

# Worth the Waite

"Bedford is certainly a town that's on its way up." That was the view of former international envoy Terry Waite who paid a special visit to our county town to formally open the new Tourist Information Centre in the historic Old Town Hall.

Mr Waite has done a lot to put Bedford on the international map. "It's a wonderful place to promote," he told visitors to the TIC opening as he described how a simple Bedford postcard from Brickhill resident Jean Brodier was the only piece of news to reach him during five horrific years as a hostage in the Lebanon.

The former Archbishop of Canterbury's envoy was chained hand and feet and held in a windowless room with no human contact throughout the duration of his captivity after being kidnapped by an Islamic militia group in 1987.

During this time the only communication from the outside world to reach him was the postcard from Bedford depicting 17th century religious writer John Bunyan, the town's most famous son, in his prison cell. Mr Waite told the Bedford audience how he envied Bunyan because "he had a window, a view, a pen, a table, books and his own clothes – what a lucky fellow, I thought".

Unveiling a plaque in the new Tourist Information Centre, Mr Waite told fellow guests: "Everywhere I go I get asked to tell that story so I am doing my bit to promote Bedford too."

He was helped in the unveiling by Mrs Brodier's 12-year-old daughter Rachel, a pupil at Beauchamp Middle School, who was just a tiny baby when Mr Waite was released from captivity.

Bedford Mayor Frank Branston presented Mr Waite with a souvenir, depicting the famous Bunyan stained glass window as seen on the postcard.

Bedford's Tourist Information Centre, which is visited by more than 130,000 people each year, is now housed in the 16th century Old Town Hall in Bedford's St Paul's Square, enabling staff to offer a wider range of goods and services, from discounted Thameslink rail tickets to accommodation advice and theatre tickets.

Mayor Branston said: "Tourism generates some £150 million a year in this area and supports around 3,200 jobs so it plays a vital role in our local economy. This new location for our tourism centre will provide an excellent showcase for all that's best about the borough of Bedford and our county too."

From now to the end of August the centre will be open between 9am and 4.30pm Monday to Saturday and between 10am and 2pm on Sundays and Bank Holidays.

You can contact the TIC on (01234) 215226 or by email: [touristinfo@bedford.gov.uk](mailto:touristinfo@bedford.gov.uk)



How the new bridge will look

## Bedford celebrates as landmark bridge idea wins regional prize

Proposals to build a Leonardo da Vinci-style landmark bridge across the River Great Ouse and other waterways have won a major prize for Bedford and helped put the town firmly at the top of the eastern regional map.

The East of England Development Agency has announced that the Bedford design for a moveable bridge which could be based in the county town but be able to be moved up and down the river for public events throughout the eastern region, is one of four exciting new projects to share a £250,000 prize.

Speaking for Bedford Borough Council, which commissioned London-based architects Urban Initiatives to prepare and submit the entry, elected Mayor of Bedford, Frank Branston said: "We are delighted to win this prize. There were about 234 entries from throughout the region and only twelve of these were shortlisted. Now our entry is one of four to share top place – and that's great news for Bedford and great news for this project."

The prize money will now be used to fund further work in developing the moveable bridge idea.

The EEDA competition aimed to find a series of eastern region landmarks to match Gateshead's Angel of the North or Cornwall's Eden project. The Bedford entry outlined how the moveable bridge will form a focal point for communities – bridging gaps and building links.

With 13 per cent of its 140,000 population of Italian origin, and with its own Italian Vice Consulate in the town, Bedford is the ideal base for this project which is designed on a Leonardo da Vinci concept of "innovative mechanics to solve universal needs".

Proposals for the new bridge are currently on show at Bedford Borough Council's town centre public exhibition in the Harpur Suite. The exhibition finishes on May 8th.



Terry Waite meets Mayor of Bedford Frank Branston (left), Jean Brodier and her daughter Rachel (centre) and relief mayor's officer Enid Tatham in the Mayors Parlour

# Bed:Safe runs rather than walks

Bedford's night-time town centre safety initiative Bed:Safe achieves three-year plan in first year!

Bed:Safe, the town centre safety partnership which is cracking down on town centre crime, is a victim of its own success.

The partnership has had to go back to the drawing board after achieving almost all of the targets in its three-year plan in just one year of operation.

