

Joint Advisory Group17th June 2011**Canal Directors Report**

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E-mail: ian.brown@hants.gov.uk**1. BCA Team Structure Review**

- 1.1 Consultation process now completed with the closing date for voluntary redundancy (VR) 10th May 2011. Four personnel have registered an interest in VR and if confirmed will be approved after 7th June 2011. Competitive interviews may not be required and remaining staff could be slotted into new structure providing a team of five rangers under the supervision of a senior ranger.

New structure to be implemented in July 2011 with a notice period of twelve weeks for personnel who have been selected for VR.

- 1.2 Sharing of wider resources is going to be further explored and in particular sharing of equipment and other skills such as tree management. Greater integration of the BCA with Hants Countryside Service and a review of the Canal Director post, are issues which need to be and are being pursued.
- 1.3 In order to meet the requirements of a sustainable, safe open and navigable canal, a minimum spend of up to £200,000 per annum is required for essential planned preventative maintenance in the future. This will form a mixed economy approach to sustaining a dedicated ranger team that will work alongside specialist contractors with clearly defined roles addressing all of the essential activities including those that require a civil and specialist engineering input.

2. Asset management

- 2.1 Capital Funded Work Plan for 2010/11 – HCC and SCC have now appointed the term contractor Dyer & Butler. This will be on a fixed term for two years starting in June 2011 and will focus on essential structure repairs identified in the condition surveys and as previously reported.

Progress on remaining condition surveys

- 2.2 Outstanding surveys on culverts, sluices and weirs have largely been completed. Preliminary reports have identified structural problems with a need to carry out some further survey work to identify and determine necessary repair works.

Volunteers

- 2.3 The BCA are more than ever keen to work with established volunteer groups and have assigned the senior ranger as the volunteer co-ordinator. Areas of importance are;
- Navigation
 - Conservation
 - Vegetation management
 - Reporting on towpath condition and litter picking
 - Light maintenance projects e.g. painting of lock and footbridge accessories
- 2.4 The Society have appointed more volunteer 'Lengthsmen' and it is hoped in time, be able to re-establish full coverage of the whole length of the canal so that the "eyes and ears" can become comprehensive again.
- 2.5 The BCA are committed to working with the Canal Society and their specialist volunteer work party who are qualified and skilled to carry out more comprehensive projects under agreement with the counties engineers and risk management procedures. Some great work has already been carried out this year with very good results and there is a forward plan to continue this.
- 2.6 The Swingbridge Community Volunteer Group (Surrey Care Trust) started a programme of clearing up vegetation on the towpath, litter picking and painting of lock furniture in Woking early in April finishing in late May. Aspire Defence (MOD appointed asset and facility management agent) will also sponsor two activity days with the installation of habitat enhancement features and interpretation signage.
- 2.7 Target savings of up to £50,000 are expected during the current financial year in direct volunteer application.

3. Revenue funding and Budget for 2011/12

- 3.1 The canal director will continue to hold costs down this year and maintain the budget within the limits outlined in the finance report.
- 3.2 Initial revenue saving made from reducing the ranger team will be used to meet any redundancy and pension strain during the current financial year 2011/12 and 2012/13. A target saving of £150,000.00 together with other efficiency scoping will be accrued to provide for sustainable maintenance of the canal after the end of the fixed term contract and capital investment made by both county councils in 2013.
- 3.3 Further limited capital investment may be required as a result of final findings and conclusion of the condition surveys.

4. Open Navigation Access Policy

- 4.1 Progress with an agreement on taking a more open access approach to navigation forward with the boating clubs proactively managing this element, will now take place with the boating clubs.
- 4.2 With the ranger team review and risk assessments completed, the BCA are now in a position to take this forward and implement in 2012. The BCA are also in the process of consulting individual stakeholders on this initiative.
- 4.3 Direct revenue saving would be equivalent to £15,000 in reducing ranger intervention and supervision of boating.

5. Income Generation and Business Plan

[See annexed document – Business Planning and Actions 2011/12 to 2013/14]

- 5.1 Projected targets set for this year are;
- Maintain upwards of 95% safe towpath access for visitors
 - 80% of navigable structure maintained for constant use and fit for purpose
 - Increase in visitor boating by 25% (target for 2012/13)
- 5.2 A planning application for the building of a two story shower and toilet block has been held back. With one particular objection/concern registered with reservations about the Special Protected Area (SPA) bordering the canal centre being affected by extra field activities and lighting associated with any increase in camping.

This now requires a full ecological impact assessment to be carried out and this will delay the application going to the planning committee for approval. The process of assessing any ecological impacts is now in progress but will need to be carried out over two full seasons before a meaningful report can be submitted.

- 5.3 The BCA have set a target to generate income from centre based activities including camping this year of generating £80,000. Other established income streams will generate in the region of an additional £88,000 making a target total of £168,000.
- 5.4 Opportunity from proposed planning developments at Woking, Deepcut and Aldershot continue to be discussed. The BCA are keen to work with all partners and stakeholders in securing benefit for the canal and potential income.
- 5.5 Specifically the BCA have identified three opportunities that could attract section 106 funding;
- Sustainable transport development using the canal towpath with additional funding of bank protection and habitat enhancements in the Deepcut, Frimley, Mytchett, Ash and Aldershot area.
 - A water storage and supply pond at Deepcut

- Redevelopment at Ash Lock to provide a workshop facility, operational base and dry dock.
- 5.6 The BCA will be seeking a consolidated approach with the canal society, so that a balanced and well represented application for funding can be made to each of the local authorities and appointed developers.
- 6. Conservation and HLS Funding**
- 6.1 The conservation management plan is due a review this year and this will be carried out and reported on at the July meeting of the conservation steering group.
- 6.2 Project plans have and are being submitted to Natural England along with the appropriate documentation to attract High Level Stewardship funding (HLS). Funding in the order of approximately £30,000/year will deliver on specific projects such as enhancement of marginal vegetation in connection with bank protection. This is match funded with contributions being made by the BCA, capital investment and volunteer input. Also up to £20,000 for reduction of tree shading projects without match funding for the next four years.
- 7. TAG/Rushmoor Community & Environment Grant 2010 (£40,000)**
- 7.1 The proposed towpath repair and upgrade between Runway's End (Eelmoor) to Norris Bridge remains outstanding. This was due to increased material cost and the need to curtail BCA maintenance expenditure in the last financial year which would of made up the shortfall. The BCA plan to carry out this work under contract this year.

Recommendations:

- That the Director be supported on items as suggested and discussed in this report
- That the Business and Actions Plan be adopted
- That whilst acknowledging the current difficult economic circumstances facing all the partners, it is imperative that the partners contribute their full share so that the safety and enjoyment of visitors and users of the Canal can be ensured