

Joint Management Committee**10th February 2012****Canal Directors Report**

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1.1 The canal director reports good progress with task orders issued to the term contractor with work on the Deepcut Flight on schedule. Three Lock structures have been repaired and improved. By-pass runs have been repaired, some earth structural (voiding) issues have been addressed and filled with suitable material. Currently Lock gates are being replaced along with new jack heads (winding gear) that is safer and easier to use by boaters.

1.2 Work in Hampshire has also started with repairs to various embankment sites, an extension to the original repair at West Hart, Poulter's Bridge and Crookham. This work will continue throughout the year and where possible the BCA will try to minimise impact on the navigation.

1.3 A design for new and improved stop plank facilities is being engineered and will be applied to existing sites where better control is required. This work is scheduled to take place during March and December 2012. Also as part of improvements to flood and emergency protection strategies, weirs and sluices will be surveyed and where possible upgraded after consultation with the regulatory agencies later this year.

1.4 A task order for remaining condition surveys on the culverts in Hampshire has been issued to the term contractor. The approach will report on condition and recommend remedial action with minor repairs carried out on site as required. Any significant recommended repairs will be planned and carried out accordingly this year.

2. Volunteer Support

2.1 Several major volunteer activities are planned for this year with the S&HCS weekend working parties, Swingbridge Community Boat Group during April and May, IWA / WRG Group for a one week Summer Camp in July and Local Community Groups all carrying out basic maintenance tasks and in the case of the S&HCS some soft bank protection at Mytchett and Frimley in order to keep the towpath open between the Canal Centre and Frimley Lodge Park.

3. Revenue funding and Budget for 2012/13

3.1 A draft report from the Honorary Treasurer will be presented and shows the financial projections for the financial outturn for 2011/12.

3.2 The Partnership is required to build up the reserve account to a sustainable level. The canal director recommends that this be maintained between £150,000 to £200,000 which would cover annual planned preventative maintenance of the canal at any given time if expected partnership funding falters. It is further recommended that this build up be phased over the next two financial years. Transfer of savings from the recent and final restructuring should be used to achieve this.

3.3 As previously reported a minimum of £200,000 is required to be spent annually on planned preventative maintenance and will cover essential activities that will keep the canal in a steady state once all of the capital funded repairs are completed. Further capital funding will be required and work is in progress to quantify and determine actual costs and potential sources of funding such as HLF.

4.1 Open Navigation Access Working Group

4.1 A report from the open navigation access working group indicates positive progress with a proposed strategy and working policy. This report is appended (1) for information.

4.2 It is proposed that this open access strategy is trialled this coming boat season and in particular during the proposed and planned S&HCS 21st celebration boat rally in early June. If amendments to the policy are required after this period, that can be discussed and agreed between the working party, boat clubs and BCA as necessary.

5. Water Strategy Group

5.1 An interim briefing report from the water strategy group will be presented by the S&HCS representative as an annexed paper to their report. The BCA welcomes and is very thankful on behalf of the partnership for this support initiative.

5.2 It is recommended that SCC proceed with a new application for abstraction of water (back pumping) on the Woodham Flight to increase allowable water volume to be pumped in line with the open access strategy and provide safe water levels for the House Boats.

5.3 It is further recommended that a new and sustainable supply of water for the Deepcut Flight be researched and investigated working with the Local Planning Authorities and the Environment Agency.

5.4 A feasibility study and cost analysis for the design and installation of basic telemetry to automatically monitor, control and record water levels is being carried out by 'Hydrologic' a specialist company. Also the installation of boat loggers in accordance with the Conservation Management Plan and Objectives. Initial funding for this is provided by the S&HCS, IWA and Natural England.

6. Income Generation Plan 2012/13

6.1 High Level Stewardship Funding (HLS) has been approved for the Surrey section and sign off was agreed with NE 17th October and is effective from the 1st October 2011 to 30th September 2021. The agreement consists of ELS annual payments, annual payments for all options excluding capital items of **£2,519**, a parcel based option on agreed maps and a capital works schedule which pertains to mostly tree shade reduction and amounts to a total of **£188,750** over the next four years. Projects are now being started with installation of enhanced bank protection and tree shade reduction.

