A Brief Guide to the Value of Providing for the Bedford Milton Keynes Waterway in Development



Introduction

This guide has been produced to provide guidance on the value of talking advantage of provision for the Bedford Milton Keynes Waterway in the development of areas near, adjacent to or across the safeguarded route of the waterway.

A companion guide, 'A Brief Guide to Space, Design and Other Technical Issues in Providing for the Bedford Milton Keynes Waterway', provides guidance on the provision of appropriate space, on design and on other technical issues in relation to provision of the waterway.

Background

The Bedford and Milton Keynes Waterway is a locally, regionally and nationally significant 'green-and-blue' infrastructure project that delivers a wide range of economic, tourism, recreational and place-shaping benefits. It will provide the missing link between the main UK canal network and the Fenland waterways and will accommodate broadbeam boats that can be up to 4.2m wide as well as traditional canal narrowboats.



Delivery of the waterway is led by the Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway Consortium. The Consortium members are the three local authorities along the route – Bedford Borough Council, Central Bedfordshire Council and Milton Keynes Council, the two national navigation authorities – the Canal & River Trust (formerly British Waterways) and the Environment Agency, together with the Marston Vale Trust, the Parks Trust and the Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway Trust.



The Waterway and its delivery is embedded in the core strategies of the three local authorities. The authorities are clear that the waterway is a priority and that it is their wish to work with developers along the route. The route map presented below is an illustrative map based on the route, more precisely set out in a series of safeguarding plans held by each of the local authorities for their area.

The local authority safeguarding maps indicating the route can be found at:

www.bmkwconsortium.org.uk/ happen.htm

Roles and Value of the Waterway

Greenspace

All three local authorities recognise provision for the waterway as a contribution to the green infrastructure and open space obligations for each relvent development. There is intentionally no overall landscape plan for the route; this enables appropriate local landscape character to be developed in each area, for example, new woodland would be required within the Forest of Marston Vale. The waterway offers opportunities to deliver several green infrastructure objectives eg wildlife habitat creation, woodland planting and countryside network access and early discussion will enable the definition of an approach and style acceptable to the local authority and the Consortium.

Commercial Development

There is opportunity to provide or make provision for commercial facilities, services and attractions along the route. This is particularly relevant to employment sites or mixed use sites and a number of mechanisms are possible to introduce developers to potential occupiers. Some facilities, such as marinas, need to be optimally spaced by boat cruising time, but most do not. The Economic Impact Assessment of the waterway* estimates that between 50 and 90 businesses will set-up in or relocate to the new waterside locations; this could include providers of water related or water supporting activity as well as businesses just wishing to be in an attractive setting.



Surface Water Management

The Waterway can be designed to assist flood risk mitigation, and to provide attenuation and sustainable drainage. It could transport and dispose of surface water run-off into existing flood storage water bodies and water courses – Willen Lake and Broughton Brook in the west and Stewartby Lake and Elstow Brook in the east both direct flows into the River Great Ouse. Careful design will be required and early consultation with the local authorities in their role as Lead Local Flood Authority, and the Internal Drainage Boards, both as advisors to the LLFAs and with their Land Drainage Act responsibilities.



Property Value Uplift

many studies, both local and national, quantify uplift for both adjacent build and the wider area. While some might be viewed as optimistic, studies cluster around 18-20% uplift for waterside property and 8-10% for the hinterland up to a kilometre away, both values being higher than for greenspace alone. Generally, these studies consider the uplift to apply to residential, commercial and office employment sites and that industrial and distribution sites present challenges. However, it should be noted that the water related uplift applies only when the water is delivered, whether as a still water body or a navigable channel – a dry swale, ditch or allocation for future creation that does not deliver water misses the uplift opportunity.

Muck

The geology along the route is generally a thin layer of topsoil over Oxford clay - digging the channel can act as a borrow pit. Arisings can be used on-site or provided as a resource to other sites. Although the minimum water depth required is 1.5m and there are limiting issues with the cut profile, the cut may be deeper and provide additional material.

Ecosystem Services

With careful design, the Waterway could be used as a source of grey water and of cooling water, as well as water source heating, hydro-electric generation and other environmental uses.

Other Benefits*

The waterway also brings a range of other benefits that developers might consider indirect and, though not delivering for their site, are of great interest to local authorities and their wider communities, including:

- Economic development £18-25m annual Gross Value Added to the local and regional economy once the waterway is operational;
- Job creation 2,500 person years in the construction, significant numbers in tourism and the visitor economy as well as between 500
 and 900 in businesses and other organisations attracted to re-locate to the area with an additional £35-70m annual GVA;
- Additions to the walking, cycling and horse riding network providing opportunities for exercise, health and well being; the towpath for part of the route will be redesignated as Sustrans NCN 51, moving the cycle route off-road.
- · Place-shaping green infrastructure, iconic tourist attractions and space for events and festivals;
- · And lastly, and most importantly, a navigable waterway.

*See Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway Economic Impact Assessment September 2009 at www.bmkwconsortium.org.uk/happen.htm