

# The Basingstoke Canal



*Value for Money*

*The Basingstoke Canal is a very special place, a tremendous and important amenity for many people. Its heritage, recreational and ecological value is of no doubt and we must look after it for the generations to come.*

*In these challenging times I urge colleagues to give their support to the canal as an inland waterway worthy of protecting after the many hours of hard toil given by the volunteers and county council staff who have striven to restore it.*

*There is much work still to do in order to bring it to a reliable navigable and vibrant waterway where all of its many community users continue to enjoy.*

Councillor Keith Chapman  
*Chair - Joint Management Committee 2010*

## **The Basingstoke Canal: Value for Money to Local Riparian Authorities**

### **Summary**

- The Canal has approximately 1/3 million regular, local users
- It provides unique leisure and educational benefits to the region
- There is a legal obligation to maintain the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and wildlife value of the Canal
- The Canal is a man made structure and there are significant safety and flood alleviation responsibilities
- The Canal is facing funding difficulties and the Canal Authority is struggling to meet the maintenance priorities

### **Under-funding will result in:**

- Gradual deterioration of the infrastructure leading to possible flooding and safety risks.
- Loss of “Added Value” provided by staff, i.e. education, guided walks, patrolling, litter picking, upkeep of secondary facilities like benches, towpath surface.
- Further deterioration of the SSSI.
- Reduced access to the towpath as bank-side erosion continues.
- Closure of locks and diminished navigation.
- Further encroachment of trees and their associated safety issues.
- Loss of crucial volunteer support.
- Loss of local Canal Visitor Centre activities.

This booklet aims to demonstrate the importance of the Canal for not only conservation and recreation, but for local quality of life and the local economy. Furthermore the significance of the canal as part of the drainage network and the necessity to maintain it in a safe condition are highlighted for future sustainability and local development.

## **The Basingstoke Canal – Value for Money**

### **Background**

The Basingstoke Canal was purchased, restored and officially re-opened amid much publicity and with great support. The benefits that the restored canal would bring were much lauded. The Local Authorities provided large sums of capital and the voluntary sector rose to the challenge to give us the canal we have today.

Since being officially re-opened in 1991 by the Duke of Kent, the Basingstoke Canal has become a much used and well loved local feature, being designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest in 1995 for its outstanding wildlife value.

It has been a success, and become an integrated part of the local scene. However, it is possible to take it for granted without proper consideration to the on-going improvements and maintenance that are necessary, and where the funding for these measures will come from.

The daily running of the canal and maintenance of the 216 year old structure is “un-glamorous”; yet it is essential. It is important to remember that the canal is basically unnatural – it is an attempt to keep water where it doesn’t necessarily want to be. Water is constantly seeking “short cuts” along the line of least resistance and this process of constant hydraulic pressure and activity takes a great toll on the engineering features.

Both the state of the SSSI and the structure itself is coming under threat as the Canal budget is under pressure and preventative maintenance takes second place to emergencies and essentials.

### **Recreational Opportunity**

The Basingstoke Canal provides a unique local resource giving free access to 32 miles of beautiful waterway, the majority of it a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest for its wildlife value. Whether on or next to the water it provides opportunity for relaxation and enjoyment as well as more challenging physical and mental pursuits. Some of its key recreational attributes include:

- It is estimated that there are around one third of million (*see Annexe*) regular local towpath users plus visitors from further afield.
- It is calculated that over 17,000 people have a boat trip on the Canal each year (*see Annexe*) in addition to private boat owners and this continues to increase.

- It provides a regionally scarce facility for navigation and general boating. Three charities along the canal operate boats specially adapted for people with disabilities.
- It is one of a few water sports venues in the area, providing both safe and challenging (in terms of distance) facilities for canoeists of all abilities. Three very active canoe clubs are based on the Canal. It is estimated that nearly 4000 canoeists (*see Annexe*) use the canal as part of a structured activity every year.
- Specialist organisations exist to help people of all abilities to enjoy canoeing.
- The canal provides 32 miles of very accessible, flat walking suitable for people of a range of abilities, from the serious rambler to families with push chairs and people of limited ability. Much of the towpath is suitable for wheelchair users, providing a link from urban areas out into quite remote countryside.
- The towpath provides clearly defined accessible countryside for those individuals, groups and cultures less at ease in the outdoors. There is no fear of getting lost or straying on to private land, thus encouraging more people to enjoy walking and the health and relaxation benefits that brings.
- It provides a safe venue for off-road family cycling, away from the dangers of the road. During 2008 and 2010 the Woking area of the canal 13 Km became a recognised and established cycle route.
- It is one of the best canal fisheries in the country, with day tickets available for all comers and a venue for National Angling Championships. In 2009, 2,600 Anglers were affiliated to the Angling Association via club membership whilst individual permits were sold to 1,500 local anglers – meaning there are some 4000 regular anglers. In addition, visiting anglers take part in matches on the canal.

