

**Basingstoke Canal Joint Management Committee**

**Navigation Policy - Discussion Paper**



Hampshire  
County Council



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**Key Issue**

To approve an outline Navigation Policy for the Canal

**Summary**

The JMC is asked to consider an outline Navigation Policy to improve regular availability of navigation due to long standing poor water-supply and reduced staff numbers.

**Officer's recommendation**

The JMC is asked to:

- a) Approve that the BCA adopt a Navigation Policy limiting navigation through locks by all powered craft and unpowered craft which are permitted to use locks (except Ash Lock) to a restricted number of places and certain days of the week.
- b) Authorise the BCA to determine the details of how the policy operates practically in consultation with user groups. These details to include the number of days and places available, plus any variations according to time of year, weather conditions, staff / volunteer availability and water levels and set notice periods for any variations in conditions.
- c) Require the BCA to keep the policy under review in the light of changed circumstances.

## **1 Introduction & background**

- 1.1 The Basingstoke Canal is currently unusual, in national terms, in requiring boats to book in advance for passage through locks. This is necessary because the canal suffers from a severely limited water supply, and enables the Canal Ranger team to more thoroughly seal each lock gate after passage – a process known as “caulking up” – to limit water loss. Failure to do so has shown that short pounds between locks can drain quickly in as little as 12 hours.
- 1.2 The Water Strategy Group has carried out a limited amount of monitoring on the Surrey section of the Canal, and has estimated that the Canal is no less leaky than the average British canal – in fact it is marginally better, however the Canal has such a shortage of water that it cannot sustain even this level of leakage and evaporation; improvements in leak proofing locks whilst beneficial are therefore unlikely to bring about significant increases in the volume of water available for navigation in the summer, but may reduce the need to “caulk up” in wetter months.
- 1.3 There is a widespread opinion that the system of boats booking navigation, together with summer closures (which have been a feature of the Canal since construction), leads to many visiting boaters and potential resident moorers thinking that the Canal is “closed” for long periods. Whilst this is frequently a misconception it is widespread opinion in the boating press and social media websites, which damages the Canal’s reputation and harms the Canal as a tourist destination.
- 1.4 There have been calls made for the Canal to adopt the “open access” position adopted by Canal & River Trust (formerly British Waterways) on most of its network, where any licensed boat can operate locks unsupervised at any reasonable time. Indeed a report has been submitted to the JMC previously by interested parties calling for this position to be adopted.
- 1.5 In the owners’ view this is at best optimistic due to the issue of water supply, the Canal having been built to accommodate only a limited number of barges per day and closed for the first time due to lack of water in summer 1804.
- 1.6 There appears to be a strong mandate from the owners’ that there should be an increased amount of navigation – especially from Surrey where navigation is currently most restricted.
- 1.7 An on-going health & safety review of the “caulking-up” process has identified serious concerns over the practices currently employed by staff and it is not considered appropriate for volunteers to be permitted to engage in the current practices until significant safeguards have been put in place. With a reduced ranger force it is necessary to address the issue of how best to manage the navigation within the existing resources.

## **2 Discussion**

- 2.1 A SWOT analysis of various options is presented below, showing strength, weaknesses opportunities and threats of each proposed. This discussion is looking only at the general principle of each option, the details of any agreed position will need to be agreed between the BCA team in discussion with the various interested parties at a later date.

- 2.2 Analysing the SWOT table suggests that “open access” as originally envisaged may actually be one of the most harmful solutions to the Canal and its reputation – with potential for the canal to be drained rapidly through over-use or unskilled handling of paddle gear or gates.
- 2.3 Equally harmful would be the suggestion that the Canal close to navigation – and indeed there would appear to be little support for this option from any perspective.
- 2.4 This leaves the current system of booking in advance, a more restricted version of this with places and days limited but advertised in advance or unrestricted navigation limited to certain days of the week only.
- 2.5 Consideration of the various options using the SWOT analysis table indicate that no option is entirely without difficulty, however, that “Bookable passage restricted in number and to certain days” is the least harmful overall with clear advantages to work programming and may enhance the Canal’s reputation for consistent availability.

### **3 Consultation**

- 3.1 The idea of restricting navigation to certain days was discussed with IWA and S&HCS representatives at an informal meeting with Surrey and Hampshire County Council Officers on 14 September; in which it was suggested by the IWA that we should adopt a similar booking system to the Rochdale Canal which operates only 2 days per week over the summit pound.
- 3.2 The idea of limited navigation was presented to the Canal User Forum and a draft of this paper was submitted to the Joint Advisory Group where no strong recommendations or comments were received, except that any policy adopted now should be reviewed as and when circumstances change. This has been incorporated into a revised recommendation.

