



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 2022; and to report the work of the Conservation Steering Group.

Officer's Recommendation

That the Committee note the content of the report, and authorise the Strategic Manager and Treasurer to:

- a) authorise additional expenditure over the budgeted amount of up to £24,000 on spot dredging to be funded from the allocated Dredging Reserve
- b) authorise additional expenditure over the budgeted amount of £28,000 for the purchase of an Asset and Issue Management system for the BCA to be drawn from the Unallocated Reserve.

Operation & Maintenance

BCA Maintenance & Inspection Works

- Winter reactive tree works – 111 tree incident reports from the storms over 18th –20th Feb. This took our limited staff team (with 2 weeks of help from a team of contractors) a month to clear. This was strongly supported by our volunteer lengthsmen who provided very quick and important reports on tree locations which was vital to allow us to prioritise and react accordingly.
- Length Inspections, Supplemental Inspections, Reservoir Surveillance Inspections have all been carried out
- Lock repair works were carried out in late March and early April to carry out the most urgent end of season works at some of the locks, including replacement of old paddle frames, lock gate replanking and replacement of cills.
- The upper gates at lock 27 were finally able to be adjusted and installed successfully.
- Much staff time has been taken with training of new staff (see below –staffing)
- Contractors replaced the old access steps at Coxheath bridge
- Contractors repaired the entrance to Barley Mow car park
- With funding from the 'Safer Streets Project' and working in partnership with Surrey Police and Woking Borough Council, extensive graffiti removal has taken place by a contractor, throughout all the Woking and St Johns stretch of canal, particularly on all the bridges. They have now been coated in anti-graffiti paint to try and prevent reoccurrence and allow easier removal in future.

Staffing

- The remaining Lock keeper left in January for a new job working on developing volunteer teams with the Canal and Rivers Trust. We hope he can pass on some of the good work we have been doing on the Basingstoke for many years now.
- Canal Ranger, Andy Loader, retired from his post at the beginning of April after 26 years. We would like to thank him for his long and dedicated service to the Canal.
- We have recruited three new permanent and one temporary members of staff, but have been unable to find suitable candidates to fill two vacant Waterway Ranger positions. The filled positions are:
 - **Inspector (Ranger)** – this role will focus on the inspection of assets to ensure that all of the inspections are carried out according to the Asset Management Plan timetable; a keen eye for detail is essential. In addition, they will receive training to manage water levels, will be part of the out of hours “duty” rota system often in sole charge of the waterway, and assist the other Rangers on group projects.
 - **Assistant Waterway Ranger** – this position is to assist the Waterway Rangers and Lock Keepers carrying out maintenance on the waterway. This role will not undertake “duty” cover.
 - **Temporary Assistant Waterway Ranger** – this position is for 6 months to assist the new and remaining staff carry out practical tasks on the canal, particularly whilst we are carrying two Ranger grade vacancies.
 - **Lock Keeper** – this role will primarily be to manage water levels and boat traffic through the Surrey lock flights. They will support the Rangers and Assistant Rangers in carrying out practical tasks. A second Lock Keeper role was advertised, and a job offer made - we are expecting the second lock keeper to start in July.
- All of the new staff are undergoing a period of extensive training; both formal courses for key skills, tools and equipment, but also job shadowing of the two remaining Rangers to find out how the Canal actually works.

Events/Visitor Services

- Santa Cruises was its usual success (despite some difficult weather for staff and volunteers to endure) with people so happy to see Santa in person again on the lead up to Christmas. Income £25,763 (gross, but net of tax).
- We now have 7,719 followers on our Facebook page (up approx. 700 since Oct 21), 1,848 followers on Twitter and 1,195 on Instagram (as of 26th April 2022).
- All the boat licence renewals have been sent out for the season and we are currently preparing to send out the commercial licenses.
- Easter School holidays was steady trade for the Canal businesses with a bumper Easter weekend in the middle.
- Businesses are now staffed/operating in a more normal fashion with no Covid restrictions on boat hire or camping. As a result of Covid we had to bring in new measures, some of which proved very successful however, and we have now been able to improve our service as a result with for example advance bookings for boat hire.
- *Rosebud* trip boat has a full summer season booked in with the usual speciality trips planned up to the end of Sept. and fully staffed by volunteers.
- A full kids/families events programme is planned for the season with trails, competitions and pond dipping all available through the school holidays.
- The Bell tents are planned to be put back up hopefully during June ready for the height of the camping season.
- Staff checked over 700 boat licenses for compliance last year and already over 100 so far this new financial year. This has helped with the marked increase in income from unpowered licenses.

