

Report to the JMC 30th November 2017

1. Work parties

The Society regular work party has recently returned to bank and overhanging tree clearance, mainly at the western end of the Canal. Before that, the main project since the last JMC meeting was to complete a section of bank repair at Colt Hill, including the making safe from protruding tree roots and paving along about 100m of towpath, a job which has been outstanding for a while.



The team has also been working on renovating the Society workboat *Fly II*, and have also recently acquired a third workboat called *Jim (Douglas)* – below. The purpose for having a third workboat, once the work on *Fly II* is complete, is so that the team can have a boat based on each of the three main pounds, which will save a considerable amount of time moving boats about between jobs.



The Society engineering team has also been busy on projects for the BCA. Since the last JMC meeting, these have included repairs to the *Rosebud* trip boat, fitting an engine and making a winter cover and supporting frame for the rescue boat, refurbishing the second work boat, refurbishing a trailer, repairing the Ash Lock saw bench motor, and weedcutter maintenance and clearing hydrocotyle weed near Lock 1.

2. Trip boats

The Society's trip boats have enjoyed a very successful season in 2017. The *John Pinkerton II* has carried 5378 passengers on 187 trips including 118 charter trips, 39 public trips and 9 themed trips. The themed trips included the ever-popular Jazz & Ale Specials and our cream tea trips (with piano accompaniment!). We also arranged a special trip for the Hampshire Emergency Services and Police in order to improve their knowledge of the canal and facilitate access to the boat to attend incidents. We also invited a number of councillors on another special trip, a few of whom took the helm.



In Surrey our 12-seater trip boat *Kitty* (*below*) had an excellent first season of operation on the Woking pound where trips were offered from Woking Town Wharf eastwards towards the top lock on the Woodham Flight. 56 trips took place, carrying nearly 400 passengers, and many complimentary comments were made in the visitor book. We now have a dedicated *Kitty* team in Woking who are enthusiastically supporting the new operation. We believe that there is considerable demand for public boat trips in the Woking area and we are looking forward to building on our successful first year by offering more trips next year including trips which are being operated in collaboration with The Lightbox.



3. Projects

The Society is very keen to use its volunteer work force and its financial resources to support projects to improve the Canal. However, we are becoming increasingly concerned about the delays in launching new projects. For example, we have previously referred to the proposal to build new moorings at Farnborough Road near Runways End which would provide additional revenue earning potential for the Canal. We have offered to finance the whole cost of this project and to undertake the work with our volunteer team. However, we are very disappointed to learn that the project is further delayed due to unspecified concerns raised by Natural England. If the proposed transfer of the Canal to the Canal & River Trust is to be achieved (and the Society is strongly supportive of that idea), then it is clearly vital that every opportunity should be taken to pursue revenue generating opportunities. In that regard we believe that all the members of the Canal Partnership (including Natural England) should be applying their maximum energies to identify ways in which additional revenue streams can be developed. We are therefore calling for a proper discussion with Natural England on how issues such as Farnborough Road can be resolved without the endless delays which appear to affect modest proposals of this kind.

4. Transfer to the Canal & River Trust

The Society has warmly welcomed the announcement by the County Councils in October that they intend to work with the Canal & River Trust over the next 5 or so years to find a feasible way of transferring the management and ownership of the canal to the Trust. We have consistently supported that proposition which we regard as the

only sensible avenue to secure a long term and stable future for the Canal. However, we fully accept that much needs to be done in order to prepare the Canal for the transfer and we would therefore urge all members of the Canal Partnership to propose ways in which they could enhance the attractiveness of the Canal to the Trust. In particular, we believe that all the Partners (and in particular the District Council members) should put the whole of their agreed contributions into the canal budget to enable the BCA to maintain the canal in good order. We also believe that Partnership members could step up their efforts to support the Canal. For example, there is considerable potential for the District authorities to obtain benefits for the Canal through Planning Gain, CIL etc. The Districts and the Counties could also do much more to promote the Canal in their communities and to include the Canal in their community programmes. In this regard we are reminded of the very successful Woking Canal Festival which amply demonstrated that the public are very enthusiastic supporters of 'their' canal and want to see improved access to it. Local publicity could certainly assist in achieving that objective.

5. Swan Cutting

We must return once again to the difficult issue of the essential repairs needed to Swan Cutting, North Warnborough. We have previously mentioned that our trip boat crews are becoming increasingly frustrated over the difficulty of navigating the cutting, particularly in dry summer months. Clearly urgent action is required and the Society has attempted to alert the County Councils to the developing problem. In March we delivered an engineers report to the County Councils. This included some suggested recommendations on possible solutions to the narrowing and silting of the cutting. At the JMC in July it was agreed that the repairs to Swan Cutting would be elevated from Priority 2 to Priority 1 in Hampshire County Council's list of outstanding projects. Despite this, we appear to be no nearer a solution. The Society must therefore repeat, yet again, its request for appropriate action to be taken. We hope that the JMC will appreciate that the seriousness of the position at Swan Cutting does merit prompt and effective action.



Philip Riley

Chairman
The Basingstoke Canal Society

13th November 2017