6.2 A similar application for the Hampshire section is on track with final mapping being agreed with the Rural Payments Agency. The Historic Environment Information (HER) doc for the Farm Environment Plan (FEP) had been completed by HCC's David Hopkins - County Archaeologist. The FEP has been commissioned and started by Mr Colin Hedley – Consultant Ecologist of CJH Agri-Environment Consultants Ltd. This will be completed by the 31st January and the cost for this work can be claimed back from NE through the HLS agreement. Once we have completed maps from the RPA, a full project plan will be submitted, anticipated time frame late March. We have an agreement offer for an allocated budget for three years capital works programme of **£30,000** and a special project option of **£7,500**.

6.3 Special Funding Initiatives for 2012 are also being pursued with the Water Framework Directive with the help of Natural England. This will primarily look at funding for enhancing water quality by dredging, control and removal of invasive non-native aquatic vegetation. A tentative bid has been submitted for **£150,000**.

6.4 A TAG/Rushmoor Community & Environment Grant awarded in 2010 for **£40,000** was held back in 2011 due to technical issues and the procurement process of the term contractor. The canal director is pleased to report that the section of towpath between Norris Bridge and Eelmoor Bridge has now been refurbished to a good standard by volunteer working parties organised by the S&HCS. This mixed economy approach has meant that the rest of the towpath in the Rushmoor area can be refurbished this year, probably by the term contractor.

7. Future Canal Estate Developments

7.1 At the last JMC meeting in October 2011, the Canal Director was requested to reconvene the working group consisting of SCC, the BCA, S&HCS and the Canoe Club to progress the funding issue and agree a likely schedule of work for the construction of the new shower and toilet block. The full planning application has now been approved by SCC Planning Committee and work is now in progress to source funding for this project.

7.2 SCC Planning Committee also approved the provision and increase of camping up to 75 units subject to agreed conditions.

7.3 The development and wider commercial potential of the Canal Centre and the canal is now the subject of a full consultation on a vision and sustainability study. Planning Solutions Consultancy have been commissioned by SCC and HCC to carry out this exercise with a full report to be made in March 2012.

7.4 The Canal Director suggests that based on this study a business and sustainability plan is also produced by the consultants if funding allows.

7.5 Ash Lock Depot has been identified as a suitable site for a new operations base for the canal. Facilities could include wet and dry docks, workshops, offices and storage facilities. This is an important project for the canal and needs to be given a high priority.

7.6 Funding remains a key issue and the need for an agreement with Defence (MoD) Estates over access and acquisition of some land and utility services crossing their land. Work is now in progress to establish a foot print for the above requirements and to scope the dependencies essential to this project.

8. Key Performance Figures - Quarter 3 - October to December 2011

8.1 Complaints;

- 1 – The queuing time to purchase spaces for the Santa Cruises
- 2 – Regarding BCA boat 'Rosebud' breaking down and not having a back up boat available.

8.2 Compliments;

117 – On the organisation, running and the magical experience of the Santa cruises.

8.3 Number of Visitors (excluding towpath access counters) = 7,073

8.4 Number of volunteer days = 490
Number of student placement days = 10 = Total 500 days

8.5 Generated income from Santa Cruises = £18,760

9. Heritage Lottery Funding potential for Basingstoke Canal

9.1 A briefing paper for a potential bid will be presented to Members.

Recommendations:

- That the Director be supported on items as suggested, discussed and recommended in this report.
- 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.

Appendix 1

Open Access Proposal from the Open Access Working Group

Introduction:

Current Basingstoke Canal Authority policy requires that all boaters be escorted by rangers through the all locks except Ash Lock during limited periods (weekends and Bank Holidays are now excluded) to ensure water conserving measures are implemented. This has resulted in a general perception among the boating community that the Canal is 'unfriendly' and 'closed'. This policy is also costly relative to boat licence revenue, and so is generally regarded as unsustainable.

