



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 1st half of 2023; and to report the work of the Conservation Steering Group.

Officer's Recommendation

That the Committee note the content of the report

Operation & Maintenance

BCA Maintenance & Inspection Works

- Length Inspections, Supplementary Inspections, Reservoir Surveillance Inspections have all been carried out as planned.
- The list of Supplementary Inspections has been reviewed by the Waterway Inspector and Canal Engineer. Several sites that have been monitored for some time following repair works are now deemed to be resolved, and the inspection regime reduced to normal levels.
- During regular inspection small leaks have been found at two locations in Woking which are being monitored by the BCA under the direction of the Canal Engineer. Works may be required to rectify these with funding from the SCC capital programme. A further leak site in Hampshire which had received previous attention started to leak again, and a more permanent solution was required, with "soft bank" restoration works being undertaken by a contractor.
- Crookham Parish Council provided grant funding of £21,000 to improve the towpath surface from Malthouse bridge through to Zebon Copse Swing bridge and a small section under Poulter's bridge.
- There was a major pollution incident in Woking town centre where a delivery truck hit a bollard and ruptured its fuel tank, with the spillage of approximately 650 litres of diesel transferring through the storm drain system into the Basingstoke Canal. The Environment Agency initially led on the clean-up operation, with support from Basingstoke Canal Authority, Woking Borough Council and Thames Water, working to contain the spill by placing oil booms in strategic locations. This was then taken over by a specialist company working on behalf of the polluter. The clean-up took 7 weeks. The incident has damaged the ecology, as well as BCA income and reputation.
- The BCA ranger team have installed a new entrance off Ively road, Fleet to provide easier vehicular access to Norris weir in agreement with Hampshire Highways and the MoD.

- An intensive search for the invasive Floating Pennywort was carried out in the Fleet area in April, this was a partnership approach with Loddon catchment group, EA & Fleet Pond working alongside canal staff and volunteers. Approximately half a bin bag of the plant was found and removed.
- The BCA Ranger team assisted by contractors installed a new set of upper lock gates at Lock 3.
- New gaugeboards were installed in the Mytchett Pound following the direction of the Inspecting Engineer for the Reservoir.
- Works were undertaken by contractors at Locks 8 and 26 to deal with a voiding created by a leaks in the lock bypass pipes.
- The older weedcutter (Millie2) is back up and running with a new bespoke rake head manufactured. This is just awaiting its PUWER inspection.

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Staffing

- A new Assistant Waterway Ranger - Jack Shepherd, joined us in January on a two-year contract.
- All Waterway Ranger posts are now filled, Jayne Raby filling the final post in the autumn of 2022. Jayne has already started 'duty' cover, and this is now on a 1 week in 5 basis.
- The Visitor Services Assistant left in December and this post has not been refilled to try and save costs of running the visitor centre and campsite, but on the basis that an on-line booking system was implemented to deal with the operation of the campsite.
- Unfortunately, we now have a vacant Lock Keeper post which we are currently trying to recruit into and the next round of interviews will be in June.
- Staff have been undertaking training in Brushcutters, Mowers, Woodchipper, Chainsaw, Manual Handling, and Basic Tree Inspection.
- The whole BCA team undertook a conservation-based task at Claycart Flash in March to remove encroaching scrub – this was part works and part team building exercise.

Events/Visitor Services

- Water levels recovered from the summer drought over the autumn, and we were able to re-open to powered boats on the Mytchett Pound on 2nd Nov 2022.
- The reopening was in time to enable the Santa Cruise event to go ahead; this did really well and broke its income target generating £28K gross.
- On social media our number of followers (as of 26/4/22) are:
 Facebook – 8641 (Sept 2022 - 8367) Followers,
 Instagram – 1292 (Sept 2022 - 1237) Followers,
 Twitter – 1837 (Sept 2022 – 1864) Followers
- Travellers returned to the campsite just before Easter. The campsite subsequently lost over £600 income over Easter as a result of cancelled bookings. The BCA were disappointed with support from the Police despite a number of incidents and alleged offences being reported.
- The Visitor Services team are working on an online booking system which initially will be used for camping, with the aim to roll it out for other income generating activities such as boat hire and boat trips if it's successful. This is currently being developed and should be ready by July.

Conservation

- The Conservation Management Steering Group meeting was held on 19th April. The primary business was Thomson Ecology presenting their final report on data analysis, examining relationships between environmental and human interactions to look into the relationships and factors that may be affecting the condition of the Canal SSSI. This report makes recommendations for future management, a key area of this suggesting site focused management on areas with most potential for improvement. This study is the most comprehensive of its kind for similar canals and will likely become a nationally referred to study, informing future management for other canals managing SSSI status alongside other pressures.
- Since the dredging works have been completed a 'Dead Slow' speed limit has been imposed with signage through each of the areas that were dredged to protect plant species which will need to recolonise the dredged areas.

