

Canal Management Report

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Key Issue

To inform the Committee of actions taken by the Strategic Manager and BCA Canal Manager in managing, maintaining and operating the Canal; and report the work of the Conservation Steering Group.

Operation & maintenance

BCA Maintenance & Inspection Works

Planned

The BCA carried out the following planned maintenance and inspection tasks:

- Lock 17 new balance beam installed
- Summer cutting of 64 miles of towpath
- Summer cutting of canal car parks
- Japanese knotweed injection along whole canal
- Principle inspection of Locks 18 – 24 started early in September taking advantage of empty locks in Deepcut.
- Frimley pump pipe broken and investigation and repairs followed. Frimley pump not working at all this summer as a result.
- Canal centre Swing bridge roller bearings replacement
- Car park night time closures implemented at Barley mow car park and Crookham wharf car park
- Arrangement for paid pub advertising in Crookham car park
- Length Inspections, High Risk Embankment Inspections, Supplemental Inspections, Reservoir Surveillance Inspections and the Lock General Inspections were all conducted on target.

Reactive

- Lower gates at Lock 18 damaged beyond repair by a visiting boater. Deepcut closed in May as a result.
- Lock 18 gates replaced in July however water levels too low to re-open Deepcut and Brookwood. Claim with insurance company for substantial costs incurred in repairs.
- Lock 3 replanking carried out in September after it sprang a leak and temporary repairs not possible.
- Lock 17 replanking carried out taking advantage of low water levels in Deepcut
- Lock 18 upper gate cills replaced taking advantage of low water levels in Deepcut
- Repair to minor leak at double bridge which appears to have been successful
- Lock 1 pumphouse track, a leaking pipe was discovered and repaired
- Seepage investigation on embankment at Claycart. Being monitored.
- Fish rescues carried out in Woodham in July with many fish deaths due to extreme heat, high water temperatures and duck weed blooms all reducing oxygen availability for fish. The EA attended. This was a common occurrence this year across the country with many water bodies fish stocks suffering.

Events/Visitor Services

- Storage shipping containers moved from the canal centre in preparation for a new improved bin area for campsite
- Successful summer season with Rosebud trips raising over £10K fully supported by volunteers running 4 trips/day, trips 6 days/week during school holidays. While Rosebuds basic trips were more successful with more bums on seats/trip this year, the cream tea trips proved particularly popular and sold out weeks in advance.
- Record breaking year for unpowered boat hire, where for once the hot weather had a positive effect for the canal and brought hirers out in their droves.
- The need for people to be near water when its hot was also reflected in the increase in unpowered boat licences sold on the canal.
- Rangers entered a team to support in the canal's 1st Raft Race event and won!
- Visitor Services Officer and volunteers attended open days at Fleet Pond, and River Wey festival and also had a stall at the Odiham raft race.
- The Canal Centre staff trialled late opening in the summer holidays till 6pm to see if this had a positive effect on income. It was found to not substantially increase income or outweigh the additional staff expenses incurred. As a result late opening will only happen next school summer holidays at weekends when the site is at its busiest.
- An accidental caravan fire on the campsite thankfully had no casualties. Resulting damage to the fence has been repaired and the grass now reseeded. A claim to the insurance company for the caravan owner was made for costs to clear up the dangerous waste. The site has been inspected by HCC Head of Risk Safety as a result and no issues were found with on-site procedures.
- The campsite had some difficulties this year with unruly campers and noise. These issues have been considered in the proposed development of the site with a strong need for an onsite warden in the evening as well as during the day to better enforce the rules that are already in place.
- We now have 3,388 followers of our Facebook page
- The lack of online booking facilities continues to hamper development of several of the BCA's business streams.
- There was an attempted break out of the barn at the canal centre, where someone managed to gain access to the barn through the canoe storage area, but due to our increased security they were then unable to break back out with any equipment!

Volunteers

- Volunteer Celebration Hog Roast event for 200 people as a joint celebration with the Canal Society for their prestigious Queens Award.
- Two Volunteers undertook their BC 1 star canoe award to help with weed and rubbish clearance
- Over the summer the Tuesday group have been undertaking extensive Lock gate painting, hydrocotyle removal and general vegetation works and rubbish removal to keep the towpath clear.
- A sub group is now using the work boat on occasional weekends in Woking clearing rubbish and hydrocotyle which has resulted in several trailer loads of rubbish being removed from the canal.
- The Patrol boat has had a busy summer, spending more time in the Fleet area and as well as usual patrols, licence checks and rubbish and debris clearance it also assisted with special missions to clear the Barley Mow winding hole for the JP11 and facilitated the Bat swarming survey at the Greywell tunnel entrance.
- The Weedcutter having undergone some maintenance works has also been out lifting out mats of hydrocotyle in Woking and Woodham.

