

**Purpose**

**To receive a presentation from James Taylor, Strategic Manager representing the Basingstoke Canal Authority.**

**Background**

1. The Basingstoke Canal Authority (BCA) manages and maintains the 32 mile long canal which serves Mytchett, Deepcut, and Frimley and Camberley (4.5km of canal is within the borough). The canal is a Site of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSI) and forms a significant part of the local blue/green infrastructure of the borough, providing recreational benefits to residents such as walking, cycling and kayaking. The canal centre based in Mytchett also acts as a local tourist attraction providing historical interest, events and activities.
2. The BCA works alongside The Basingstoke Canal Society to enable projects on the canal, ranging from new moorings and paths to events and boat rallies. According to the 2011 Census, 85,845 people live within 5 miles of the canal and 700,000 live within a 30 minute drive.
3. People and cycle counters located between the Canal Centre and Frimley Lodge Park show that from 1st April to the 10th Nov 2020, 110,021 people used this area of towpath. This figure is up on previous years, likely due to the increased number of people using the towpath to exercise during lockdown periods. Conversely camp site users and canal centre visitors were around half their usual levels due to the pandemic.
4. The BCA highlight how they meet all of the Council's 4 'P's within the five year strategy, in particular that keeping the canal in good condition fits perfectly with SHBC's 'Place' objective by enhancing and protecting green spaces and encouraging active recreation. The BCA also advise they help keep the borough a safe place to live as they manage water levels to protect residents and regulate use of the Canal by issuing boating, angling and other recreational licences.
5. Other benefits provided include a hugely diverse ecological benefit and a large volunteer programme including over 60 'lengthsmen' walking a section of the canal every week.
6. The BCA is founded on partnership between 9 local authorities including Surrey Heath and is reliant on annual contributions from these partners, although it also supports itself through various income streams. The general reserves for the BCA at 31/3/20 were £697,089, up slightly from £691,509 on 31/3/19, but the impact of the pandemic means a loss of £92,000 is projected

for the year ending March 2021 with a further projected loss of £83,000 to March 2022.

7. In recognition of paragraph 6 above, the Basingstoke Canal Authority is currently one of the ring-fenced organisations under the Council's Revenue Grant Scheme. A grant of £10,000 was approved at the Executive meeting on the 19<sup>th</sup> January 2021 subject to an agreed service level agreement for the year starting 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021.
8. Surrey Heath Borough Council has a member on the Basingstoke Canal Authority's Joint Management Committee, which is currently Cllr Sarah Jane Croke.

### Recommendation

1. The Committee is asked to consider the presentation in relation to Surrey Heath along with any future steps which Members would wish to recommend to the Executive and/or Council.

Background Papers:

Author:

Service Level Agreement 20/21

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