

## **Basingstoke Canal Authority**

### **Joint Management Committee**

**2<sup>nd</sup> March 2001**

#### **Canal Directors Report**

#### **1. General**

- 1.1. **Staff Issues:** The vacant post of Canal Development and Promotions Officer is currently being advertised, with a view to somebody starting in April.

Tony Harmsworth is now working part – time pending his retirement at the end of June 2001.

A re-think of standby arrangements in light of Health and Safety and emergency procedures reviews is taking place. There may well be cost implications to this.

- 1.2. **Backpumping Scheme:** This is progressing well with contractors Lean and Higgins running to time. The pipeline has now been laid and the pumphouse is rising daily.
- 1.3. The new **Countryside and Rights of Way Act** is being phased in as legislation. This will put statutory obligations on the management of the Canal SSSI.

#### **2. Navigation, Maintenance and Waterway**

- 2.1. **October Storms:** Heavy rainfall throughout October and severe rain and wind on 30<sup>th</sup> October have had a major effect on the Canal and the work programme. Canal staff worked round the clock for several days around 30<sup>th</sup> October to prevent a major catastrophe, during what was probably the highest level of rain experienced since the canal was built 200 years ago! The controlled release of water through sluices meant no overtopping occurred at any point on the canal. Set in the national context (i.e. widespread flooding) this is highly commendable.

Sluice water from Ash Embankment has been identified as contributing to flooding of some properties in Shawfield Road, Ash. However, this was one of several factors identified as causing the flooding, namely: the Canal sluice ditch (responsibility of Surrey CC) was overgrown and could not take its design load of water; the River Blackwater had burst its banks (many causes) and was causing widespread local flooding as well as “backing up” the sluice channel; local ditches around the houses (which feed into the canal sluice ditch) were uncleared, meaning water could not escape. Being a “man made”

structure with an obvious operator, the Canal sluice was (incorrectly) homed in on as the main cause by local people and BCA received some bad press.

We have worked with the Environment Agency, Surrey County Council and Guildford Borough Council to instigate a number of improvements to ensure the risk of similar future flooding is minimised.

The work programme has been severely affected as emergency works to remove fallen trees (over 30 across the canal) have taken a priority. Other tasks (i.e. towpath resurfacing) are fruitless in such wet conditions.

- 2.2. **Farnborough Airfield:** Tree clearance and hilltop removal works associated with Farnborough Airfield are taking place on MOD land adjacent to the Canal.
- 2.3. **Norris Bridge:** Work on the new bridge over the Canal (associated with the DERA development on Farnborough Airfield) have started in earnest. Canal staff have worked hard to ensure any disruption is minimised.
- 2.4. **Dredging:** The Brookwood Mile is the next section to be dredged and ADAS have been asked to explore costs and options with a view to work starting this winter (2001/02)
- 2.5. **Lock Gates:** New gates for Ash Lock were installed, 30 years after the originals were put in – the first set to be restored on the canal.

### 3. Recreation Issues

- 3.1. **Colt Hill:** This has gone very quiet – the Basingstoke and Deane Canoe Club (who are the landowners) are taking a lead on this and the project is very much in their hands. They are reliant on voluntary help.
- 3.2. **Pond Tail:** A response was eventually received from Defence Estates following a letter from the Chair of the JMC. They have decided that the area in question is needed for training and therefore not available for a canoeing base. More options will be explored in consultation with local user groups.
- 3.3. **Recreation Development Group:** Minutes of this group will be distributed to the JMC as agreed at the last meeting
- 3.4. **Canal Events:** Canal Centre Christmas Specials went very well. Fully sold out, with over 500 people taking part. Over £1,000 was raised. Thanks to Bill Homewood and Martin Bowers who volunteered to help and to Gourmet Cruises who lent the boat for free.

The Halloween Event was cancelled due to the appalling weather.

3.5. Other Key Events coming up on the Canal include: Bridge Barn Festival at Easter, Canal Centre May Fayre, Colt Hill Rally and 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations May Bank Holiday and Cavalcade of Transport 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> September.

3.6. **Canal Signs:** New main information boards are currently being finished off for the Canal. These will be erected in time for the new season.

#### 4. Conservation

4.1. **The Conservation Working Party:** Met in October. Minutes will be circulated to the JMC for information.

4.2. **Tree Projects:** English Nature (Hampshire) have provided £15,000 for SSSI enhancement works by sensitive tree removal. A major project is taking place at Coxmoor Wood. This is very generous financial support for the Canal.

4.3. **Leersia oryzoides: (aka Cut Grass)** The Canal is one of only two or three sites in the UK where this very rare “Red Data Book” grass grows. English Nature (Surrey and West Sussex) have provided £1,000 towards costs to reintroduce and manage this plant. Canal staff and local specialists have been involved, using a batch of plants from Chelsea Physic Garden grown from seeds collected from the Canal.

#### 5. Mooring Basin

5.1. Chambers at Runfold have taken a sample load of soil and feel confident they can sell it. It is a matter of finding the right local customer at the right time. Price is between £2 and £4 a tonne. This should cover costs of excavation.

5.2. Meanwhile we have to call in Surrey CC Archaeological Service to dig two trial trenches. This will cost around £1,000 – but we cannot proceed until it is done. I think it is worth the gamble to go ahead.

5.3. Meanwhile we have to wait for a “customer” and a convenient timeslot that does not interfere with pre-booked activities on the field.

#### 6. Partnerships, Community and Links

6.1. **Junior Citizen:** A Junior Citizen Safety Scheme is to be held at the Canal Centre over a two week period in March. This will involve nearly 1000 school children coming to spend half a day learning water safety, home safety, “stranger danger” etc. This is carried out in conjunction with Surrey Police.

6.2. **Surrey Community Boat Project:** Plans are moving forward and the hull has been commissioned. Further funds are being sought for running costs.

- 6.3. The Canal Director attended **Annual Meetings** of the Basingstoke Canal Canoe Club, Basingstoke Canal Angling Association and the Waterways Trust
- 6.4. A series of regular meetings with the **River Wey** has been started to discuss issues of mutual concern.
- 6.5. The Director gave a presentation to **Hart District Councils** Leisure Committee. The final decision on Canal Funding will sit with the full council.
- 6.6. A "**Grant Application**" form was filled in for Guildford Borough Councils annual contribution as part of a new initiative in the Borough.
- 6.7. We have applied for **approx £6,000 to SITA** for new Lock Gates for the next Financial year.
- 6.8. **SC Johnson are providing £1500** sponsorship for improvements to facilities in the Visitor Centre. They are also very keen to fund a tree project on the canal next year. Plans have already been put to Guildford Borough Council.
- 6.9. Thanks go to the **Surrey and Hampshire Canal Society** for their continued support in many aspects of the Canals management. A particular thanks to the members of the **Waterways Recovery Group** whose "Christmas Task" sorted out a lot of bankside clearing through Hampshire.
- 6.10. Thanks also to the many other **volunteer groups** who continue to provide much needed opportunities for local people along the canal.