Conservation

- The Conservation Management Steering Group meeting was held on 20th April. Discussion was again held regarding water level monitoring in the Common Standards for Assessment which the Strategic Manager did not consider an appropriate measure of draw down levels on canals. Natural England were asked again to look into this matter.

- The Frimley pumping system was discussed which has not been operational for the last 2.5 years. The system runs from a railway sump 800m across a development site, across Frimley Lodge Park into the Canal. The developer and Surrey Heath Borough Council have proposed moving the pump into Frimley Lodge Park with open ditches, swales and ponds to accept the railway drainage, before entering a shorter pumped system. This may benefit habitat within SHBC land and will make maintenance access easier for SCC/BCA. Initial data from a water quality and sediment analysis of the drainage system is promising for the Canal. The CMSG raised no strong objections to this proposal as it was not a new water source.
- There was a brief discussion around spot dredging and the intention to get a contractor to start to carry this out in high priority areas such as bridge holes under the agreed scheme of management.
- Other topics included the control of invasive species, particularly floating pennywort, and crayfish
- John Edwards (Surrey County Council Ecologist) announced he is retiring from Surrey County Council at the end of April and said he was happy to be leaving the Canal on a much more positive footing.

Volunteers

- Volunteers have been operational each Tuesday and some additional days, organised and overseen by a Canal Ranger and Volunteer Leaders who are taking a greater role. We continue to use the online booking system and manage group numbers depending on the task we are undertaking. Winter sapling cutting was undertaken in as many areas as possible.
- Car parks had their potholes filled in where possible and general spruce ups.
- Volunteer Skippers and crew have been undertaking their early season refresher training and had a good Easter running public trips on Rosebud.
- The Head Skipper organised a recruitment drive for new skippers and crew in March which was a very successful day resulting in 30 expressions of interest and 22 new volunteers. Five volunteers have been put forward as new skippers, with those who didn't already have them being trained to RYA Inland Waterway Helmsman standards.
- The BCA Patrol boat which is mainly volunteer crewed was out for 182 hours in 2021/22.
- Three volunteer Santa's supported the Santa Cruises event this Dec and one even grew a Santa beard, there is dedication for you.

Management Actions

Partnership finance

We were disappointed to be notified in late May that Rushmoor Borough Council have almost halved their revenue contribution to the BCA partnership - resulting in a cut of £23,000. As a result of not being notified 12 months in advance the planned BCA budget agreed at the November JMC meeting has been affected. There will now be a real pressure around ensuring safety related tree works can be completed, and the repairs to the decking of the Brookwood Visitor Mooring can no longer be afforded in this years' budget.

The planned works to spot dredge in the Hampshire Pound over the winter can also no longer be afforded unless there is a planned draw on the reserve. The Strategic Manager is therefore recommending to the Committee that the £24,000 in the allocated Dredging Reserve should be used for this purpose.

The BCA's asset management database system is now aging, and Hampshire County Council's IT Department will shortly cease to support the platform on which it is based. It also doesn't provide functionality around issue management, which is considered a significant defect in risk control. An alternative system is therefore required, the Strategic Manager has looked at possible systems with colleagues and is recommending that the system used by both Hampshire and Surrey County Councils for asset management and issue tracking for their public rights of way networks is adopted. A quotation has been provided by the supplier to provide additional licences, transfer of data, set up costs, and staff training to bolt the Canal's requirements onto the existing Hampshire County Council system. In order to purchase the system a draw on the reserve of £28,000 will be required.