### **4 Financial and value for money implications**

- 4.1 Currently income from boating amounts for around 10% of the income to the BCA, yet on the nearby River Wey Navigation it amounts to nearly 40% of revenue income. It is important for the Canal’s future that the regular availability of navigation is improved so that in the future percentage of income generated from boating can start to rise, this will only happen as more boats visit the Canal or choose to moor on the Canal as a home base.

### **5 Equalities & diversity implications**

- 5.1 Lock passage with BCA Ranger or in the future volunteer Ranger / Lock Keeper supervision in one form or another may be beneficial for boaters with disabilities who may need assistance with lock operation.
- 5.2 The proposed alteration in Navigation Policy therefore has no adverse Equalities and Diversity impacts.

## **6 Crime & disorder implications**

- 6.1 Adopting an “open access” policy might lead to increased instances of vandalism as padlocks on lock gear will need to be standardised. It is also possible that tramp boats (continuous cruisers) may access the Canal from the rest of the network undetected for the same reason – and may then be difficult to remove.
- 6.2 There are no crime and disorder implications for adopting the recommended restricted amount of navigation under the supervision of BCA staff or in the future volunteer rangers / lock keepers.

## **7 Conclusion and recommendation**

- 7.1 The most beneficial method of improving the regular availability of navigation on the Canal in the short to medium term within current resources is to allow navigation through locks on a restricted basis.

## **8 What happens next**

- 8.1 The BCA and owners’ officer representatives will arrange meetings with the major boating user groups to agree the practical details of how the policy will operate.

Appendix 1 – SWOT analysis of navigation options

	Strength	Weakness	Opportunities	Threats
<b>Maintain existing ranger managed “bookable navigation”</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited water management issues</li> <li>Good control over licence and safety certificate status of visiting boats</li> <li>BCA know roughly where all boats are and can quickly advise boaters of potential closures or significant risks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Difficulty for Ranger team to plan maintenance and inspections work in advance</li> <li>Inefficient use of water and ranger time</li> <li>Limited ranger resources lead to poor availability of navigation</li> <li>Rangers need to caulk up / lock paddle gear at end of each passage</li> <li>Booking system discourages some tourist visits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited increase in numbers of visiting boats help support local economy</li> <li>Limited increase in income from boat licences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited availability may bring about (incorrect) perception Canal is “closed”, difficult to navigate</li> <li>Significant increase in boat movements may lead to Ranger team spending majority of time on navigation</li> </ul>
<b>Close navigation through locks (except Ash Lock)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ranger team can concentrate on inspection and maintenance</li> <li>Limited water management issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Loss of income from boat related traffic</li> <li>Ecological succession due to limited flow makes SSSI condition decline more rapidly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Potential to increase use by non-powered craft and other uses such as angling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Damage to local economy due to loss of tourist income – especially acute in Surrey</li> </ul>
<b>Continuous “open access”</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ranger team can concentrate on inspection and maintenance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Severe water management issues</li> <li>Higher water use makes summer closures more likely</li> <li>Poor control over licence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Greater numbers of visiting boats support local economy</li> <li>Greater income from boat licences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Damage to SSSI through loss of water</li> <li>Areas of Canal can be drained quickly through over use leading to safety issues for boaters</li> </ul>

		and safety certificate status of visiting boats		and houseboat residents <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More likely that “tramp” boats will access the canal</li> <li>• Potential loss of income from unlicensed craft</li> <li>• Summer closures due to water levels entrenches perception Canal is “closed”</li> </ul>
<b>Restricted “open access” on certain days</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ranger team can plan for inspection &amp; maintenance and navigation days</li> <li>• “Closed” intermediate days allow water levels to recover</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor control over licence and safety certificate status of visiting boats</li> <li>• Higher water use makes summer closures more likely</li> <li>• Rangers need to caulk up / lock paddle gear at end of day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater numbers of visiting boats support local economy</li> <li>• Greater income from boat licences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Damage to SSSI through loss of water</li> <li>• Areas of Canal can be drained quickly through over use leading to safety issues for boaters and houseboat residents</li> <li>• Summer closures due to water levels entrenches perception Canal is “closed”</li> </ul>
<b>Bookable passage restricted in number and to certain days</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good control over licence and safety certificate status of visiting boats</li> <li>• Ranger team can plan for inspection &amp; maintenance and navigation days</li> <li>• Limited water management issues –</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ranger team spend significant proportion of time dealing with navigation</li> <li>• Rangers need to caulk up / lock paddle gear at end of each passage</li> <li>• Booking system discourages some tourist visits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited increase in numbers of visiting boats help support local economy</li> <li>• Limited increase in income from boat licences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited availability may bring about (incorrect) perception Canal is “closed ” or difficult to navigate</li> </ul>

	<p>rangers can plan best use of water</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “Closed” intermediate days allow water levels to recover</li><li>• BCA know roughly where all boats are and can quickly advise boaters of potential closures or significant risks</li></ul>			

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