

## BASINGSTOKE CANAL CENTRE - CAMPSITE PROPOSALS

As per the Canal Campsite – Decision Report – presented to the Joint Management Committee meeting on Thursday 30 November 2017.

Comments submitted by Alan Norris, 3 Avon Close, Ash GU12 6NS

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I offer the following comments on the Camp site report. I and my family have used campsites within the UK and occasionally abroad on a regular basis for around 30 years. Many of our camping stays have been on sites run by the Camping and Caravanning Club (CCC) of which we were members. The CCC is a respected member based organisation with over 100 campsites, both owned and franchised, across the UK. Their campsites are maintained to a very high standard and many sites have good usage with some sites open all year.

1. I note that of the two organisations consulted, David Morley Associates (<http://davidmorleyarchitects.co.uk/>) are architects with projects listed as typically being large prestigious designs. Campsites or similar projects did not feature. The website for 'A Different View'. <http://www.adifferentviewonline.com/>. indicates that their client focus was predominantly the leisure business and visitor attractions. I could not find any of their clients and projects within the camping sector.
2. There is no indication in the report that any advice has been sought from an experienced campsite operator, such as CCC. I do not know if the CCC offers any consultancy service to campsite operators, but they have franchised campsites – details on: <https://www.campingandcaravanningclub.co.uk/franchising/> They may be willing to offer some informal advice which could be in the form of a visit to a campsite to see how they are operated. There is a CCC campsite at Chertsey which is open year round. The Caravan Club, another member based operation, also has sites across the UK.
3. The number of electric hook up pitches (10) is rather low, and for 75 pitches this will be insufficient to meet expected demand. When I have camped the proportion of visitors in caravans and motor homes to tents was around 3 to 1, with a higher ratio in winter when there are fewer tents, but then there would be a lower total number of visitors. Many caravan and motorhome visitors will book a hook-up pitch. If open at Christmas / New Year there could be a significant demand as winter caravan breaks are now quite popular.
4. I have concerns on operating a campsite with staffing only available during the canal centre office hours. I am presuming this is the case at present as the website states that visitors are required to arrive between 12.30pm and 4.30pm. A campsite of 75 pitches is not dissimilar to running a medium size hotel in terms of the number of visitors on site, except that no restaurant, bar or room servicing is needed. At a typical hotel the reception is generally staffed in some form until mid evening, when a night porter is available for later hours and overnight. Section 6 of the report states that the maintenance officer's hours will be increased to full time cover and the canal ranger will cover out of hours issues. But full time cover equates to around 40 hours a week. Limited or no staff is acceptable on a basic site with no facilities other than a water point and toilet disposal. The canal ranger may live some distance from the canal centre, but they are still able to fulfil call-out duties anywhere along the canal. Call out duties are generally intended to be on an occasional basis, and are additional hours to normal day time work hours. Regular calls from the campsite to the canal ranger out of hours would be unacceptable. A hotel would not operate with the night porter based, say, 10 miles away in the next town.

5. The staffing levels seem rather on the low side for a site of this size with the expected increased usage. CCC sites of similar size will have two site managers (often a couple) and a deputy, and they will be resident on site, usually in their own caravan. With adequate staffing on site, this provides availability of a responsible person in case of daytime and overnight emergencies (as will inevitably arise at some time), and allows for rest days / time off. On CCC sites the site managers will usually go off duty by 8.00pm, but they will be available for emergencies after then. The site managers / deputy will undertake the routine site cleaning, grass cutting and light maintenance. These staff are often early retired people taking up another occupation and who have a keen interest in running a well operated and maintained site. If the canal authority is to scale up the scope and business of the camp site then it is essential that the staff who run it have experience in the leisure and campsite activities. The site managers need to be customer focused and enhance the vacation experience of visitors, and have had appropriate training. The campsite should not be run as an add-on to the canal centre where there may be conflicting demands on the canal rangers and admin staff. That arrangement might work reasonably well with the limited facility site as currently, but not with an enlarged operation.
6. On CCC campsites visitors are often escorted to their pitch by a site manager, and this is an opportunity to point out any site features – all a part of friendly customer service. A site manager needs to be available during the main arrival times, mid/late afternoon and early evening, seven days a week to welcome visitors. On a 75 pitch site at full occupancy and with an average stay of 3 days, there will be an average of 25 arrivals in the course of, say, 4 hours, i.e. one arrival every 10 minutes if evenly spaced. Visitors, especially those travelling longer distances, can't be expected to arrive during the canal centre office hours merely for the convenience and working hours of the staff. It is also useful to have the reception manned for an hour or so in the morning to deal with enquiries from visitors.
7. The toilet / washroom blocks on CCC sites are cleaned every day (usually during mornings after most visitors have left). A second light clean and check of the toilets is done in the early evening to maintain high standards. The toilet block / facilities area should be of sufficient size to cater for a high site occupancy. There is a 'rush hour' in the facility usage in the mornings, and visitors should expect to be able to use the facilities without an undue wait. The CCC will have plans of toilet blocks of various sizes and layouts which they may be able to supply at an appropriate fee.
8. The CCC has a charging policy of high season (typically July, August and bank holiday weeks), mid season (typically May, June, September) and low season (March, April, part September and October). Standard charges throughout the season (as currently shown on the canal centre website) do not maximise the income from booking fees, i.e. they are probably too cheap for the high season and too high for the low season, where the cost might discourage visitors who are often retired people and who may have limited incomes.
9. In conclusion, I believe that the camp site proposals should be reviewed again before approval, and the actual operation of the campsite is more clearly defined in terms of staffing, including the availability of staff outside of the canal centre hours.

Alan Norris  
25 November 2017