



**BASINGSTOKE CANAL JOINT MANAGEMENT
COMMITTEE**

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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 since the preceding meeting, and look forward work likely to happen in the 2nd half of 2020; also to report the work of the Conservation Steering Group.

10/20

1. Operation & Maintenance

1.1. BCA Maintenance & Inspection Works

- Repairs to Ash Vale Sluice as result of weir and sluices Principle Inspection.
- New boat licence signs installed at all main entrances & car parks on the canal.
- Lock 28 chamber was suction pumped out to remove the build-up of material in the bottom of the chamber.
- Annual lock inspections carried out and follow-up minor works started.
- Clearance of 37 fallen trees from towpath and navigation since the middle of May, mainly as a result of high winds and rainfall while the trees are heavy in full leaf.
- Navigation through Deepcut and Brookwood locks stopped due to summer water shortage on 25th July, re-opening on 12th October.
- Lock 26 sluice chamber unblocked by contractors.
- Leak found at Lousey Moor embankment on 27th May. Emergency contractors Land and Water attended site and leak stopped. Two Leaks found by River Whitewater aqueduct on 15th Oct. Rangers attended site and temporarily stopped both leaks. Land and Water attending site to carry out follow up emergency softbank works planned for week beginning 9th Nov.
- Length Inspections, Supplemental Inspections, Reservoir Surveillance Inspections / Reservoir Inspection by the Supervising Engineer, and the Lock General Inspections were all conducted

1.2. Events/Visitor Services

- The canal campsite re-opened on 4th July well in time for the school summer holidays. This was for people who were self-sufficient, having their own toilet as a minimum requirement. The toilet and shower facilities have not yet been re-opened to campers.
- The canal centre toilets re-opened to the public for the school holidays and in time for the re-opening of the onsite café.
- The Canal Visitor Centre re-opened in July and with many special measures in place was able to run a profitable boat hire business from the 4th July, if at a reduced capacity with additional staffing costs.

- A new coffee van venture was set up by third party licensee *Kiwi and Scott* at the beginning of July and is based at Woking Wharf. A licence agreement is in place for this with the BCA receiving a percentage share of the profits. This appears to have been successful and well received in Woking. BCA are considering what other areas a similar venture might work in.
- We now have 5,632 followers on our Facebook page, 1,813 followers on Twitter and 915 on Instagram (as of 7th Oct 2020).
- Interviews are being held in October for the Visitor Services Officer position which has been vacant this summer.
- The decision has been taken to cancel the popular Santa Cruises event for this December due to restrictions for Covid 19 and uncertainly over how this will continue to develop, making it near impossible to run the event. Santa is also quite vulnerable, and we don't wish to be the cause of a no presents Christmas this year!
- At end of season 4 of the canoes that form part of the canoe hire fleet were sold off. Income from these will go towards replacing these boats with new ones. This is part of a planned on-going replacement of a proportion of boats at the end of each season to keep the hire fleet in good condition.

10/20

1.3. Conservation

- The full canal wetland flora survey was carried out by Hampshire Biological Information Centre (HBIC) during July. Awaiting final report due in late November.
- The commercial Crayfish trapper on the canal managed to be included in a licence issued under the new Invasive Alien Species (Enforcement and Permitting) Order 2019 to trap and transport crayfish directly to a licensed distributor. So, we have managed to continue trapping Crayfish this year with approximately 4 tonnes removed from the canal. This is a temporary licence which we hope will continue to be renewed by Natural England.
- In conjunction with the vegetation survey a Turbidity Survey of the canal was carried out in July by a special task force of boat-based volunteers with readings taken every 250m along the canal. These results are now being considered alongside the wetland flora survey results and will be presented as part of that report.
- The annual Japanese Knotweed herbicide injection programme has taken place along the canal.
- New Non-Native Invasive Species signs (sponsored by RAPID LIFE & managed by the Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust) have been installed at main paddlesports and trail boat launch areas along the canal to encourage boaters to clean their boats before and after use on waterways to stop the spread of unwelcome species.

1.4. Volunteers

- Volunteers are now operational in groups of 6 with up to 2 groups out each Tuesday. Volunteers are also very active with the weedcutter boat getting on top of the floating pennywort in Woking and also volunteers have been working on this with small groups using a canoe around the houseboats below lock 3.
- Volunteers helped with preparation of the towpath survey points in preparation for the flora survey.
- A new system has been introduced by HCC Countryside for recording volunteer hours. Volunteers have re-registered and now enter their own hours online. This system is in early stages and we are still working with volunteers to ensure they record their hours accurately; no figures are available as yet while the new system beds in.
- A new booking system has also been introduced to allow us to better manage volunteer numbers on volunteer days which also allows us to control numbers to comply with Covid 19 restrictions.
- The patrol boat has been out and about as well and assisting (along with many Lengthsmen and staff) in checking boat licences which there has been a crack down on this year, reaping large additional benefits in income and an enviable 74% licence compliance rate.

