

BASINGSTOKE CANAL JOINT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

SURREY & HAMPSHIRE CANAL SOCIETY REPORT - APRIL 2011

1. Working Parties

Following the very sad loss of Peter Redway, the Canal Society has been reviewing its volunteer working party activities with the aim of re-establishing a structure to manage the work parties and to comply with the requirements of the County Engineers. Progress is being made and a new modus operandi is being developed. In this connection the nomination of the BCA's Head Ranger, Jon Green, as volunteer co-ordinator is seen as an essential step forward in re-enforcing the relationship, at working level, between the volunteers and the Canal Authority.

In the first 4 months of the year volunteer working parties have been active on the canal in several areas. These include:

Runway's End

The Canal Society is nearing the completion of a new landing stage near Farnborough Aerodrome. This will be used by the Society's trip boat, the John Pinkerton, during the bi-annual air show and it will also be available for use by other boats including hire boats and visitors to the canal. The project at Runway's End enabled the Canal Society to use its recently refurbished work boat, the Alan Flight, to good effect.

Bank-side Clearance

During the late winter Canal Society working parties cleared a [specify length of canal and location] of vegetation which was growing over the canal and impeding navigation. It is anticipated that this essential work will re-commence after the bird nesting season.

During the period January to April 2011, Canal Society volunteers and volunteers from visiting canal restoration groups undertook 202 man-days of work on the canal equivalent (on conservative estimates of labour costs) to £13,350 in value of work undertaken. The Society also incurred significant expenditure on plant hire and on the purchase of materials including approximately £4000 on steel piling.

2. Canal-Side Developments

As mentioned in the Canal Society's report to the JMC in February, there are currently a number of developments proposed on land adjacent to the canal in both Surrey and Hampshire which offer the potential to obtain significant benefits for the canal both in terms of providing much needed moorings and facilities for boat owners and in offering improved recreational opportunities for canal-side communities. Some of these developments might also attract businesses which would generate much needed revenue for the BCA. These developments include the Brewery Road site in Woking, the proposed housing development at Brookwood Farm, the re-development of Deepcut

Barracks and the large residential and mixed development known as the Aldershot Urban Extension on former Army land north of Aldershot town centre. In all these cases the Canal Society has made constructive proposals to the developers with a view to securing the benefits which can typically be derived from water-side developments of this kind. However, the Canal Society is disappointed that the relevant planning authorities, all of whom are represented on the JMC, appear to be largely ignoring the significant opportunities that these developments are creating for the canal. We strongly urge the JMC, and particularly the local authority members representing the districts where the developments are being planned, to join with the Canal Society in pressing the case for the canal.

3. Water Supplies

The Canal Society has continued to explore the options for securing additional water supplies for the canal. Most recently the Society has commissioned a study into the potential for obtaining water from the reservoirs on the Army land at Bourley which are disused. The study indicates that the project is feasible and the next stage will involve engagement with interested parties which include Defence Training Estates, the Environment Agency, Natural England, the Fleet Pond Society and the Army Fishing Club. A possible complication has recently arisen in that the water from Bourley may be required for the new AUE housing development. Discussions with Rushmoor BC on this issue are continuing.

4. The Future of the Basingstoke Canal

The Government (through Defra) has recently commenced a consultation on the future of the waterways in England and Wales. It is proposed that British Waterways (the Government owned agency which manages many of the UK's inland waterways) should be moved into the third sector and constituted as a charity. At a later date (probably by about 2015) the waterways managed by the Environment Agency (which principally comprise the R Thames, Medway and some of the navigable East Anglian Rivers) should also move into the new charity. It is envisaged that the new charity will be in a better position to attract grant funding for the waterways. It is further proposed that the new charity will adopt governance arrangements based on local participation in the management of each region's waterways. The consultation document also mentions that the new charity will be set up in such a way that, over time, it may agree to partner or merge with other navigations not currently managed by BW and the EA.

The Canal Society has studied these proposals with considerable interest and it intends to make a response to the consultation. In giving its views, the Society will support the proposal to incorporate the smaller non-BW and EA waterways into the new charity. With regard to the Basingstoke Canal, the Society has long held the view that, in the longer term, the future of the canal lies with a much larger navigation authority which has the critical mass, economies of scale and range of skills and expertise to manage, maintain and improve the waterway as a fully operating navigation. However, it must be recognised that any transfer of the Basingstoke Canal would not be possible in the

foreseeable future. If the option to transfer did arise, the new charity would almost certainly require firstly that the canal was put into fully operating condition and secondly that the current partnership would continue to provide financial support for the canal for a specified period. Having said that, the Society believes that the formation of the new charity offers the possibility of placing the Basingstoke Canal on a firmer and more sustainable footing and it therefore recommends that the JMC should keep abreast of these developments. The Canal Society also urges JMC members (via the BCA which is named as a consultee in the consultative document) to express support for the Government's proposals.

5. Income Generation

Work continues on a proposal to replace the Canal Society's passenger trip boat, the John Pinkerton, with a new vessel to be built to the latest Maritime & Coastguard Agency standards. The cost of the new boat will be financed entirely from Canal Society sources but the income it generates will be re-invested into the canal through the provision of support and materials for working parties. Since the John Pinkerton commenced operations in 1979 it has produced income in excess of £500,000.

The Canal Society has fully supported and encouraged efforts by the BCA to identify and develop new sources of revenue for the canal. Clearly the need for more income generation has become increasingly important this year as the local authority contributions continue to fall and the BCA's cost base comes under more pressure. Against this background, the Canal Society has been dismayed by the continuing delay in launching the project to develop the camping field at the Canal Centre and provide new facilities for the Basingstoke Canal Canoe Club. The Canal Society understands that the necessary planning application (to Surrey County Council) has been delayed following an intervention by the Surrey Wildlife Trust who is suggesting that the proposed development will interfere with a bat corridor. A bat survey extending over 2 years is being recommended. This has come as a very significant blow to the Canoe Club, the BCA and the Canal Society who have been working hard (and, in the case of the Canoe Club, incurring considerable expenditure) to bring the scheme to fruition. The Canal Society regards this position as entirely unacceptable and representations are being made to the SCC members on the JMC to intervene to resolve the position. The proposed development would offer a 'quick win' for the canal as it would begin to produce additional income in the short term. If this project does not go ahead this year the Canal Society is bound to question whether the JMC is really committed to seeking new revenue sources for the canal. This is an excellent example of a situation where the JMC (and particularly the SCC members) should be actively engaged in achieving a satisfactory solution.

P. Riley
Vice Chairman
03.05.11