June, Simon Clewlow was interviewed in Bedford Radio's studio about the plans for the Waterway, and also about the history of the canal scheme as it was advanced at various times in the past.

A Trip to the Palace

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We are delighted to inform you that Jane Hamilton received an invitation to attend a Royal Garden Party in May 2026 in recognition of her tremendous efforts and hard work on behalf of B&MK Waterway Trust in her role as Chair of the Trust from 2015 to 2023. She was accompanied by one of her daughters, Emily.

Situation Vacant

Your editor has been in post for over 10 years, and thinks it is probably time to stand down.

We want to move to a different way of presenting information to members and supporters, though there will likely still be a newsletter. If you have an interest in taking up this communication rôle and want to talk about what it involves, contact: beryl.bennett@bmkwaterway.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 now will receive membership until May 2027.

From Binbag to Lightbulb

The final speaker at the APC was Nick Henderson, European Communications Manager at Encyclis.

Encyclis is the leading UK Energy-from-Waste business which owns and operates Rookery South Energy Recovery Facility (ERF), near Stewartby in Bedfordshire. He joined Encyclis in 2022, the year this important regional facility began operating. His role includes media relations, stake-holder engagement and sustainability reporting.

Nick Henderson

Nick said that, as a representative of the waste industry, he doesn't get many invitations to speak. Waste is a business that is largely invisible when it is working well. When there is a problem, it is very visible, for instance when collections stop.

The facility receives about 2-3,000 tonnes per day of residual waste. Seeing this volume brings home the relentless tide of waste that comes from the way we live.

Although there are critics of energy from waste, the only real alternatives are landfill or exporting the waste, neither of which is a realistic solution in the medium term.

The obvious thing when you look at the plant is the flue stacks. Rookery South is on the site of the old brick-works, and when it was designed, there were a lot of the old chimneys still standing, so the design was meant to blend in. By the time it had received permission and was built (about 10 years), they had all been demolished, so there was nothing to blend in with.

Encyclis operate two plants, with two more being built, in central England, and handle around 2M tonnes of waste per year. Rookery South han-dles 657,000 tonnes per year, and generates 60MW of power, enough to power 120,000 homes.

At the moment we recycle about half our waste, something must be done with the other half. The new Government initiatives to improve recycling hope to achieve about 60% in 10 years time. So in the meantime we have to do what we can with what is left.

The Waste Hierarchy

In the waste hierarchy, where the best result, at the top, is to prevent waste, Encyclis fall into the "recovery" category, extracting value and resource from waste. They burn it to extract the energy, and use the heat to create steam to generate electricity. About a third of the plant is dedicated to cleaning the emis-sions before they are released.

For every 5 tonnes of waste, they generate about 1 tonne of ash. This is processed at their Wellingborough plant to make aggregate for road building etc. There are also metals that have survived the process which can be extracted and recycled. They would like to use the waste heat for a district heating system, and the plant is ready for this, but they have not found the right solution to use it yet, though they are still looking.

Obviously, burning the waste creates CO_2, and this cannot be avoided. At the Protos plant in Cheshire they are investing in what will be the UK's first energy from waste carbon capture and storage (CCS) facility. Rookery South has a pilot CCS plant, used to develop the technology for Protos, and they have received planning permission giving the potential for a full-scale CCS plant next door.

Encyclis also have a community trust fund that gives £75,000 a year (£400,000 so far) to local projects especially those promoting renewable energy, energy efficiency and recycling.

There is a visitor centre for anyone wishing to find out more or potentially arrange a tour of the plant. ●

2024/25 Recycling Leage Table England

Authority	Percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling or composting (Ex NI192)	Position in Table (of 321 authorities)
Milton Keynes	63.9%	2
Central Bedfordshire	42.2%	149
Bedford	36.8%	216

Letsrecycle.com data sourced from Defra

Events Calendar 2026/7

9Th September	18:00 Annual General Meeting, Box End Park.
March	Annual Partnership Conference Details TBC

Electra 5th Birthday Celebration

On the 5th of May, *Electra* celebrated her 5th birthday, since her initial launch in 2021; since then we've run over 1,300 cruises, delighting over 12,000 guests. To show our gratitude, some of the longest standing volunteers and other key helpers, were given a free return cruise from great Linford Manor Park to new Bradwell, with cakes and refreshments. And it was very apt that one of our newest skipper recruits, (Foxy) was on the helm.

On returning to the park, there was a get together with a much larger group of volunteers with more cake and refreshments. Denise Taylor thanked everyone for their tireless work, without which *Electra* could not operate.

Meeting the Lord-Lieutenant

Recently Hilary Chipping and Simon Clewlow met Susan Lousada, Lord-Lieutenant of Bedfordshire, for an informal meeting (see picture)

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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HM Lord-Lieutenant of Bedfordshire's Service of Thanksgiving

Steve Ashley, Cath Hibbert and Carol Leverkus, three members of the *John Bunyan* Community Boat crew, were invited to attend HM Lord-Lieutenant of Bedfordshire's Service of Thanksgiving in recognition of the service the boat gives to the community (see left). The event was held at St Paul's Church in Bedford and was attended by many charities and community volunteers, service people and other dignitaries. HM Lord Lieutenant of Bedfordshire Mrs Susan Lousada said that all the organisations and their volunteers who attended this service were invited because they play a significant role within Bedfordshire.

Electra - Finalists in Milton Keynes Foundation Charity Awards

Jane Wolfson, (our previous chair) has been beavering about in the background and put in a submission on *Electra*'s behalf, for the Milton Keynes Foundation Charity Awards. This Foundation is celebrating its 40th year, in recognising exceptional people and organisations in the voluntary sector. Our project is one of 3 finalists in each of two categories, 'Environment and Transport award' and 'Business for Good award'.

STOP PRESS
Electra won the "Business for Good" award. Congratulations - more in the next edition.

The winners are selected by an independent panel of local figures from media, business and community sectors and will be announced on Monday the 29th of June at The Stables in Milton Keynes.

River Great Ouse: Bedford Lock

Bedford Lock has been closed over the winter whilst the Environment Agency undertook a £2m project to renovate and refurbish it. The work started just after the end of the *John Bunyan's* cruising programme in October 2025 and reopened on 30th April. The work included the installation of new downstream gates, and the renovation and painting of the upstream guillotine gate. The lock walls were repaired following damage from tree roots, and the jetties have been repaired and improved.

Whilst the *John Bunyan* Community Boat does not operate during the winter, from Easter to 30th April our cruises operated on the lower river, as far as Castle Mill lock. Passengers enjoyed a Family Eyespy cruise, a Golden wedding party, a schoolchildren's trip, an afternoon tea cruise and a community group trip downstream, where they were able to see the diverse wildlife and enjoy the peaceful lower river.

Our trips are now back on the Upper River, cruising through Bedford town, and there are still places on many cruises later in the year. You can book a trip at https://www.bmkwaterway.org/johnbunyanboat/book-a-cruise/ .

The work underway

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