'Open Access' is described as being the use of the Basingstoke Canal by boaters without the direct supervision of the Basingstoke Canal Authority, as if they were using any other part of the canal network. 'Open Access' is required to enhance the Canal's reputation and to attract more boats, and is seen as necessary due to staff reduction and to maintain Health and Safety. The aim is to bring all boating in line with the industry norm where visiting boaters make a positive contribution to the bottom line.

Licensing:

For any non-Basingstoke licensed boats licences will be available from:

- Thames Lock (National Trust)
- Dapdune Wharf (National Trust)
- TLC (Independent chandlery at Parvis Wharf)

Licences will still be available, as now, via the normal procedures from the Basingstoke Canal Authority.

Outstanding Action: The Basingstoke Canal Authority to confirm that licence processes are in place with the National Trust and TLC. Checking of licences by BCA rangers will continue as now if appropriate.

Opening Hours:

Sunrise to sunset

Lock State:

Locks should not be drained after use as leaving the locks filled (after ascending a lock) will provide better security and proven sealing of the gates.

Outstanding Action: Before the implementation of the scheme, the Basingstoke Canal Authority to confirm that the locks can be left full. We understand this policy is acceptable for Woodham and St Johns flights. We believe leaving the locks full brings the Basingstoke Canal in line with the industry norm for Health and Safety.

Security of Locks:

We will need to secure the locks (locking the top paddles to prevent unauthorized wastage of water) – we have a number of options:

- Purchase new locks and keys in the ‘style of’ the BW Watermate keys. Keys to be available from TLC/National Trust for a ‘substantial’ deposit.
- Use BW Watermate keys – these can be easily purchased on websites such as E-Bay but most boaters will carry them as a matter of course.
- Combination locks.

On advice of Wardlaw and Sons (Locksmiths) we have decided not to further investigate combination locks.

We advocate the purchase of, and use of, new BW style locks for increased security.

Emergencies:

- The boater should call the Canal Centre on (01252) 370073
- Failing a response from the Canal Centre the boater should call the Duty Ranger on (07894) 425588

We advocate that these telephone numbers should be on all licence paperwork.

Water Level Maintenance:

1. Lock 1 to Lock 3 Woodham Flight

We are aware that water levels have remained relatively constant between Locks 1 and 3 due to close supervision by the Basingstoke Canal Authority and relatively few visiting boats in the recent past.

Houseboats moored in this area should be made aware that in future it is expected that an estimated water tolerance of +3” to -12” should be expected as ‘normal operations’ resulting from an expected increase in the number of visiting boaters who are operating locks unsupervised, coupled with some lateral movement due to passing boats.

In an emergency situation boats should be capable of ‘taking the bottom’ i.e. fit for purpose and the lease should reflect this ‘normal operation’. We would encourage the appropriate authorities to engage with the houseboat residents in this regard.

The ‘Open Access’ group is able to assist with technical details and with suggestions on how best to promote the Open Access scheme to the residents, and would be happy to do so.

2. Existing BCA Customers:

Existing customers are entitled to receive a level of service delivered with reasonable care and skill (Sale of Goods and Services legislation). The Basingstoke Canal Authority should therefore retain a position to restrict passage through a flight of locks or a combination of lock flights in order to maintain sufficient water levels for existing licence holders whose boats are resident on the Basingstoke Canal (NB this includes houseboats).

Open Access Start Date:

‘Open Access’ should not be implemented until a suitable and sustainable supply of water is secured. Please refer to the Water Resources Group document previously circulated.

The two outstanding issues to be addressed are:

- Leaving locks full when ascending a flight (as per normal industry practice) to maximise water retention and lock gate life. This was communicated to the BCA in December 2011.
- Negotiation of an enhanced water extraction licence for Woodham. This was communicated to the BCA and SCC in December 2011.