

THE BASINGSTOKE CANAL SOCIETY

Report to the Joint Management Committee – 26th June 2014

1. Recent work on the canal

Work on renovating the historic barn at Colt Hill, Odiham is almost complete and the Chairman of Hampshire County Council, Cllr Thornber, unveiled a plaque in May to record the efforts of the volunteers in restoring the building. The barn is now the base for the John Pinkerton trip boat which provides excursions on the western end of the canal throughout the summer.

Following the complete renovation of the Basingstoke Canal Authority's weedcutter, Society volunteers have been using the weedcutter to tackle the extensive weed growth in the Woking area and a significant section of the navigation has been cleared.

The Canal Society will be organising work camps for visiting volunteers this summer. Work will be undertaken at Brookwood and on the Deepcut flight of locks. These work camps continue a long tradition of volunteer working on the canal which dates back to the restoration phase in the 1970s and 1980s. The work camps are attended by young people from all over the country (and some from abroad) who spend part of their annual holiday undertaking all kinds of construction and renovation work on the canal. The Canal Society is indebted to Hampshire County Council for making its accommodation at the Runways End activity centre available this year for the visiting volunteers at an affordable cost.

2. Canal Society work party efforts

Since the February meeting of the JMC, Society work parties on the canal have undertaken 204 man-days work or approximately £18000 Equivalent Value in Kind (EVIK). The Society has also invested its charitable funds in the purchase of materials, the hiring of plant and equipment and the acquisition of parts for the weedcutter.

3. John Pinkerton 11

The outlook for the 2014 cruising season looks very promising with bookings at record levels. The charters this year will include a private charter for the Farnborough Air Show and several themed trips. These will comprise a Pirates trip, a Jazz and Ale Special, an 'Acoustic' trip, a Creamed Tea (with piano accompaniment) cruise and a 'Cruise with the Blues'. All these trips emphasize the importance of the John Pinkerton to the promotion of the canal. In the Canal Society's view there is no doubt that the John Pinkerton is an excellent ambassador for the canal providing both enjoyment to many hundreds (if not thousands) of people who would otherwise be unaware of its attractions. The trip boat

also generates considerable revenue which is then re-invested into the canal through the Society's work parties.

With the successful introduction of John Pinkerton 11, we have decided to sell John Pinkerton 1 which has served us well over the last 34 years. The boat is likely to go to a new home on the Kennet & Avon canal.

4. Planning

In the Canal Society's view there remains a vital need to ensure that the canal benefits from new developments in the canal corridor. This has been a recurrent theme in these reports but the fact remains that (unlike our sister waterway, the R Wey Navigation, for example) there is no 'joined up' approach to planning on the Basingstoke Canal. We can only repeat our suggestion that both counties and all six districts should make a real effort to formulate planning policies for the whole canal so that any new developments that are proposed, in canal-side locations, are required to provide benefits (including financial contributions) to the canal which is clearly used by developers as a basis for securing premiums for properties with canal frontages or access to the canal. Proper canal-based planning policies would also provide a very useful means of ensuring that developments on the rural sections of the canal are prevented or adequately controlled.

5. Magna Carta

In 2015 the 800th anniversary of the sealing of Magna Carta by King John at Runnymede in 1215 will be celebrated throughout the country. This creates an important opportunity to promote the canal next year. It is generally thought that King John was at his castle in North Warnborough immediately before he left for Runnymede to seal the Charter. This important connection with King John will be marked in Odiham by several events including a medieval fair, the recital of a specially commissioned anthem in the church, and an archery contest. The Canal Society is planning to hold a boat rally at Colt Hill in Odiham in May 2015 as part of the 800th anniversary celebrations. We will also be running specially themed 'King John' trips with commentaries on the historic events of 1215. A long distance walk is also planned from Odiham to Runnymede to re-enact the king's passage to the historic site on the Thames. All these activities will enable the canal to be promoted as a unique link (via the Thames) between Odiham and Runnymede. The support from all the members of the Canal Partnership would be very much welcomed in contributing to the success of this important anniversary.

6. Visitors Centres

The Canal Society warmly welcomes Surrey County Council's plans for a new visitor centre at Mytchett and we would be very pleased to offer our active support for this project. However, given that the canal is 32 miles in length, there is, in our view, a need for smaller visitor centres (or visitor information centres) at the eastern and western ends of the canal. Suitable locations need to be identified but suitable sites might exist in Woking and Odiham. We would urge the JMC to undertake a review on the options for

further visitor centres including a consideration of location, funding, staffing (could volunteers be used?) and design options. There is an obvious need to market the canal more effectively and the experience of other canals (for example the Wey & Arun, Grand Western, Kennet & Avon) would indicate that visitor centres are an effective way of attracting support (both financial and volunteer) to waterways.

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Chairman
The Basingstoke Canal Society

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