#### **Wildlife Conservation Value**

- The Basingstoke Canal is a designated SSSI. It was designated for its rich variety of aquatic plants – more than any other water body in Britain – and their associated wildlife, particularly dragonflies. The Greywell Tunnel, at the western end of the Canal is a designated SSSI in its own right, being Britain’s largest bat hibernation site and the second largest roost site in Europe for certain species.
- Maintaining the wildlife value of the Canal is a statutory obligation under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000. The Canal’s owners could be fined for failing to meet their obligations.
- The tree lined waterway, with its reed margins and banks of wildflowers provides a rich variety of habitat for rare and not so rare species of wildlife.
- The wildlife value of the Canal undoubtedly adds to its recreational attractiveness. For many, the thrill of seeing a kingfisher, a shoal of fish or a swarm of blue dragonflies makes the Canal a really special place to spend some time.

- The Canal contributes considerably to the biodiversity of the areas through which it flows, and ensuring it remains in good condition will help Local Authorities meet their Biodiversity Action Plan targets and fulfil Central Government Directives.

However, it has been noted in recent years that the SSSI is in decline. Ironically, the shading from canal-side trees, high silt load and lack of essential maintenance are just some of the causes of this decline and the Conservation Steering Group are looking at ways to turn this around whilst maintaining the canal as a viable recreational asset.

### **Wider Benefits of the Canal**

In addition to the more easily recognised attributes of the Canal listed above, it has many other benefits, contributing significantly to local quality of life. These include:

#### **Local Economy**

The presence of the Canal contributes significantly to the local economy in a number of ways. This is a difficult figure to quantify as no two people will spend the same on a day trip, neither is it easy to identify what elements of, for example, a pub's profits are due to canal visitors. Nationally, some attempts at establishing a formula for calculating economic benefit have been made (*see Annexe*) although these have to be taken as a guide rather than as hard facts. Nevertheless, figures would indicate that visitors and canal users make a significant contribution to the local economy.

#### **Employment**

The Canal Authority employs 15 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff. There are up to 6 other FTE positions employed directly on the canal through commercial operators etc; It is difficult to estimate the number of indirect jobs created by the Canal.

The visitor spend will create numerous employment openings in local shops, pubs and restaurants.

#### **House Prices**

Either backing directly onto, or in close proximity to the Canal certainly adds value to property. Estimates vary from between 10 – 25% (various sources).

Whilst not having a direct effect on the local economy, higher property prices will have indirect effects through attracting higher earners with a higher spend to an area.

### **Local Drainage Function**

The area surrounding the Canal developed rapidly through the latter half of the 20th Century. Over this period the Canal has become integrated as part of the local drainage network. It takes run-off from roads and built-up areas as well as taking drainage directly from new developments via pipes and outfalls. Following heavy rainfall, the West/ East flow of water has to be carefully controlled and managed as urban run-off builds up in the canal. Drainage is a vital role, especially in times of higher rainfall and associated flooding. Management of the local drainage network is a statutory function carried out by Local Authorities in conjunction with the Environment Agency.

This function of the Canal warrants statutory funding and investment by Local Authorities and the Environment Agency as part of their responsibility to minimise flooding risk.

### **Health and Wellbeing**

The Canal provides a venue for both physical and mental relaxation. It has many opportunities for exercise at all levels, from a gentle, flat stroll to long distance canoeing, jogging or the “Green Gym” benefits of physical activity and voluntary work.

As an accessible, free, safe, resource on the doorstep of thousands which provides for a variety of formal and informal opportunities to benefit health, the Canal is unsurpassed locally.

### **Social Integration and Development**

Being accessible and on the doorstep of thousands of people, the Canal has rapidly become a popular resource for social interaction. Many opportunities exist.

There are many clubs associated with the Canal, providing a chance for social contact, development of skills and providing a platform for people to take an active role in life at all ages.

Associated with Canal-based clubs and organisations is the opportunity to get involved as a volunteer, providing self esteem and challenge as well as a sense of contributing to the community. Whether carrying out maintenance with the Surrey and Hampshire Canal Society, teaching youngsters to fish, or organising a fundraiser for the Boat Club, volunteer

opportunities abound.

Without these volunteers, the Canal would not be the facility it is today.

Each year, the Canal provides an ideal venue for many sponsored events and activities – boat rallies and festivals, canoe races, duck races, bike rides, BBQs, walks and even scuba dives have all taken place. The money this ploughs back in to local good causes is difficult to quantify, but is likely to be in the 10s of £1000s.

The easy access, proximity to urban areas, safety and beauty of the Canal and the roles it provides makes it of particular benefit to many “target groups” including local older people, younger people and people with special needs. It helps to break down barriers between different social and cultural groups and between people and their environment.

