

# SURREY & HAMPSHIRE CANAL SOCIETY REPORT

## Joint Management Committee 14<sup>th</sup> October 2011

### 1. The Navigation

I had hoped to write this report in the knowledge that the essential repair-work at the Deepcut and Brookwood Locks was well advanced. Very regrettably this is not the case and, indeed, this work has yet to start. It is entirely unacceptable to the volunteers that it should have taken over 18 months for the contractors to be selected and the contracts put in place. The Canal Society simply does not understand why the County Councils have taken so long to finalise the contracts given that the funds were voted in early 2010 and the contractor selected in the spring. In our view lessons must be learnt from this sorry state of affairs. We have never had an adequate explanation of the reasons for the delay and we would therefore urge the JMC to ask the County Councils :

- to inform the Committee of the reasons why this important publically funded work should have been subject to such an unwarranted delay
- to indicate to the Committee what lessons can be learned from this very unsatisfactory state of affairs and what steps can be taken to ensure that a better, more efficient, procedure can be established for the future.

**RECOMMENDATION FOR ACTION :** The County Councils are asked, within a month of the JMC meeting, to respond to the above questions.

The Committee will be aware from previous reports that the Canal Society, supported by the BCA and Surrey Heath BC, is planning to hold a boat rally at Frimley Lodge Park in late May 2012 to celebrate the 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the completion of the restoration. We cannot over-emphasize the importance of this rally in re-building the sadly tarnished reputation of the Basingstoke as a destination for boats based on other parts of the inland waterways network. The completion of the work at Deepcut and Brookwood is an essential pre-condition to our ability to arrange a successful rally. The Canal Society has been informed by the Canal Director that the necessary work will be completed by Easter 2012 and planning for the rally is proceeding on that assumption.

The Canal Society would like to compliment the BCA on the modifications to the jack heads on the Woodham flight of locks. Although the primary aim of the modifications is to improve safety at the locks, the new paddle gear is much easier to operate and will be welcomed by the boat owning community.

### 2. Working Parties

## **SURREY & HAMPSHIRE CANAL SOCIETY REPORT**

In the last 4 months, volunteer working parties have been engaged on a number of projects including the following:

Runway's End – The landing stage has now been completed and will be available for use during the Farnborough Air Show in 2012. The Canal Society would like to thank TAG Aviation and Rushmoor Borough Council for providing the funding for this project. A successful event, attended by the mayor of Rushmoor and TAG executives, was held in early September to mark the completion of the project.

Lock 17 – Work has continued on Lock 17 on the Deepcut Flight where the lock chamber has been re-pointed.

Lock 1 Landing – Further work has been undertaken on the new landing stage below lock 1. This will provide an easier disembarkation point for boat owners arriving on the canal from the R Wey.

During the 4 month period, the Canal Society volunteers and volunteers from visiting groups (managed by the Canal Society) undertook 282 man-days of work equivalent (on conservative estimates of labour costs) to £20,300 in value of work performed. The Society also incurred expenditure of £7462 on the purchase of materials and plant hire. These figures do not include the substantial number of man-hours contributed by the volunteers in such areas as crewing the Society's trip boat, attendance at events, participation in numerous committees and working groups and preparation of various publications including the Basingstoke Canal News.

### **3. Canal-Side Developments**

The Canal Society has consistently emphasized to JMC members the importance of capitalising on new developments adjacent to the canal. It is our belief, and this is supported by experience elsewhere in the UK, that significant benefits can be obtained from developers of sites on, or close to, inland waterways. There is ample evidence that such developments can enhance the canal environment and can enable the developers to obtain premium prices for their properties. It is against that background that the Canal Society remains disappointed that none of the major developments currently planned on the side of the canal have produced any tangible benefit. A case in point is the new development on the Brewery Road site in Woking town centre where the World Wildlife Fund is developing its new headquarters. The Canal Society has campaigned for many years for improvements to the canal environment in this area but it now appears that the modest improvements suggested by the Canal Society will not be incorporated in the project plans. This is a particularly unsatisfactory outcome bearing in mind that the Canal Society had offered to finance the improvements and to carry out most of the work. It is also noteworthy that although the Woking BC district plan contains numerous policies applicable to developments on or near the canal, none of these appear to have been applied in this case. We are bound to question why this is the case.

## SURREY & HAMPSHIRE CANAL SOCIETY REPORT

In the Canal Society's view there is a pressing need for the 6 riparian districts (in conjunction with the BCA and the Canal Society) to prepare plans for the canal corridor in their respective areas which would ensure that new developments do enhance the canal environment. These plans could also identify ways in which the facilities offered by the canal (moorings, boat basins, slipways, water points etc) could be enhanced and improved.

**RECOMMENDATION FOR ACTION:** The Canal Society urges the JMC to task each of the 6 riparian districts with the preparation (within a defined timescale) of specific plans for the improvement of the canal corridor within their respective areas. Such plans should also ensure that suitable benefits for the canal (via S106 Agreements or otherwise) are secured from new developments.

### 4. Open Access

Following the reduction in the size of the ranger team, the BCA has been obliged to further restrict access to the canal from the R Wey. The canal already has an unenviable reputation as a 'no go' area for boats and these restrictions will further exacerbate the problem. Although the Canal Society understands the need to reduce ranger cover, it is very concerned that the proposal to use volunteers to provide the necessary assistance to boat owners wishing to access the canal out of hours and at weekends has not been implemented in order to dovetail with the new restricted opening hours. There is a clear need for the BCA to develop and agree a new volunteer access policy with the voluntary sector in order to have new arrangements in place by spring 2012 in time for the new boating season and the Frimley rally. The Canal Society believes that this matter should be given the highest priority.

**RECOMMENDATION FOR ACTION:** The BCA is tasked with developing and agreeing an Open Access Policy with the voluntary sector by the end of November 2011 and to report the achievement of this objective to the members of the JMC

### 5. Income Generation

Although one meeting of interested parties has been held since the last JMC meeting, it appears (to our knowledge) that little or no progress has been made with the development of business plans aimed at increasing the revenue of the BCA from sources other than public funds. In particular the Canal Society remains very concerned that the proposal to develop the camping field at Mytchett and to provide better facilities for the Basingstoke Canal Canoe Club remains stalled. It is the Canal Society's view that the BCA, assisted as appropriate by the County Councils, should prepare a business plan showing the potential for income generation at Mytchett, the funding (and the sources of funding) required for the development and a timeframe for completion of the new facility. The aim should be to have the new facilities available in the spring of 2012 in order to capitalise on the revenue potential which could be derived from the Farnborough Air Show, the Olympics etc.

## **SURREY & HAMPSHIRE CANAL SOCIETY REPORT**

**RECOMMENDATION FOR ACTION:** The BCA and the County Council officers are tasked with the production of a business plan (including funding proposals and timeframe) for the proposed development at the Canal Centre at Mytchett by 30<sup>th</sup> November 2011.

Philip Riley  
Chairman  
The Surrey & Hampshire Canal Society

26<sup>th</sup> September 2011