Volunteers

- Three new volunteers are being trained up as Volunteer Leaders to help manage our volunteer work parties.
- The newly formed Western End Work Party (a volunteer-led group working to BCA's policies/procedures and making use of the Canal Society's work boat on days when she is otherwise not being used) have also been tackling some offside cutting near Lousey Moor and carrying out sign installation for the dredging and some follow-up surveying.
- The Patrol Boat is now back out on regular patrol, fully crewed by volunteers.
- The Tuesday volunteers have had a busy winter;
 - Carrying out sapling management alongside the towpath and water's edge throughout the Canal. Their work clearing the stretch along the Brookwood mile and Brookwood Lye made a significant difference in improving the towpath for cyclists and pedestrians, with many positive comments and thanks from those using it.
 - Clearing the overgrown field at the Broad Oak silt dump, using the cut saplings and branches to make a silt barrier and enabled the deposit of dredgings from this winters spot dredging works.
 - The work boat was used to access and cut back the invasive bamboo near lock 8.
 - Invasive Floating Pennywort clearing took up a few task sessions in the Woking pound through to the junction with the Wey.
 - Earlier in the season a task day at Odiham Castle saw the volunteers cutting back vegetation and laying fresh shingle to keep the site maintained for visitors.
 - More recently 3 weeks of task sessions saw the volunteers replacing old fencing at the Canal Centre campsite ready for the new camping season.
 - Overall, for 2022-2023 financial year the Canal logged 20,633 Volunteer hours.

Management Actions

Partnership finance – following the announcement at the November 2022 JMC that Rushmoor were withdrawing all funding, the budget was reviewed, to see if it could be balanced. However, the review only revealed further pressures especially in terms of health & safety related tree works. The revised budget will therefore be calling on the reserve and is further referenced in the Finance Report.

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

- **Tree Inspections** – SCC's Arborists are currently carrying out the delayed inspection of the Hampshire half of the Canal.
- **Mytchett Lake Reservoir** – The independent Inspecting Engineer has carried out the 10-year assessment of the reservoir and has directed a series of Measures in the Interest Of Safety – it is a legal requirement for these to be carried out. Work has been ongoing on the Draw Down and Flood Study with appropriate consultants and a number of the more practical items such as the releveling of the gauge boards, and management of vegetation on the embankment. The Strategic Manager has written to the EA following the receipt of legal advice regarding responsibility for areas outside of SCC's canal ownership.
- **Regular Liaison Meetings** – Basingstoke Canal Society (BCS), Boat User Group, Basingstoke Canal Angling Association, and regular meetings with a number of commercial/quasi-commercial operators. BCS – Planning group. The Canal Manager gave a talk on Risk Management to members of the Canal Society at their Chobham talk in February.

Asset Management Programme

The following works from the County Councils' "capital" asset management programme were undertaken from the 2022/23 programme, or have been carried forward to the 23/24 programme:

Surrey

- **Deepcut Towpath Improvement** – Legal advice was obtained as to whether planning consent was required and if so the determining authority; with it being determined that consent was required and SCC are to be the determining authority. The requirement to gain planning consent has slowed implementation by 12 months due to the number of pre-application surveys and supporting documents that are required. Construction is now expected in summer 2024.
- **Lock gate cyclical replacement programme** – lock gates were purchased for Lock 3 which were installed by the BCA.

Hampshire

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- **Crookham Deeps** – the interim works to solve the main leak site are being monitored.
- **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.
- **Spot Dredging & bank repairs** – Spot dredging works were carried out between Barley Mow and Broad Oak totalling approx. 583m in length. Areas of bank were also repaired using the arisings from the dredging. Dredging is extremely expensive at around £140k per kilometre, and the HCC capital programme allocation was supported by an additional amount from BCA revenue and a donation from the BCS.
- **Weirs and Sluices** – As a result of the previous principal inspection of weirs and sluices elements at Norris Hill weir/sluice were noted as life expired or needing major attention, with a complete replacement of the sluice gates essential. In order to improve water safety on the Canal and address more minor issues identified at North Warborough and Farnborough Road, Aldershot - three new dual leaf weir penstock gates have been purchased. This style of gate was successfully installed at Hermitage weir in Woking in 2016 and require less staff intervention to manage winter water levels with improved safety for waterway users. Consents and a tender for installation are currently being sought with works expected mid to late summer.

Both counties

- **Culvert Inspections** – Allocations for expected repairs following the Principle Inspection of culverts have been carried forward due to the delay to the inspection which is not expected until stream and ditch levels subside in drier weather.