The vital volunteer input and contribution to society needs to be shown the respect it deserves through being matched by adequate funding for maintenance and infrastructure. In 2009/10 the Surrey and Hampshire Canal Society provided a volunteer contribution of over £54,000.

### **Educational Value**

The Canal is used as a formal part of the education curriculum for all Key Stage levels, as well as degree and postgraduate coursework. Most of this work is now co-ordinated by the Canal Authority in association with the local Surrey Wildlife Trust through the Visitor Centre at Mytchett, although an unknown amount of additional educational visits and field work does take place.

The Canal’s unique social history, geographical issues, engineering aspects, and abundant wildlife and conservation interest make it an ideal resource for formal education from nursery through to graduate and post-graduate coursework.

As a venue for lifelong learning, the Canal is ideal. It is used regularly for art, history, wildlife interest, health, wellbeing and personal growth courses. Through volunteering, there are boundless opportunities to learn new skills and develop interests.

A simple walk along the canal for a young child can provide a huge range of stimulus and interest, inspiring an interest in the natural world and encouraging the pursuit of outdoor interests and their associated health benefits.

As an outdoor education resource, the Canal is unmatched locally for the variety and range of experience, stimulus, interest, relevance and accessibility it can provide. Further investment could make it a significant regional education resource.

### **Heritage interest**

The Canal provides an important slice of local history, being instrumental in the development of the local area and its economy. Evidence of its changing role and use is evident in the associated wharves, bridges, locks and structures as well as the remains of Second World War defences and more recent changes and improvements.

Members of the Surrey & Hampshire Canal Society have recently published books on the history of the Canal and on the World War II defences along it, which have proved very popular.

The Canal provides much historic interest as well as providing the important root to local identity sought by many in an area of constant change and growth.

### **Social and Ecological Sustainability**

The Canal can contribute towards sustainability in many ways. It provides a number of social, economic, health and environmental benefits as can be seen elsewhere in this booklet.

The towpath itself contributes significantly towards the reduction in traffic congestion by providing a suitable route to school, work, shopping etc., for walking and cycling. For example a Sustainable Transport (Sustrans) towpath improvements scheme has recently been completed in the Woking area.

The Canal adds considerably to the landscape and aesthetic value along its route. Through the more urban centres of Woking, St Johns, Ash and Fleet it provides a tree-lined environment and a green corridor which continues through the more outlying suburban areas. The old locks and bridges provide visual and historic interest along the length of the Canal contributing considerably to the local setting.

## What it Costs

The Basingstoke Canal Authority requested a sum of £573,800 from Local Authority partners in 2009/10 in line with the current agreed service level funding formula. The Canal passes through a number of district or borough council areas and these councils together contribute 44.08% of the total revenue cost for the Canal. The amount each is asked to contribute is weighted equally between their population numbers and their bank mileage. Three authorities were unable to meet their full requested contribution in 2009/10. The budget is made up as follows:

PARTNERSHIP REVENUE CONTRIBUTIONS REQUESTED			
AUTHORITY	Original Budget	Agreed Contribution	Agreed Contribution
	2009/10	2009/10	2010/11
	£	£	£
Surrey County Council	160,434	160,434	162,448
Guildford Borough Council	40,925	36,800	36,800
Runnymede Borough Council	17,667	8,000	8,000
Surrey Heath Borough Council	27,526	11,000	10,000
Woking Borough Council	55,796	55,796	56,497
Hampshire County Council	160,434	160,434	162,448
Hart District Council	66,773	67,197	65,822
Rushmoor Borough Council	44,244	44,244	44,799
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>573,800</b>	<b>543,905</b>	<b>546,813</b>

*Note: Agreed contributions are the actual amount contributed to the Canal budget.*

The shortfall represents 5.4% of the budget. Two Boroughs have not met their funding request for many years now, whilst one is now starting to fall short. One has paid their full funding request for the first time in many years with a positive partnership approach and help from their riparian parishes in Hart.

Previously the shortfall had been around 12% and those local authorities not meeting their requested contributions have indicated that they will actively seek to make up the difference “in kind” or through a Service Level Agreement (SLA), although the Canal Authority may need to incur additional expenditure to deliver this.

The revenue budget for the Basingstoke Canal works out at approximately £23,400 per mile. British Waterways spend approx three times more per mile. In its 2009 financial report the Kennet & Avon Canal received approximately £6 million to maintain the infrastructure. The K&A is three times the size of the Basingstoke Canal. In this context it can be seen that the Basingstoke Canal is managed on a relatively small budget and a budget comparable with these other waterways would be in the region of £2 million in revenue funding.

