

November 2020 Basingstoke Canal Society report to JMCActivity in 2020:

The COVID pandemic continues to affect us all. Compared the 27,700 volunteer hours that we did in 2019, our boating and work party work has been impacted:

- we have lost £50k trip boat income with very limited operations of the trip boats, despite considerable work to ensure COVID compliance when trips were possible
- the BCA Tuesday work parties and weekend work parties were closed down during the lockdowns. Pleasingly weekend work party is now able to work and finish off Farnborough Moorings
- Other smaller work parties have been out including the weedcutter to help control in the invasive hydrocotyle weed

In the meantime the society continues to modernise and put in place a sound organisational structure to support the canal going forward. This includes:

- People: 30 people recruited 'behind the scenes' with specialisms ranging from planning, project work, marketing and fundraising
- Website: the new website is live with online membership and sales. Already we have approaching a 100 new members and there is 200% increase in the sales of books (including Fiona's Paddleboard book!). This includes the 2021 Calendar which was produced from a photography competition. Boat bookings will also be online for 2021
- Communications: with the electronic Bulletin, Facebook reaching over 10,000 each month, and links out to local clubs and societies, we have channels to quickly and easily reach the local community.
- Campaigns: Indeed our first major marketing campaign is now in progress to help increase membership and to raise funds for our projects (see Information Points below). This campaign is being delivered through our Facebook page, press releases, Bulletin
- Volunteer Leaders: we now have around 8 volunteer leaders trained to help run volunteer work groups, thereby giving the BCA further flexibility for working parties and in time corporate volunteer days

Key Plans in place and going forward:

1) working with the BCA/Councils:

Recognising that the BCS can really help the Canal with Volunteers, project management, expertise and funds, we had a very constructive meeting with Cllr Glenn, Jo Heath and James Taylor 28/10, at which it was agreed that we will work more closely together going forward.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) will be signed asap and we will allocate projects where the BCS can lead, with regular joint meetings to track progress. WE SEE THIS AS A VERY IMPORTANT STEP FORWARD

2) Particular projects already underway/planned:

- Information Points along Canal: we kicked off this campaign a month ago to raise £20k to provide more info signs. Already we have raised £5k from donations and pledges. BCA have also mentioned the idea of making better use of the Pill Boxes along the Canal to engage canal users
- Moorings at Farnborough Road: the Week End Work Party plan to finish these moorings in the next couple of months which have cost £80k with the revenue of £25k to be received by the BCA, along with the benefit of increasing boat mooring facilities
- Odiham Moorings: we are looking at a similar mooring project at Odiham with potential £15k income to the BCA. The BCA are keen for us to discuss and identify other suitable mooring locations
- An eco friendly trip boat, including disabled access, to replace our Woking trip boat
- Our planners are doing work to investigate the possibility of getting a 'Right of Way' foot-path along the last 5 miles of the canal to Basingstoke

3) Swan Cutting:

The Society remains very concerned about Swan cutting and the potential closure of the upper reach of the canal due to land slippage. This, unless rectified, could cause severe limitations to boating including potentially reduced use of the top end of the canal (and access to King John's Castle), including a dramatic loss of income to the society, and therefore to the Canal. The BCS is keen to get closer to understanding the work underway and the progress being made as this has run on for several years

4) Other BCS support to the Canal (via the BCA):

The BCS continues to support with an annual £6k contribution to the BCA towards volunteer training and equipment. Plus we have recently we donated nearly 300 of our Canal books to the BCA for sale in their shop along with hedge trimmers and strimmers to help with the volunteer maintenance work.

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