2. Management Actions

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

- 2.1. **Canal Centre Campsite Redevelopment** – Unfortunately we were unsuccessful in our bid for grant funding for this project. We are now sourcing alternative funding. This will however mean the timescale of this project has been extended and put back.
- 2.2. **Chobham Road turnover bridge** –The new “turnover” footbridge near the Lightbox in Woking has now been completed by Woking BC .
- 2.3. **Covid 19** – This has changed significantly how the canal is operating since the lock down as a result of the pandemic. The team has continued to be split into isolated cells to ensure there is a minimum of 2 people available to manage water levels which is a key critical function. Rangers are still out on site managing the canal while the rest of the team are supporting and working either from the Canal centre office or from home as much as possible.

While the first few weeks were daily responses to the changes from government and interpretation of these on the ground, the second phase was replying to complaints and issues around this and managing the high levels of additional use the canal was experiencing. We are still in the third phase which is about planning for long term recovery from Covid 19, whilst keeping abreast of remaining Covid compliant and adjusting procedures and risk assessment based on ever changing government guidelines.

While the summer holidays allowed opening of the visitor centre and limited income generation through unpowered boat hire and camping. The lack of income generation in the early part of 2020 will have a significant impact on the canal’s generated income during this financial year 2020/21. Two staff are suspected to have contracted Covid 19 early in March, both undertook periods of isolation while recovering and returning to work. As there was no testing available at that time this has not been confirmed.

- 2.4. **Lock Gate Re-Tender** -The lock gate procurement framework was re-tendered this summer, with a contractor now in place ready for lock gate replacement works this winter.
- 2.5. **Paddle Guide to the Basingstoke Canal** – A new paddle guide to the canal was written by the Canal Manager over the summer to help to promote positive paddlesport use of the canal and help to increase income from both the book and licence sales. This was kindly designed and printed by the Canal Society to form part of their series of publications available on the canal. Available to purchase online from both the Canal Society and BCA websites. (BCA on-line shop <https://www.hants.gov.uk/shop/home.php?cat=339>)
- 2.6. **Boat Licence Review** – A review of boat licensing was undertaken, and consideration given to pricing on waterways, resulting in the paper presented to the Committee as a separate item.
- 2.7. **Accident Investigation** – Unfortunately, a number of incidents were reported regarding accidents to members of the public on the towpath this summer. These have been investigated and no links have been found between the incidents other than there being more than usual number of people using the site. It has however prompted the need for a more detailed Principle Inspection of the towpath and

access points in the next 12 months, and additional elements to be added to the Canal Rangers' 6 monthly Length Inspections.

- 2.8. Staffing** – The BCA's Visitor Services Officer retired in February 2020, and the post has been held vacant as there was a recruitment freeze during the spring and summer; this helped offsetting some of the lost income but resulted in the need for additional casual staff for the Visitor Centre during the summer. The post has now been advertised with interviews in late October.

The recruitment freeze also affected the employment of the Project Officer to support the delivery of the capital programme and assist in developing developments identified as part of the business plan. The post will be advertised shortly.

3. Asset Management Programme

The following works from the County Councils' "capital" asset management programme were planned for the winter 2019/20 programme:

Surrey

- 3.1. **Bank protection** – a prioritised list of sites to repair erosion and minor seepage have been identified and this along with some works that were not able to be completed last winter are now being procured with the aim to start as soon as possible. The Canal Engineer reports that the backlog of bank protection works from the "low funding" era (1991-2010) in Surrey will, on the conclusion of this year's programme, have been largely caught up with.

- 3.2. **Lock inspections / repair** Locks 1- 6 will receive their Principle Inspections (PI) this winter starting in late November, followed by any required repairs in January – March 2021.

Lower gates at lock 28 and upper gates at lock 27 will be replaced this winter as part of the cyclical gate replacement programme.

- 3.3. **Weirs & sluices** – Atkins (the professional services supplier for both HCC and SCC) conducted the PI of Weirs & Sluices across the whole of the Canal; with the main item of repair being noted at Lower Wilderness weir. Civil engineering works as a result of this report are now being planned with the same contractor carrying out the lock repairs due to be deployed. Smaller scale works, such as repairing sluice winding gear, are being tackled in-house by BCA Ranger Team.

Hampshire

- 3.4. **Crookham Deeps** – the bed lining project due for the winter of 2019/20 is delayed by a further 12 months as the planning consent necessary for the silt lagoon has not been obtained, this was due to lack of availability of staff to project manage this, and delays in engineering investigations and design which has now been largely solved.

- 3.5. **Swan "Cutting"** – The Canal Manager and Strategic Manager together with Engineering and other professional colleagues at HCC continue to work on this project. Data from soil investigation is still being analysed and will provide sufficient data to enable a sustainable design solution for the slopes above the canal channel and the towpath. There is no quick fix to this long-term project involving many adjoining landowners.

- 3.6. **Bank protection** – work sites have been identified and this along with some previously identified works that were not able to be procured last winter, are now being procured with the aim to start as soon as possible in parallel with similar works in Surrey.

3.7. **Weirs & sluices** – Works as a result of the Atkins PI report are now being considered and procurement planned, with the main issues being noted at Reading Road Weir and Norris Sluice (both near Fleet); again with any smaller scale works are being tackled in-house by BCA Team. Due to previous procurement decisions by both County Councils the same civil engineering contractor used in Surrey cannot now also be deployed in Hampshire, and a separate procurement will be required using an HCC framework.

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