

Key Issue

To seek approval for creation of a new mooring line on the Basingstoke Canal to increase revenue income for the Basingstoke Canal Authority.

Summary

A new mooring for privately owned boats at Farnborough Road (Wharf) Bridge will generate an additional revenue for the BCA Canal Partnership, from a previously unproductive area of the Canal estate. A business plan shows that over 20 years there is a very positive NPV, with payback within 5 years.

Officer's recommendation

That the Committee authorises officers to implement the proposed moorings and associated alterations to the adjoining car park at Farnborough Road (Wharf) Bridge.

1 Introduction & background

The Canal estate, especially in Hampshire, lacks significant areas of land other than the water itself, the most significant opportunities for revenue generation therefore have to come from the water where this can be realised.

Mooring fees from privately owned boats bring in one of the BCA's largest streams of revenue and the BCA are at last seeing demand for new moorings on the canal now it has remained an open, accessible and viable part of the canal network for several years.

2 Discussion

The BCA moorings at the Canal Centre have taken a couple of years to generate significant interest amongst boat owners, but now with a small amount of turnover of spaces it is usually full, with a demand to fill any vacated spaces. An actual income of £14,161 from this similar sized premium mooring was received this year, against a theoretical maximum of £15,375 at 80% occupancy.

Moorings do require an amount of land next to them (for car parking, rubbish disposal, etc) to make them viable and this is one limiting factor on the number potential locations. Better security or additional services such as water, or electricity will allow the BCA to charge at the higher "premium" rate.

A further limiting factor on the number of moorings along the Canal is the requirement to manage powered boat numbers to ensure there is no harm to the protected features of the SSSI. There is a legal duty for the owner to protect and enhance the SSSI. The limit currently agreed with Natural England is between 700 – 1300 boat movements past any one location annually. The average for the Canal is currently 936 movements, with fewer movements in Surrey than Hampshire. This shows that without significant improvement to the SSSI condition only a small amount of additional powered boat traffic will be acceptable, especially in the Hampshire section of the Canal.

The proposed design of mooring pontoon has been agreed with Natural England in other locations and is relatively cheap and straightforward to construct. The design is under 200m³ and is therefore “permitted development” under Town & Country Planning legislation, subject to the requirement to carry out an Environmental Impact Assessment Screening.

Some alterations will be required to the layout of Farnborough Road car park, reserving a larger area for boat owners than at present.

3 Financial implications

The Business Plan attached as *Annexe 1* shows that the project makes a surplus throughout its proposed 20 year life, due to a generous offer to donate the equivalent cost of materials to construct the pontoon by the Canal Society – estimated at £40,000. The Canal Society have also offered to be the BCA’s main contractor constructing the pontoon with volunteer labour at virtually nil cost.

The main assumption is that the Canal remains open for powered boat traffic March-October each year, summer water supply notwithstanding. The project has a positive Net Present Value of £134,570 over 20 years; this represents excellent value for money with a quick turnaround of income.

Should the Canal Society decide that they do not wish to donate the set up costs, and the BCA pay out the full cost for this project, the business case is still good with a Net Present Value of £94,530 over 20 years, and pays back the capital costs in year 5.

4 Consultation

The BCA have discussed the matter with Natural England, who have expressed a few reservations about Assenting new moorings at a time when the most recent botanical survey suggests that the improvement in SSSI condition, reported previously, has apparently not been sustained. They state that they will approve the proposal but would not want to see a proliferation of moorings, and may impose a time limit and/or a requirement to increase water quality monitoring. The location however fits with the idea of “honeypot” sites for boating located at widening of the Canal in accordance with the Conservation Management Plan.

Rushmoor Borough Council and Hampshire County Council’s Planning Unit require that an EIA Screening opinion is obtained before development takes place due to the sensitive nature of the Canal as an SSSI.

Runways End Outdoor Activity Centre have pointed out that the moored boats may be struck by their novice canoeists – potential moorers will need to be made aware of this issue.

The Treasurer is content that the Business Plan is sound and will be a financial benefit to the BCA Canal Partnership.

5 Equalities & diversity implications

A level route from the car park and a ramp with handrails to allow wheelchair access to at least 1 of the moorings will be incorporated into the design. An increased width over the Canal Centre pontoon design will be adopted to ensure those with more limited mobility can gain access to other moorings.

The Canal already offers extensive services for people with disabilities through the offer from the charities Accessible Boating (Hampshire) and Recreational Boating for the Disabled (Surrey).

6 **Crime & disorder implications**

The mooring pontoon is located in an area removed from residential dwellings; there is a therefore a greater potential for boats to be vandalised. As with any unmanned site moorers will need to be made aware of the possible risk before accepting the agreement. Fibreglass or soft-topped cruiser style boats may not be suitable for this location. Should there be any issues consideration should be given to installing CCTV and/or making the exception to the Canal policy on live-aboard boaters for one mooring space in return for “night watchman” duties.

7 **Conclusion and recommendation**

Given that there are likely to be at least some reduction in Local Authority funders in the coming 24 months, these moorings make economic sense. They add an additional revenue stream to the BCA and make an area which was previously a financial liability (a free car park, previously prone to fly-tipping) into a revenue generating asset.

It is recommended therefore that the generous offer of the BCS to fund the capital costs of construction is accepted, and officers are authorised to obtain all necessary consents and then implement the project.

8 **What happens next**

- Officers will obtain consents and implement the project

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