

## November 2021 Basingstoke Canal Society (BCS) Report to JMC



### Executive Summary

The BCS has contributed over £400,000 in the last 18 months towards the operation of the Basingstoke Canal, in terms of volunteer labour, projects such as the new Holland moorings in Farnborough and 15 new information signs along the Canal, plus fees, donations and purchases.

The volunteer members of the BCS also provide a source of committed and industry experienced experts in planning, health and wellbeing, marketing and event management, which supplement the BCA's own internal staff resources and helps avoid the costs of engaging outside consultants and contractors.

As the "Guardians of the Canal" and the original instigators of the project to reopen and rejuvenate the Basingstoke Canal (an event that celebrates its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year), the BCS is committed to the vision of "Keeping the Canal Alive and Vibrant" for the enjoyment of all along its 32 mile length (37 miles, if the last 5 miles between Greywell and Basingstoke is taken into account).



**Paddleboards and Boats on the Vibrant Basingstoke Canal**

However, the BCS, BCA and the Canal need the riparian Councils to play their part in maintaining this unique and wonderful asset for their residents and ratepayers to continue to enjoy through:

- Financially supporting the Canal at the requested level under the Canal Partnership Agreement
- Direct Council Planning Departments work with BCS / BCA to ensure new developments along or near the Canal make appropriate contributions to mitigate the impact of such developments on the Canal infrastructure or add new facilities along its length for all users to enjoy
- Promote the Canal as a recreational attraction and a source of health and wellbeing for local residents through Councils websites and marketing activities at every opportunity

- And, very importantly, ensure that the JMC pushes for a quick resolution to the navigation issues affecting Swan Cutting so as not to adversely affect the operation of John Pinkerton II Cruises, whos' profits are all recycled back to the Canal / BCA, and the Accessible Boating's operation, who regularly take guests with mobility issues to the tourist attraction of King's John Castle at Odiham

The BCS recognises that in fiscal year 22/23, Councils will come under increased pressure to make cuts to spending on activities deemed non-core / not essential to residents, but we would contend that the health and wellbeing benefits afforded by the Canal to users, both water and land-based at an average **cost of 50p per annum per resident**, is money well spent and should not be subject to cut backs.

The BCS stands ready, willing and able to assist the BCA and the Canal Owners, to protect and maintain the Canal as a viable waterway for the enjoyment of all users along its full length by devoting more volunteer hours and more of its financial resources to the task.

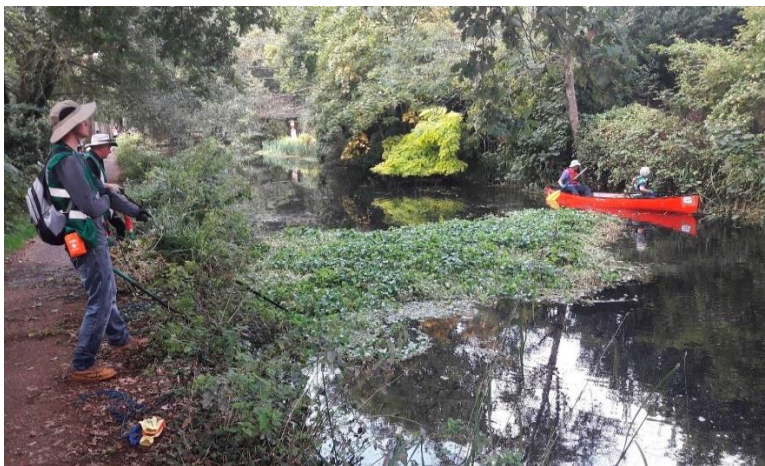
### **Achievements this year**

Like most organisations, the BCS has been affected by Covid, both from a reduced revenue perspective with little or no trip boat activity and volunteer work parties being limited in numbers.

At the same time, funding for the Canal by the riparian Councils and its Owners is coming under increasing pressure, while numbers using the Canal for recreation have in some cases tripled.

However, the BCS has still managed to:

- Increase membership numbers by 30% to over 1,000 and reach over 10,000 per week followers on social media sites
- Undertake 3,500 days of labour on Hydrocotyle weed and towpath clearing at (say) £10/hour – total £280,000



**Volunteers removing Hydrocotyle**

- Complete the Holland Mooring project at Farnborough Road – total cost £80,000 funded from an endowment by a BCS benefactor and generating potentially £20,000 pa income from extra mooring fees back to BCA



**New Holland Moorings at**

**Farnborough Road**

- Raise £20,000 for 15 new information signs along the Canal
- Donate £12,000 to BCA for volunteer training and funding equipment
- Participate in the Last Five Miles project to re-establish the Canal's former path from Greywell to Basingstoke
- Conduct a major research survey of BCS members and the almost 10,000 followers on social media into their usage, attitudes and awareness of the Canal to help better inform the Society's membership offering and communications
- Develop a closer relationship with the BCA for improved co-ordination / broader outcomes for the Canal

A refreshed board of Directors and specialist volunteers, continuing to better organise, plan and execute our programmes and the establishment of a lobbying team based in each riparian Council area means the Society is well structured, resourced and able to support projects of benefit to the Canal and the BCA.

