

June 2023 Basingstoke Canal Society (BCS) Report to JMC



Executive Summary

The Basingstoke Canal needs all Councils to play their part in maintaining this wonderful world class asset for residents and visitors to continue to enjoy now and in the future. The BCS is actively doing our part - and plan to do more. The councils need to do theirs'

The Canal Society's work in the last year includes:

1) Volunteer support. The BCS has, in terms of volunteers, contributed over £280,000 (28k hours @ £10) in kind in the last 12 months towards the operation of the Basingstoke Canal. This labour, includes vegetation management, lock gate painting, graffiti removal, ongoing maintenance engine repairs to the workboats and weedcutter etc.

2) Hard cash: In hard cash terms we contributed £12,000 to the Basingstoke Canal Authority (BCA) to help out their training budget, over £20,000 for the spot dredging programme around Odiham, and last but not least over £50,000 for the purchase of a brand new Conver weedcutter – launched on 17th May from Spantons Wharf in Woking

Therefore, the Canal Society has **donated over £80,000 of hard cash** in recent months.

In addition, we are planning a £175,000 spend on a new electric trip boat (with disabled access) for 2024 along with environmentally friendly electric points along the canal. (The Basingstoke Canal will be leading the way!)

3) New electric equipment: Wherever possible we have been increasing the BCA stock of Stihl electric power tools by purchasing new equipment and donating them to the BCA so that the older petrol engine kit can be retired. Indeed, we are now one of Stihl's chosen charities

4) Our trip boats safely carried over 7,000 passengers in the 2022 season – a remarkable achievement as the country recovers from the pandemic.



Conver weedcutter in Woking

5) 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.

6) work with Surrey Police and local residents in the development of a Canal Watch for the Woking stretch. This initiative meant that Surrey Police won the National Tilley award sponsored by the Home Office. They are now competing in the International Awards event, using the Basingstoke Canal as a successful Police/community crime solving partnership case study.

Proactively launched a Campaign to help 'Keep our Canal Alive'

The BCS are the “ Guardians of the Canal” and the original instigators of the project to reopen and rejuvenate the Basingstoke Canal and **address the real risk caused by some local councils reducing their funding (which in itself has not been inflation adjusted for the last 10 years)**

So despite the action of some councils, our commitment is to protect the canal for the benefits of all users and the community **notably the hundreds of thousands of local council taxpayers who use the canal**

And let’s not forget the real benefits the Canal brings. It is rated as 13th in the top 100 waterways in the world – an outstanding achievement. It brings significant benefits:

- Health and Well Being: with the pressures on the NHS and Mental Health, the canal is a vital amenity. We cannot put it at risk and put more pressure on the NHS. Over the last couple of years the numbers using the Canal for recreation have in some cases tripled and caused a degradation of the towpath surface in some areas. Various University studies have demonstrated that access to the waterway network across the whole of UK delivers over £1bn of mental health benefits to the NHS.
- Environment: the canal has SSSI status in view of its unique plant life. Residents value this
- Social: it is used by walkers, cyclists, canoeists, paddleboarders - and frankly people just wanting to find a local place to relax
- Quite simply it is highly valued by the majority of local residents

Our action - The BCS Campaign objectives:

- 1) **To raise major funds to support agreed projects.**
- 2) **To work with councils to ensure they realise the benefits to their Council Tax payers and actively support the canal.**
- 3) **To raise awareness in the local community of the risks and need to support the canal the canal through donations and membership - and the associated risks if we do not.**

Already we have:

- launched the Campaign via Facebook and other Social Media channels, plus posters..... it will be actively promoted through work parties and all contacts with members of the local public.

The Basingstoke Canal Society

KEEP YOUR CANAL ALIVE!
Help safeguard your and your neighbourhood's health and habitat

Find out more on donating or become a member of the Basingstoke Canal Society

Feel healthier!
Use the 'green gym' where you can walk, run or cycle for free, taking care of your physical and mental health.

Feel happier!
Study shows spending time by a canal can make you feel happy* whether on the footpath or navigating the water.

Feel connected!
An opportunity to meet people, make new friends or volunteer to make a difference.

Appreciate nature!
Support the biodiversity and the variety of nature the canal brings to your doorstep for future generations to enjoy.

www.basingstoke-canal.org.uk/keep-your-canal-alive

- we participated in a BBC podcast celebrating the waterways of Surrey in association with Surrey Day
- we were also interviewed by BBC Radio Surrey with regard to our Save our Canal Campaign and the challenges that not only the Basingstoke Canal faces but all the waterways in the UK face due to lack of funding, from Scotland down to the South East.
- the main thrust was essentially if you, the listener, are passionate about the environment and use the canal please put your hand in your pocket and help us help the BCA look after this world class asset.

What we now ask the local councils to do....

- Local councils to continue to financially support the Canal at the agreed level under the Canal Partnership Agreement
- Councils to recognise the wider real benefits, economic, social and health to the local community
- promote the Canal as a recreational attraction and a source of health and wellbeing through Councils websites and marketing activities at every opportunity

Finally, other BCS achievements this year

-Strong working relationship with BCA. An important plank of the Society work is continuing with a more structured working relationship with the BCA. This includes regular monthly meetings for Canal Operations and a separate Strategy meeting to agree a joint projects list.

- With the decline in the restrictions caused by the pandemic, the Society has been able to safely restart its activities, however trips in Woking were somewhat delayed by a diesel oil spill.

- Sustain our membership numbers at around 1,000 and reach over 20,000 people a week on Facebook along with 5500 Followers on social media sites

- as noted we have already led around 10 Corporate Volunteer teams delivering over 400 hours of labour on Hydrocotyle weed removal, graffiti removal, vegetation management, etc. This includes SC Johnson, AECOM, Ion Group, Yorktel and Discover. We have been working with CMMP, CSR officers of some local councils and Voluntary Services. All done in collaboration with the BCA team. Many of these companies give a donation of upwards of £800 towards the day – which is fed through to the BCA in due course.

-We have coached and mentored youngsters doing their Duke of Edinburgh awards, for example one young person in Woking in over a 6 month period of time collected approximately 200 kg of litter from the towpath. (In these cases they work with their parents and not with a BCS member).

- hosted Nick Wood-Dow (Deputy Lord Lieutenant) onboard Kitty to celebrate Surrey Day

- we plan to purchase defibrillators for installation on all the boats in the BCS and BCA fleet, currently only John Pinkerton has one, as does Dawn (an Accessible Boating Association vessel)

- supporting a series of events, for example, Fleet Coronation Festival, and many more in the pipeline

- appointing a health & wellbeing volunteer to lobby for the medical benefits that the Canal brings to local residents and users.

-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.



Volunteers removing graffiti in Woking (before)



Volunteers removing graffiti in Woking (after)



Celebrating Surrey Day



Removing trolleys (yet again)



Replacing the fencing around the Mychett camp site

Key projects for 2023/24

- 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
- 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 2024. This will reduce our carbon emissions in an urban environment by nearly 4 tonnes.
 - Ensure a resolution to the Swan Cutting navigation issue to mitigate the impact on Accessible Boating/John Pinkerton II trips to King John's Castle.

To close: The Basingstoke Canal needs all Councils to play their part in maintaining this wonderful and world class asset for residents and ratepayers to continue to enjoy in the future. The BCS is actively doing our part - and by working together we will do a lot more

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