This low level of funding, exacerbated by cuts in recent years, is now calling into question the future ability of the Canal’s managers to meet the maintenance obligations and maximise potential for visitors. This will have an effect on the safety of the Canal and the quality of nature conservation and navigation. Whilst the Basingstoke Canal Authority can fundraise and acquire grants for some works, the basic maintenance and upkeep is “unattractive” for many fund providers. This essential work therefore must continue to be provided for by the Local Authority Partners whose populations benefit from the Canal.

Both County Councils (joint owners) have now **approved a capital fund of £1.6 million** to be spent on major high priority repairs over the next three to four years. This will help towards the repair of the major structural works identified as priorities by the recent full condition survey of the Canal, and to place the basic structural integrity of the Canal on a surer footing.

It is therefore timely to re-establish the importance of the Canal and the role it plays in the local and regional community as a way of demonstrating to funding Partner Local Authorities the value it provides and the dangers that underinvestment will cause.

## **Annexe**

### **BASINGSTOKE CANAL – FACTS AND FIGURES 2009/10**

#### **Visitor Numbers**

Local Population: The Canal runs through 6 District and Borough Council areas (the “Riparian Boroughs”). Figures show the population of these Boroughs to total 574,900 residents. (Source: Council Websites)

In addition to the Riparian Boroughs, regular users are likely to come from the large population areas of adjoining Boroughs including: Basingstoke and Deane, Waverley (Farnham) and Bracknell Forest (Bracknell, Sandhurst, Crowthorne etc).

Research at Rushmoor Borough Council has indicated that 44% of the population are Canal users. Centrally based on the Canal, with a population housed further from the Canal than in Woking, yet nearer than in, say, Hart, Rushmoor could be considered a fair indicator of local use.

Extrapolating this 44% figure to the local population gives a user total of approx ¼ million people from the riparian Boroughs. Allowing for the highly populous neighbouring Boroughs, an estimate of ? million users would not be excessive. Assuming 3 or 4 visits per year (once every 2 months) we arrive at a figure of approximately 1 million visits per year.

Private Boating: The BCA typically issues 130 Annual Licences and 60 Visitor Licences a year for powered boats. In addition over 4000 canoe licences are issued.

#### **Passenger and Holiday Boats:**

John Cale Canal Cruises runs the boat operation at the Canal Visitor Centre, Mytchett and in 2009:

- 70 Self Drive Hires took place for 840 people
- 40 Chartered Cruises took place for 1200 people
- Approx. 2,500 passengers took a short boat trip
- 1000 bookings for rowing boats, pedaloes and canoes
- 1860 passengers enjoyed a “Santa Cruise” (operated by the BCA)

Galleon Marine based at Odiham in Hampshire took

- 135 holiday bookings (typically a short break with an average of 5 passengers a time = 675 people)

The Surrey and Hampshire Canal Society provided:

- 150 Chartered Cruises for 30 – 40 passengers = 5,250 people
- In addition 45 public trips took place for 900 people.

Accessible Boating provide hire boats for people with disabilities and their carers.

- 6 holiday hire and 63 day hire bookings were made in 2009 catering for 816 people.

The Swingbridge Community Boat operated by Surrey Care Trust

- Gave trips to around 360 people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

### Visitors and Users Spend

British Waterways research shows a rolling average spend per head for the period 2007 – 2008 as follows:

• Powered Boats (with an engine)	£13.94
• Unpowered Boats (without an engine)	9.69
• Fishing / Angling	3.03
• Cycling	4.64
• Dog Walking	6.78
• Walking Rambling	3.97
• Running Jogging	4.14
• Pub Visits	6.83
• Other	3.68
Average spend for visits	£6.30

In the previous published literature, the visitor and user spend was based on the Inland Waterways Association Handbook (Harrison 1999) and was based on 1996 prices. Between 1996 and 2010 inflation has been 41%. This makes the current representative figures as follows:

	<b>1996</b>	<b>2010</b>
Private Boats (per boat per annum)	£3,100	£5,100
Hire Boats (per boat per annum)	£23,000	£38,500
Trip Boats (per boat per annum)	£27,500	£45,800

Based on these figures and extrapolating on the Canal's activities, the average annual spend will generate approximately **£5.3 million in local economy terms**.

**Interestingly, the cost to local council tax payers for maintaining the canal is approximately £1 per head per year for residents of the Riparian Districts and Boroughs.**

### **Canal Income Generation**

Canal Authority Income Generation [actual]

Income for 2009/10 can be broken down as follows:

<b>Income source</b>	<b>£</b>
Boat Licences	17,278
Sales	3,824
Angling	11,622
Rents and Hire of Facilities	66,966
Group Activities	19,264
Fibre Optic Cable	49,288
Donations	6,716*
<b>Total Revenue Income</b>	<b>174,958</b>

\*Does not include the Surrey & Hampshire Canal Society Voluntary Contribution of £54,112 (2009 – 10)

Basingstoke Canal: Value for Money



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