**A new vision**

A key plank in the Society's work for the last few months has been the development of a new Vision Statement (attached) to better deliver on our mission of "Keeping the Canal Alive and Vibrant", along the four key threads – cultural, social, economic and environment. This is now being translated into action, some examples of which are as follows:

Cultural

- a drive to increase the number of moorings and other facilities, such as a boat basin at Aldershot's Wellesley site, for boats along the Canal.
- the development of a Virtual Museum of archival material, including old photographs and stories, on the Society's website.



**Steam dredger “Perseverance”**

- a project to return and restore Perseverance, the steam dredger that played a major part in the Canal’s restoration, and to make it a permanent display in a suitable location.
- suitably acknowledging the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the re-opening of the Canal in May 2022.

#### Social

- a series of events, including the very popular Odiham Raft Race September 2022.
- appointing a health & wellbeing volunteer to lobby for the medical benefits that the Canal brings to local residents and users.
- assisting the Surrey Police and local residents in the development of a Canal Watch programme for the Woking stretch.

#### Economic

- fund raising campaigns ) all help to bring additional funds back to
- increased memberships ) support the BCA and the Canal
- dedicated BCS planning team assisting the BCA to identify and, where applicable, secure s106 / CIL funding contributions to mitigate the impact of new developments on / near the Canal and / or to develop new facilities on the Canal.

#### Environment

- all electric trip boat and charging points for Woking section, to be part funded £75,000 by the BCS and the remainder from donations, fundraising in the local area and corporate sponsorship.



**Electric canal boat Wey & Arun**

- securing volunteer environment and water resource specialists to help the BCS / BCA with these key issues associated with climate change and green energy goals.

### **Improved working relationship with BCA**

The second key plank in the Society's work since the last JMC meeting is a more structured working relationship with the BCA. This includes:

- both organisations are in the final stages of completing the Memorandum of Understanding of roles and responsibilities of each party so as to maximise opportunities to work towards the goals for the Canal whilst minimising duplication of effort.
- running regular meetings for Canal Operations and a separate Strategy meeting to agree a joint projects list.
- the BCS's planning volunteers maintaining a monthly list of developments likely to impact the Canal in order to identify opportunities for s106 / CIL funding contributions to help the BCA with mitigation or new facilities to enhance the Canal.

### **Key projects for 2021 / 22**

- double BCS membership to 2,000 by end 2022 by better understanding their needs through research, membership drives along the Canal and improved marketing of the benefits of joining the Society in social media posts and press releases
- a presentation programme to each riparian Council in the spring of 2022 to be held aboard JP2 / Kitty to improve their understanding of the benefits of the Canal to local residents and to market the Canal as a source of recreation and health and wellbeing to residents at every opportunity
- work with BCA and local Councils Planning Departments to finalise the Planning Guidelines document as a guide for developers undertaking projects along / near the canal
- BCS volunteers continue to help BCA maintenance team maintain and improve the towpath and waterway
- build and operate an all-electric trip boat at Woking and commence the installation of charging points along the Canal
- encourage the Grainger / Wellesley development to create a boat basin in Aldershot
- improve our understanding of water resource and environmental issues on the Canal
- work to develop new moorings at Colt Hill and Ash Wharf

- continuing to push for a resolution to the Swan Cutting navigation issue to mitigate the impact on Accessible Boating / John Pinkerton II trips to King John's Castle



John Pinkerton II canal cruises

***The Canal Society, BCA and the Basingstoke Canal need all Councils to play their part in maintaining this unique and wonderful asset for residents and ratepayers to continue to enjoy for the future.***

***The Society is prepared to place even more emphasis and effort behind securing volunteers to undertake work, such as weed clearing and dredging, that the BCA would otherwise not be able to afford or have the manpower to carry out if budgets are cut further. In addition, the Society is willing to channel some of its financial resources towards viable projects to help maintain and enhance the Canal that would otherwise be cut as non-essential by the BCA.***

***The Canal's Owners and JMC members are asked to encourage the BCA to consider this offer seriously and work more closely together to implement more joint work programmes in 2022/23.***