Capital Works Programme

The following works from the capital works programmes of Surrey and Hampshire County Councils have been carried out from the 2017 programme:

Surrey

- **Woking town wharf** – works took longer than expected and are still on-going at the time of writing, however they are due to finish by the end of September. (8 weeks behind Schedule)
- **Bank protection** – a scheme of bank protection throughout the Surrey half of the Canal will begin in early October.
- **Deedmans Bridge** – works started to widen the towpath around the bridge that had become too narrow – contractor to rectify snags.
- **Lock inspections / repair** – Deepcut Locks 18 – 24 Principle inspection has begun with follow-up works planned for Dec – Jan

Hampshire

- **Bank protection** projects were delayed due to contractor availability. Bank protection works are due to start in Surrey from October and although there are still some works planned in Hampshire unfortunately a substantial part of the money allocated for these works had to be diverted to deal with a leak which suddenly worsened at Pyestock shortly before the Farnborough Airshow in July.
- **Crookham Deeps** – the embankment between Poulter's Bridge and Chequers Bridge has been leaking ever since restoration in the 1980s. Several schemes of repairs have been tried over the year which have only worked partially. A scheme of bed lining (similar to the successful works at Ash Embankment in 2016) is planned for January
- **Swan "cutting"** – The Canal Society's Engineer has submitted some outline proposals for how the issues experienced in the Canal channel at Swan might be addressed. This has been carefully considered by HCC's Engineering team. Their view is that further information is required before a detailed design can be arrived at, as there is some evidence that the issues are wider than the Canal. The Strategic Manager has now instructed HCC Estates and Engineering to liaise with the landowners so the additional data can be obtained.

Management Team

The Canal Manager and Strategic Manager have been working on the following matters:

- **Canal Centre Campsite Redevelopment** – Following a consultation with neighbours and interested parties Plans and preparatory surveys have been prepared and a planning application was submitted in early September.
- **Staffing** - A minor staff restructure is being looked at following the resignation of the Senior Admin Assistant, to ensure the visitor centre can cope in summer seasons, and also looking at ways to ensure that the BCA meet all of their key inspection targets. Two new seasonal roles of campsite warden and visitor services assistant are being considered.
- **Chobham Road turnover bridge** – the Strategic Manager is engaged with design and consents approvals for a Woking Borough Council / SCC project funded by EM3 to provide a new turnover bridge at Chobham Road, Woking. A planning application has now been granted by Woking Borough Council. The bridge will be owned by Woking BC under an agreement with SCC as Canal owner.
- **Water Environment Grant** – the Canal Manager has been working on working up a suitable project to enhance the Canal SSSI using measures set by the Environment Agency in the Water Framework Directive and Natural England; this will be a project based on conservation objectives in the Canal's Conservation Management Plan (see below). The grant is to enhance rural stretches of water and a substantial "pot" of funding is available for projects over the next three years. This is a one-time only grant application process as it is based on EU funding. Still awaiting response to this

- **Abstraction Licensing** – The water abstraction licensing regime changed on 1 January 2018. A large number of previously exempted activities, including navigation, now require licensing. Navigation Authorities are entitled to transitional arrangements and some exemptions within their waterway system; but non-navigation authorities require abstraction licences for every water transfer. The EA have previously challenged SCC/HCC/BCA's role as a navigation authority, there is therefore a substantial risk that additional costly licenses would be required for each lock and bypass should their previous view prevail. The Strategic Manager has therefore instructed SCC Legal Services to engage a legal Counsel for advice, and Counsel has now issued advice which is in the Councils favour.
- **Conservation management Plan** – Following consultation with the Conservation Steering Group over the draft plan a second draft has been produced and is now ready for submission to Natural England for assent. Partners have been sent a copy of this 2nd draft as an opportunity to comment on this before final submission.
- **Basingstoke Canal Canoe Club Changing Facilities** – After a request from BCCC the management team worked with BCCC to source and suitable temporary building to act as changing rooms and kitchen for the club. This 2nd hand refurbished portacabin has now been installed next to the BCCC barn and connected to services to provide a water supply, drainage and electricity for lighting and heating, providing improved year round facilities for the club.