

**Canal Directors Report**

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**1. BCA Structure**

**1.1 Ranger Team Review**

In order to meet required and identified efficiency this exercise was completed on the 31<sup>st</sup> August 2011. A new team of six rangers including the senior ranger will focus on critical tasks that cover;

- Formal Structure Inspections
- Risk Management – Safe Service Operation
- Planned Preventative (light) Maintenance
- Management objectives that will bring the canal into favourable condition
- Water level control and conservation
- Income generation activities
- Customer focus

1.2 Projected savings [*see finance report*] are circa £38,100 in first year.

1.3 Projected savings for 2013/14 will meet target set of £150,000 after redundancy and pension strain. This reflects direct savings in salaries and hired transport and associated costs. The saving will be transferred to directly increase the maintenance budget.

**2. Term Contractor**

2.1 Dyer & Butler have now started work repairing a leaking bank in Woking and after that is completed will start repairs to certain lock structures on the Deepcut Flight.

2.2 BCA are currently planning task orders that will be issued soon for extensive bank repairs to be carried out in Hampshire during the winter months along with fitting stop plank grooves at selected bridge hole points to facilitate control over water volume and flow in times of exceptional weather conditions.

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2.3 Further assessment on what is required in terms of capital funding and further repair work to bring the canal into a fully serviceable and safe operating condition for navigation is now being carried out. The canal director will initiate discussion with senior colleagues and members to move this forward and to establish a planned approach by the next financial year with the indicative cost known by November this year. **(BCA ACTION 1)**

2.4 This information could then be used to also explore potential Heritage Lottery Funding and other potential sources to meet any shortfalls in the amount of capital investment required.  
**(BCA ACTION 2)**

### **3. Deepcut and Brookwood Lock Flights Reopening**

3.1 At the stakeholder user forum meeting and at previous JAG and JMC meetings the canal director reported that the BCA should be in a position to make an informed decision on whether these Flights could be safely navigable in time to have the planned boat festival in celebration of 21 years after restoration in May 2012. The BCA plan is to complete the scheduled work between now and the end of March next year that may enable the Deepcut and Brookwood Flight to reopen.

3.2 Initial priority work on the Deepcut Flight will see locks 19, 20 and 25 repaired and the worst lock gates replaced. Finishing this work by the end of March should give the BCA enough time to test and safety check the flight for navigation before any navigation takes place.

3.3 However, allowing for the unpredictability of the winter weather, unforeseen problems relating to the condition of the structures and the need to fully test the operation after repairs are completed, it is not possible to give a guarantee now that the canal will be open to boating by the Spring.

3.4 The canal director will report progress as it occurs and will keep all interest groups regularly informed.

3.5 Another area of serious concern is Mytchett Lake where the county is bound to comply with the Reservoirs Act and recommendations on essential bank protection. This work will also need to be prioritised this and next year.

### **4. Volunteers**

4.1 This year has seen some outstanding volunteer contributions from the Surrey & Hampshire Canal Society, IWA Waterways Recovery Group, Swingbridge Community Boat, Aspire Defence Services and Novartis a local based business.

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4.2 Projects were carried out to a high standard and are estimated to have saved the BCA in excess of £48,000.

### 5. **Open Navigation Access Policy**

5.1 A workshop was held to further look at how a navigation open access policy could be managed by volunteers in the future. Discussion and exchange of ideas on the main topics were very productive and covered;

- Keeping the house boats in a safe depth of water
- General H&S issues
- Working at height whilst sealing gates ('caulking up')
- Contractual governance
- Boat safety guidelines
- Water level control
- Back Pumping
- Lock gate improvements
- Boat licence requirements and collecting fees
- How we do it with just one duty ranger outside normal working hours
- Time frames
- Flexible working
- Volunteer support
- Stopping undesirable boating – un-licensed craft?

5.2 It was agreed that a selected working party will now meet to take this forward and formulate an acceptable policy and action plan ready for the next boating season. (**BCA ACTION 3**)

### 6. **Income Generation**

6.1 Projected total income for 2011/12 is £157,400 and is down on the original projected target of £168,000. (- £10,600) [ *see finance report for a full breakdown of figures* ] This reflects poor summer weather conditions where canal centre visits and camping were slightly reduced based on last years performance.

6.2 Boat licence income is £16,000 to date.

6.3 Camping income is £28,000 to date.

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- 6.4 Early bookings for the Santa Cruises indicate that the above shortfall may be made up with income in excess of £17,000 and 93% of the tickets sold so far.
- 6.5 The BCA team continues to explore other sources of income.
- 6.6 A draft Income target for 2012/13 is set at £160,000 and reflects existing streams, assuming no further development of the canal centre in that year or significant increase in boating activity.
- 6.7 High Level Stewardship Funding (HLS) has been agreed but awaits final approval [see finance report] for up to £190,000 to be spent on the Surrey section of the canal. A similar bid is now in progress for the Hampshire section.
- 6.8 Projected customer base targets set for this year are;
- Maintain upwards of 95% safe towpath access for visitors – **so far achieved**
  - 80% of navigable structure maintained for constant use and fit for purpose – **with the exception of the Deepcut and Brookwood Flights, approximately 75% has been achieved.**
  - Increase in visitor boating by 25% (target for 2011/12) – **work in progress**
7. **New shower and toilet block**
- 7.1 A final bat activity assessment has been carried out and a full report will be submitted to the SCC Planning Officer. (**BCA ACTION 4**)
- 7.2 A working party is still seeking funding for this project with several potential opportunities to explore. (**BCA ACTION 5**)
8. **Developments adjoining the canal**
- 8.1 Further discussion between the BCA and Developers at Woking, Deepcut and Aldershot are in progress.
- 8.2 These seek to include significant gains in enhancing the value of the canal to the local communities whilst ensuring the operational and ecological sustainability of the canal in balance and in line with agreed management objectives. (**BCA ACTION 6**)

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### 9. Towpath and Cycling Issues

- 9.1 This year has seen an increase in complaints about cycling and in particular cycling at speed with little to no regard for other users. Clearly the BCA will have to react to this.
- 9.2 After a discussion with the Woking Cycle Group Chairman and Sustrans agreed to carry out the following short term measures;
- Amendment of highways signage with removal of speed and timings from a to b
  - More formal visually impact signage at bridges
  - More interactive face to face communication – Sustrans volunteers will help with this and the BCA will encourage other user groups to do the same. (**BCA ACTION 7**)

### Recommendations:

- That the Director be supported on items as suggested and discussed in this report.
- Action points identified are carried out by the service with full cooperation of partners.
- That whilst acknowledging the current difficult economic circumstances facing all the partners, it is imperative that the partners meet the requested level of funding whilst the BCA and Counties continue with the programmed work of bringing the canal into full and sustainable operational condition, so that the safety and enjoyment of visitors and users of the Canal can be ensured.