Project Manager Gill Anderson says: "We've come a long way in a year. Our action plan was meant to last for three years but already the bulk of the targets have been achieved. We've now secured funding for Bed:Safe to 2007 so we are putting together a new action plan to challenge us further and take us through the next few years."

Last week Bed:Safe held a meeting at De Montfort University's Polhill campus where all those involved with the successful initiative – including local licensees, taxi operators, door supervisors, the police and representatives from the borough council, the Town Centre Company, North Beds Community Safety Partnership, Bedfordshire Drug Action Team, the Ambulance Service and other local

agencies – met to discuss setting new targets for the project to tackle.

Opening the day-long meeting, Bedford Mayor Frank Branston said evidence already shows that people are feeling safer in Bedford at night. "Things are very, very greatly improved in our borough," he told delegates. Mr Branston said he hoped the gains achieved through the Bed:Safe model could soon be extended outside the town centre, adding: "I want Bedford to become a place for people of all ages and interests."

Superintendent Tony Smith, speaking for Bedford divisional commander Chief Superintendent Steve Battle, said: "Bed:Safe is so successful because of the commitment of all the partners." He said he had been out on town centre streets on New Year's Eve and witnessed first hand how effective Bed:Safe was in cutting crime levels.

Supt Smith also praised the town's licensees and door staff saying the standards in Bedford were very high and licensees, who operate the BAND (banned from one, banned from all) scheme, had taken a lot

of responsibility in making the town centre a safer place.

The meeting heard from guest speaker Stephen Hogg of the Government's Home Office, who said that Bed:Safe was leading the way in tackling alcohol-related crime.

This was confirmed by latest police figures which announced an 8% fall in town centre crime and a 6% fall in town centre violent crime over the past year. "Bed:Safe is having a real effect," said Supt Smith, who pointed out that the majority of violent crime is alcohol-fuelled.

Bed:Safe's BAND scheme, which allows pub and club landlords to ban arrested troublemakers from all town centre premises for a year, is proving to be effective already. To date nine people have been banned for one year (including one woman) and a further 13 are facing possible bans.

Gill Anderson said: "BAND is sending out a clear message to troublemakers – don't come to Bedford! The year-long ban means you'll be sat on your own while your mates are out on the town. So think before you kick off – do you really want to be a Nelly-No-Mates?"

WW2 People's War

# Do your bit for Bedford

Did you fall in love to the sound of Glenn Miller? Were you a 'Land Girl' or a 'Coca Cola' kid? If you have a World War II story to tell then the BBC want to hear from you.

Almost sixty years after the end of World War II, the BBC has created an archive for people who lived through the war to share their stories with the rest of the nation and to provide a personal account of Britain at war.

The BBC will be in Bedford this month and in June to record resident's memories of the war for its 'People's War' project, starting at a free variety show which is being held at Bedford Corn Exchange on the 27th and 28th of May.

The performance, organised by local voluntary organisation Frame of Mind and supported by the borough council and the BBC, will bring together local talent in a varied programme of concert hall and musical favourites for the senior citizens of the borough.

The event, titled 'Showtime', is free for local senior citizens and tickets can be requested by completing and returning the coupon at the bottom of this page.

As seating is limited, priority will be given to those willing to participate in the BBC's 'People's War' project by sharing their wartime story.

Residents will also have the chance to record their story or personal memory at the BBC WW2 Roadshow, which will be in the Civic Theatre until mid June.

Bedford Borough Council's tourism development officer, Joanne Moore, says: "The People's War archive will ensure that the experiences and memories of many of those who lived through World War II are not lost, but can be shared by all and treasured for future generations."

"We need your story to build the biggest picture to date of life in Bedford during World War II. Whatever your story we want you to share it with the BBC and the nation."

To read the World War II stories submitted so far, visit the People's War website at [www.bbc.co.uk/ww2](http://www.bbc.co.uk/ww2)

For further details about the 'Showtime' performance please contact Joanne Moore on (01234) 227429.

## Reply Coupon

I/We wish to apply for \_\_\_\_\_ tickets for the Showtime Concert at Bedford Corn Exchange on May 27/28 (delete as appropriate)

I confirm that I am 60 years or older  tick box

I/We have a WWII story/memory to share and would like to arrange a time to talk to a BBC People's War advisor.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return this coupon to:  
Joanne Moore  
Tourism Development Officer  
Bedford Borough Council, Town Hall,  
St Paul's Square, Bedford MK40 1SJ

Closing Date: May 15th 2004