

BASINGSTOKE CANAL JOINT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

SURREY & HAMPSHIRE CANAL SOCIETY REPORT – FEBRUARY 2011

1. CAPITAL WORKS

The Canal Society has previously expressed its serious concern about the delay in appointing a term contractor to undertake the outstanding capital works on the canal. We must re-emphasize the point that if the canal is to re-open to through navigation in the spring of 2012, there is a pressing need to see contractors on the ground tackling the major repairs that are needed. The advanced planning is underway for a major boat rally at Frimley Lodge Park in May 2012 to mark the 21st anniversary of the re-opening of the canal. The success of this rally is wholly dependent on the ability of boats to enter the canal from the River Wey and navigate the Deepcut Locks. We strongly urge the County Councils and the BCA to apply their maximum efforts to ensure that the necessary works are undertaken and completed by the autumn of this year. A successful rally would hopefully go some way towards restoring the reputation of the Basingstoke Canal in the inland waterways community – an issue which should be in the forefront of JMC members' minds.

2. CANAL-SIDE DEVELOPMENTS

The Canal Society has consistently argued that the canal should seek to benefit from any major developments on land adjacent to the canal. At the present time there are 3 developments which offer the potential to provide additional canal facilities and which could be designed to improve the canal environment. These developments are:

- The Aldershot Urban Extension, a re-development of surplus MOD land which will involve the construction of 4500 houses and associated amenities
- The Deepcut Area re-development which involves the building of 1200 houses on the site of the Princess Royal Barracks
- The re-development of the Brewery Road car park site in Woking as a headquarters for the World Wildlife Fund

In the case of each of these developments the Canal Society has put forward constructive suggestions on how the new buildings can benefit from the canal setting and how the canal can be enhanced by the development. We have proposed small boat basins, lay-bys, boating facilities and places for the public to enjoy the canal. We have also suggested that the developments could capitalise on the waterfront setting by the provision, for example, of a café or restaurant. In our view these developments offer significant opportunities to make a large improvement to the canal environment. We therefore urge the BCA, the Counties and the relevant district authorities to do all they can to secure planning gains for the canal from these important developments.

3. WORKING PARTIES

The Canal Society continues to organise volunteer working parties to undertake a variety of jobs on the canal.

Lock 17

The repairs to the wing walls have now been completed by Canal Society volunteers and by volunteers from canal restoration groups based in other parts of the country.

Brookwood

A very successful Canal Society led working party was held on 8th January on the Brookwood Locks when a large quantity of brushwood, over-hanging trees and other vegetation was cleared from the lock areas. The working party was assisted by two BCA rangers and it is hoped that this will be the first of many joint working parties along the whole length of the canal. The Canal Society would like to express its thanks to Peter Bickford and Sarah Murray of the BCA for their contribution to the success of this work party. Further bank-side clearance working parties are scheduled for later in January using the Society's recently commissioned work boat.

Runway's End

The Canal Society is planning to construct a landing stage adjacent to Farnborough Aerodrome which will be used particularly by the John Pinkerton trip boat during the Farnborough Air Show. Finance for the landing stage has been provided from the TAG S106 fund.

Resources

Due to the indisposition of both Peter Redway and his computer, we are currently unable to provide the usual statistics for volunteer effort on the canal during the last 3 months. There will be an update in the report to the next JMC meeting.

4. USE OF VOLUNTEERS

The volunteer work at Lock 17 has highlighted the need to improve the working relationship between the County Councils, as the owners of the canal and the responsible authorities under the health and safety legislation and the volunteer groups which are co-ordinated by the Canal Society. In November the Lock 17 project was halted by the County Councils, at short notice, pending a review of the relevant method statements, project plans, risk assessments and insurances. This review was required in order to comply with the Construction, Design and Management (CDM) regulations which apply to projects running over extended periods. From an examination of the circumstances which led up to the suspension of work, it appeared that there were lapses of communications on both sides and it also transpired that relevant documentation prepared by the Canal Society had not been properly communicated and reviewed by the County Councils' engineering departments. This matter has been discussed by the Counties, the BCA and the Canal Society and there is now a fuller understanding of what is required.

Although the Canal Society fully accepts the need to comply with all the regulations applicable to construction sites, it must make the point that issues of this kind must be handled sensitively, especially bearing in mind that volunteers are a fragile resource which could be lost if it is felt that a heavy handed approach is being adopted.

5. TRIP BOAT

The Canal Society has operated the John Pinkerton passenger trip boat on the western end of the canal for over 30 years. The income from the trip boat, which now exceeds £500,000, has been re-invested in the canal through a number of projects including back-pumping schemes and lock repairs. Consideration is now being given to replacing the John Pinkerton with a new boat equipped to modern standards. In particular, the new vessel will have full provision for disabled passengers. There is no doubt that the trip boat has been an excellent 'ambassador' for the canal over its many years of operation and the Canal Society hopes that the new boat will continue with the good work.

6. WATER SUPPLIES

Recognising that the Basingstoke Canal continues to suffer from a shortage of water in dry summers, the Canal Society is working with the BCA to identify new sources of water and to improve supplies through back-pumping. The Bourley Reservoirs near Aldershot offer one opportunity to access a new water supply. The Canal Society is also concerned that over-abstraction at Greywell is reducing water supplies to the western end of the canal. We would urge all the Basingstoke Canal partners, and in particular Natural England, to join us in our efforts to tackle these supply problems which are complex and long term.

7. NAVIGATION

The Canal Society believes that the canal should be more easily accessible to boats arriving at the Woodham Locks from the River Wey. The current arrangements involve very restrictive opening times, the need to book passages and a requirement for boats to be assisted through the locks which places demands on rangers' time. A proposal has been made by the Society to improve access; this would involve the use of volunteers. Discussions on this subject will shortly commence at the BC Users Forum.

P Riley
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