

## November 2022 Basingstoke Canal Society Report to JMC



### Executive Summary

The BCS contributed over £300,000 in the last 12 months towards the operation of the Basingstoke Canal, in terms of volunteer labour, and installation of 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, that supplements the BCA's own internal staff 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 was celebrated its delayed 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 residents, users and Councils along its 32 mile length (37 miles, if the last 5 miles between Greywell and Basingstoke is taken into account).



### Full passenger trip boats on the Vibrant Basingstoke Canal

However, the BCS, BCA and the Canal all the partners to fully contribute in order to maintain the canal as 13<sup>th</sup> in the top 100 of waterways in the world – an outstanding achievement:

- 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 the residents to enjoy
- Continue to promote the Canal as a recreational attraction and a source of health and wellbeing 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, who's 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

### **Achievements this year**

With the decline in the restrictions caused by the pandemic, the Society has been able to safely restart its activities. Both revenue earning on the trip boats (passenger numbers are almost back to pre-pandemic levels) also via the events stand and work parties successfully completing some of the projects.

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 and caused a degradation of the towpath surface in some areas.

However, the BCS has still managed to:

- Sustain our membership numbers at around 1,000 and reach over 8,000 per week followers on social media sites
- Organised and led a number of Corporate Volunteer teams delivering over 850 hours of labour on Hydrocotyle weed, lock gate painting towpath clearing at £10/hour – total £8,500

The companies included SC Johnson, BMW, Neos Networks, HSBC, Merlin Entertainments, Asahi, BOC, Environment Agency, Poly.com, Ion Group and all have said that they would like to repeat the exercise again next year. We have been working with CMMP, CSR officers of some local councils and Voluntary Services. All done in collaboration with the BCA team.





### **Volunteers removing *Hydrocotyle***

- Raised £20,000 for 15 new information signs along the Canal, and then installed them.
- A small team went to Ireland to look a Berky weed harvester to check whether the capability would be suitable for use on the canal. The Society is minded to buy (at a cost of around £45k) a weedcutter to supplement the BCA owned Millie.
- Donated £6,000 to the BCA for volunteer training and funding equipment
- Repaired the failed towpath piling at Colt Hill on BCA managed land.

### **A new vision**

A key plank in the Society's work in the recent year 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.
- In collaboration with the Mayor of Woking hosted the Mayor of Rastatt (twin town) on a Kitty cruise



**Twin town Mayors meet up on Kitty**

Social

- supporting a series of events, for example Easter Egg Hunt, Woking, Fleet Festival, Odiham Raft Race September 2022, etc.
- 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 for the Woking stretch. This initiative is now competing in the National Tilley awards sponsored by the Home Office. If successful they would go to compete in an International Awards event.



**Boats arriving at the Canal Centre to celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Canal being reopened**

## Economic

- fund raising campaigns; for example, legacies, all help to bring additional funds back to support the BCA
- increased memberships
- dedicated planning team supporting 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.

## **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:

- 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 2022/23**

- increase BCS membership to 1,500 by end 2023 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
- working with the campaign team to prepare a presentation programme to each riparian Council 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
- Work with various partners, BCA, Whitbread, SCC, WBC and UKPN to install electric power infrastructure into Woking
- contract and operate a new £175k all-electric trip boat at Woking, a build slot has been reserved with Brayzel Boats for delivery in Q4 2023.
- 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.***