

For information/discussion

Title: Dry Dock

Summary

Following the last meeting of the JMC on 02 April 2004, a meeting was held on 13 July 2004 with representatives from Guildford Borough Council, the Surrey and Hampshire Canal Society, the Basingstoke Canal Authority and Surrey County Council to better understand the complaints from neighbours about noisy activities at the Dry Dock. More recently, a meeting was held involving the complainants, Guildford Borough Council (as Environmental Health Authority), the BCA (as manager) and Surrey County Council (as landowner). The intention of this meeting was to attempt to identify a way forward which could be acceptable to all parties.

Background

In April 2003, the Canal Director reported to the JMC that complaints had been made to Guildford Borough Council Environmental Health Department about excessive noise emanating from the Dry Dock at Deepcut, and that measures were being taken to reduce noise at weekends (Minute 07/03).

An update was given by the Director to the JMC meeting on 17 October 2003, when it was explained that further complaints had been received by GBC Environmental Health. It was also reported that the Canal Authority would apply to GBC, as Planning Authority, for a Certificate of Lawful Use (Minute 20/03) to regularise the use of the Dry Dock.

Further information regarding the complaints about noise at the Dry Dock was given to the JMC at its meeting on 02 April 2004 (Item 6: Directors Report, paragraph 5.1 to 5.3). The Director explained that more complaints had been made to GBC Environmental Health following the summer season re-opening of the Dry Dock in March 2004, although strict limitations had been put in place to restrict potentially noisy activities at the Dock. It was further reported that discussions were being held with GBC and SCC to try to ensure that the Dock was operated in as quiet a manner as possible, but that the future of the Dry Dock was uncertain, if complaints about noise continued to be made to GBC.

Actions taken

Some monitoring of noise levels has been carried out by GBC and SCC, plus the Canal Society. From these, it is apparent that the area around the Dry Dock is normally extremely quiet, with the exception of occasional planes, trains and Army live-firing, and that noise from the Dry Dock is therefore very noticeable. Following discussions with the GBC Environmental Health Officer, when it was explained that a Stop Notice could be served if unacceptably noisy activities continued, restrictions have been placed on weekend working and out of normal hours working. The plastic cover over the Dock has been replaced, although this has little if any impact on noise. The SCC Principal Noise Engineer recommended that straw bales be placed at the Dock to muffle noise from compressors and generators, but commented that there was

little that could be done to reduce the noise from electric hand tools, other than to restrict the length of time that they could be used.

Since the last JMC meeting (02 April 2004), a meeting was held with GBC, the Canal Society, the BCA and SCC to allow the different parties explain their positions and concerns. Following this, a meeting was arranged on site with the complainants, attended by GBC, the BCA and SCC, to hear their concerns at first-hand, and to explain the unique value of the Dry Dock facility. It was agreed that BCA-enforced restricted use of the Dry Dock would continue over the next two to three months, giving time to establish whether the working arrangements were practicable, but this would need to be better monitored by the BCA. The complainants were also recommended to telephone the Canal Director or SCC Head of Countryside Management immediately if they were unhappy with noise being produced by activities at the Dock.

Full Conditions of Use are contained within Appendix 1 (Working Time Restriction for the Dry Dock, Deepcut) attached to the Director's Report. This limits noisy activities from Monday mornings (excluding Bank Holidays) to Wednesday lunchtimes (2.5 days per week). Angle grinding and hull banging are further restricted to 10 minutes in any one hour, and major construction or re-fabrication is not allowed at any time, other than emergency repairs authorised by the BCA.

Alternatives

It was suggested by Guildford Borough Council that a new Dry Dock could be provided elsewhere at a location less likely to cause complaints. This has been investigated by the Director, but due to lack of land owned adjacent to the Canal, plus restrictions due to the Conservation Area status of the Canal and its SSSI designation, there is no obvious site which would necessarily generate less complaints. There is also the problem of funding any new facility, and the fact that this would be introducing a new use into another part of the Canal, when there is an existing Dry Dock, with well-documented use extending well over a hundred years.

Another suggestion was that the Dry Dock should be covered with a sound-proofing cover. The major concern with this suggestion is whether the cover (which would be expensive and which would have to receive Planning Permission) would provide the expected level of noise reduction, as it would have to open to allow boats to enter into the working space inside, and would have to accommodate the drop in water height as the Dock is dewatered.

The third option is to close the Dry Dock. This would require boats to visit alternative dry docks, the nearest being at Pyrford on the Wey Navigation. Closure would have major implications for the BCA work boats, Canal Society boats and those commercial boats which are based solely on the Canal, as all would have to be sent down the Canal (taking 2 – 3 days for a return voyage) or be expensively transferred by road.

Preferred option

The preferred option is to retain the Dry Dock at its present location, but to accept that use will necessarily be restricted, both in terms of time available for certain activities and for type of work.

Current situation

The complainants have now had direct contact with the Canal Director, and with Surrey County Council, as landowner, and have been invited to telephone or email either body if they have specific concerns. The BCA has issued a one page directive which is sent to all prospective hirers of the Dock, and which must be complied with. Failure to comply with the restrictions will lead to the hirer being refused future access, but more importantly could lead to GBC serving a Stop Notice on Surrey County Council, which will result in the closure of the Dry Dock. It is expected that a further meeting will be held with GBC Environmental Health at the end of the calendar year to review progress.

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