Staffing

As stated in the Canal Manager's report above the BCA have continued to be very stretched for the last 6 months in terms of staffing. Leaving us with only 2 fully trained rangers trying to cover 24hr duty 7 days a week between them. Understandably leaving them exhausted, in addition to train up new staff and dealing with the array of usual reactive works. The Canal Manager has now re-advertised the two vacant Waterway Ranger positions, and we are hoping for a better level of interest from candidates.

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

- **Regular Liaison Meetings** – Basingstoke Canal Society (BCS), Boat User Group, Basingstoke Canal Angling Association, Woodham Houseboat Tenant engagement sessions and regular meetings with a number of commercial/quasi-commercial operators.
- **New Commercial Licences** – 2 licenses are now in place for businesses to advertise on our land. These are both for services that we consider are helpful to Canal users.
- **Tree Inspections** – SCC's Arborists will now carry out an inspection of the Hampshire half of the Canal over the coming months.
- **Mytchett Lake Reservoir** – The independent Inspecting Engineer has carried out the 10-year assessment of the reservoir. He will require a draw down study, and a re-examination of the 2010 flood study in the light of new inflows and evidence. These have been referred to SCC for funding as they are a consequence of SCC's ownership not maintenance or repair issues. The Inspecting Engineer also requires a number of mostly minor works to be undertaken – some of which have already been completed, but some will need to be funded from the SCC capital programme over the coming years. The independent Supervising Engineer (who inspects the Lake and connected section of canal twice a year) has been asked to certify the On-site Plan for the Reservoir, but he required substantial modifications to the plan resulting in a significant amount of work; this however has now been certified. The Strategic Manager is also seeking legal advice from SCC's lawyers on requirements by the Inspecting Engineer that SCC are responsible for works on parts of the lake which are not in SCC ownership.

Asset Management Programme

The following works from the County Councils' "capital" asset management programme were planned for the 2021/22 programme:

Surrey

- **Towpath Repair Works** – the section of towpath between Deepcut High Bridge and Frimley has now been surfaced, and some areas of the sealed surface at Brookwood and St John's which had started to degrade were resurfaced with Tarmac; a buff surface dressing stone will be added in warmer weather to maintain the semi-rural character of the site.
- **Bank repairs** – Three minor leak sites identified by the Embankment Principal Inspection in Woking have now been repaired.
- **Lock gates** – this year funding went into the re-planking of a number of lock gates at the mid-point in their lifecycle rather than a complete replacement set of gates.

Hampshire

- **Crookham Deeps** – this project has halted after the contractor left site without completing the works. The Strategic Manager is being advised by appropriate Hampshire County Council legal and procurement colleagues with a view to resolving the matter as soon as possible. We are currently holding water levels in the Hampshire Pound lower than normal (at a maximum of -150mm) for safety reasons due to ongoing leakage. This means that we are starting from a lower level than normal, and it is highly likely that we will need to suspend all powered navigation on the Hampshire Pound at some point this summer - without substantial prolonged rainfall. This is likely to have a similar knock-on effect on the Mytchett Pound. This will affect all of the commercial and quasi-commercial boat operations including the BCA at Mytchett.
- **Swan "cutting", North Warnborough** – The Canal Manager and Strategic Manager together with Engineering and other professional colleagues at Hampshire County Council continue to work on this project. Hampshire County Council geotechnical engineers are currently drawing up the design for this project which will then

need to be agreed by all parties and put out to tender. This is a long-term project with no works expected on site until next winter at the earliest.

- **Reading Road Weir Repairs** – replacement of handrails on the footbridge over the weir are now complete.
- **Bank Repairs** – Sections of towpath embayment's were repaired throughout Hampshire by our contractor. A further set of works is planned for winter 2022.

Special funding

- **Hampshire Path Recovery Programme** The section of towpath between Ash Lock to Ash Embankment Railway Bridge was particularly badly worn during the Covid lockdowns. The Hampshire County Council Path Recovery fund paid for the repair of this section. Further plans for a section of towpath repairs near Norris Bridge that also suffered during Covid from increased use – this was to be repaired by staff, the BCA dredger and volunteers - but has been delayed by lack of availability of both staff and dredger.

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