

## November 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, for example we are actively seeking ways we can minimise the shortfall on the revenue budget but it must be in ways which the Society are comfortable with. The councils need to play their part*

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

- 1) Volunteer support. The BCS has, in terms of volunteers, has once again, 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 BCA workboats and weedcutter etc.
- 2) A subset of the volunteering effort has been a dramatic increase (over 2022) in the number corporate working parties, totaling 21 events with 240 participants delivering over 1,300 hours of work equivalent to **£13,000**. These groups are all organized and led by BCS volunteers. In quite a few cases the corporates do give up to £1,000 in donations to the BCS, which we then use to buy new electric power tools for the BCA.
- 2) Hard cash: In hard cash terms we will contribute £6,000 to the Basingstoke Canal Authority (BCA) to help out their training budget.

Therefore, the Canal Society we will have **donated over £6,000 of hard cash** by year end.

In addition, we have signed a contract with Brayzel Boats to build a brand new £175k electric trip boat (with fully accessible toilet) for operations in 2024 along with environmentally friendly electric points along the canal. A big part of our funding has come from SCC and Your Fund Surrey, so a huge thanks to all involved, BCA officers, SCC officers and BCS volunteers plus all those who have given cash donations.

- 4) Our trip boats safely carried approximately 7,000 passengers in the 2023 season – Although we note that passenger numbers did dip on Kitty this year, probably caused by the oil spill delaying the start of the season. However, we were reimbursed over £1,300 by the loss adjusters for lost revenue. So in broad terms net income will be similar to the previous year.





### Conver weedcutter in Woking has cleared the waterway

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) We work with Surrey Police and local residents in the development of a Canal Watch for the Woking stretch, main aim is to monitor anti social behavior and track/remove graffiti on the bridges. And keep an eye on the less affluent members of the community who use the canal corridor.

### 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 13<sup>th</sup> 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

**The Basingstoke Canal Society**

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

**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 towpath 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.

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

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

- 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 main thrust was essentially if you, the public, 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 remind the local councils to....**

- continue to financially support the Canal at the agreed level under the Canal Partnership Agreement
- 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.

- Sustain our membership numbers at over 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 over 20 Corporate Volunteer teams delivering over 1,300 hours of labour on Hydrocotyle weed removal, graffiti removal, vegetation management, etc. 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 £1,000 towards the day – which is fed through to the BCA in due course.

- 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)

- supported a series of events, for example, Fleet Coronation Festival, Odiham Raft Race and many more in the pipeline for 2024

- 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 painting Zebon Copse swing bridge**



**Removing Hydrocotyle near Lock 1**



**Removing trolleys (yet again)**

### Key projects for 2024/25

- working with the campaign team to deliver 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
- operate a new £175k all-electric trip boat at Woking. 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.
- Support the BCA in mutually agreed projects, for example we are actively seeking ways we can minimise the shortfall on the revenue budget but it must be in ways which the Society are comfortable with.

***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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