

BASINGSTOKE CANAL JOINT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

INLAND WATERWAYS ASSOCIATION REPORT TO JMC FEBRUARY 10th 2012

They last several months have been a period of considerable progress in fully reopening the canal and prospectively returning it to an acceptable navigation standard. If the good work continues there is now a realistic prospect within the next two to three years of having a high quality heritage navigation, a leisure facility and SSSI. In particular the owners the two county councils are to be congratulated on a number of new initiatives which are commented on in more detail below. Canal management is to be congratulated on a forecast for the year which implies a small surplus rather than a not so small deficit.

1. Open access.

The new open access policy has been agreed. It is proposed to pilot it at least between the bottom of Deepcut Locks and the Wey. This will start at the beginning of the season. As part of this policy it is acknowledged that the houseboats in the Woodham flight need to be free to rise 75mm and fall 300mm. The Canal Director is putting each houseboat owner on notice of this. It will also be a part of the new houseboat leases being negotiated by Surrey CC. Navigating boaters will be put on notice to exercise extreme care when passing moored houseboats to minimise any friction which may arise given the long absence of numbers of moving boats on the canal and to ensure that the benefits of open access continue to be enjoyed. Surrey County Council will continue to investigate the administrative costs of the leases which are said to exceed the rent. JMC are asked to give final approval to these matters.

2. Water supply, telemetry and boat movements.

Water supply on the canal continues to be an issue, particularly in dry months. The recently established Water Strategy Group (WSG) have proposed a number of areas to be investigated/progressed, including writing to South East Water (SEW). When the winter works have completed in the Hampshire pounds and at Deepcut the WSG have calculated that absent a drought it will take 20 days fully to refill the canal. Significant rainfall will shorten that. The Chairman has written to SEW to ask for assistance if the summer is dry. The WSG will see if they can improve the flow from the Frimley pump. WSG recommends, longer term, new boreholes feeding the Hampshire pound below Ash Lock and now applying for a licence increasing the Woodham back pumping. JMC are asked to endorse the obtaining of the appropriate licences by the owners. The efficiency of the canal can be improved with boat counters, costing £12,000 which Natural England will pay for and other telemetry which will, inter alia, automate back pumping costing £25,000 this year and £10,000 next. As the owners do not have the funds to pay for this with the owners permission IWA and the Canal Society will attempt to raise the funds from appropriate charities. Natural England we believe are on notice from the canal director to increase the

number of boat movements in the conservation plan. We believe consent has been given for the boats attending the Boat Rally in early June. It is disappointing that Natural England while supporting the canal financially attend very few meetings. Can JMC endorse the approach to Natural England by the Chairman to see how Natural England can be encouraged to play a fuller part in meetings and the restoration of the navigation which their own ecological advisor Professor Eaton says will be beneficial to the SSSI. Can JMC authorise the telemetry and its funding.

3. Publicity

There is a boat rally organised at Frimley Park on the Jubilee Bank Holiday weekend. The waterway press are giving this National publicity and it will be on IWA and Surrey and Hants CS websites. Can members of JMC and the organisations they represent do what they can to add to this? It is being trailed as the 21st Anniversary reopening rally.

As requested by some members of JMC IWA members have been encouraged to contact their local politicians whether riparian or not to say how much appreciated is the financial assistance and other work they do. The turnout for the e mail petitions regarding Bedser Bridge is perhaps an indication of how much the canal is appreciated.

4. Heritage Lottery Grant.

It is estimated that of the order of £5million needs to be spent to put the canal in safe working order. It is pleasing that the works expenditure authorised in March 2010 is now proceeding. The site contractor after a slow start is really getting to grips with the work and the weather has been benign. It is pleasing that the BCA Director has promised to reopen the canal next Spring. It is not so pleasing that it may well close again within a few months due to water shortage and more work will need to be done next winter.

Andy Smith of HCC has with his team made an excellent start on the HLF bringing together a group to work on a HLF bid. Enquiries with HLF have indicated that funding is very realistic and likely to cover the required funding gap. The canal society and the IWA are prepared to enter a partnership with the BCA, HCC and SCC to make such a bid and provide volunteers to work on the same. They are also prepared to contribute to the £6,500 initial costs. It should be noted that G & R had a successful small bid some years ago. SCC has made 2 successful bids this year. HCC is making a number of bids. The bid will require careful framing to maximise its chances with HLF. The "vision" exercise currently being funded by Surrey CC will no doubt be very helpful in this funding process. The Canal Society's value for money document demonstrates why a bid will work. It should also be noted that such a bid would be modest in terms of cost per mile or user compared with other waterway projects which have successfully bid for lottery funding. ACTION Andy Smith to be charged with the leading the partnership forward. JMC should endorse and support the separate paper on this proposal.

5. Management of Canal

Andy Smith has proposed a new structure for both strategy and day-to-day management of the canal. IWA believes this is a move forward and JMC should endorse these actions. It would be helpful if JMC created a steering group to manage the key issues between JMC's. It would also help if minutes were produced with 2 weeks of meetings so that actions are dealt with expeditiously.

6. Bedser Bridge, the Woking Canal Basin and other developments.

The positive response to the Bedser Bridge e petition by Woking Council was welcomed. In response to IWA and Canal Society prompting their offer of a canal basin in Woking is also welcome. This will have a very positive benefit for canal revenues. It will give a new facility for the people on waiting lists for space on the Wey are the near Thames facilities. It will benefit the local economy and further enhance Woking face which is turning increasing toward the canal. It has been estimated that waterside development has a higher value by some 20%. There are a number of other developments mainly in Hampshire which we would like to see maximised for canal value.

7. Campsite

It is pleasing that the campsite leisure facility has planning permission. IWA would like to see the business plan for this development. It should be revenue positive for the canal. Also there is a very realistic possibility that the Canoe England Grant can be reinstated and that the health or sport sections of lottery funding can be tapped. More visibility is needed as well as greater impetus.

Gareth Jones

Inland Waterways Association

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