



About the Basingstoke Canal

The Basingstoke Canal was built in the 1790s to take agricultural products from central Hampshire to the London Docks via the Rivers Wey and Thames. At the time waterways were much more efficient means of transport, but within 50 years the railways had largely taken their place. The Basingstoke Canal became less commercially viable, until by 1960 it was derelict.

The Canal passes through a range of different geology, from alkaline chalk at the Basingstoke end to acid Heaths at the Surrey end. Despite being entirely man made, native plants and invertebrates that liked the differing water conditions quickly colonised the canal. Unlike many canals the traffic on the Basingstoke was in horse drawn barges until near the end of commercial operations in 1950, this allowed plants to thrive.



The Canal today is 32 miles long, stretching from its junction with the Wey at New Haw, passing through Woking, Frimley, Mytchett, Ash Vale and on into Hampshire near Aldershot and now ends at Greywell near Odiham. It passes through a number of different greenspaces both those geared towards recreation (such as Frimley Lodge Park) and conservation (such as Ash Ranges) and acts as a linking corridor for nature. Today 90% of the Canal is a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

At 230 years old the Canal is a prominent landscape feature through West Surrey and Northeast Hampshire. It passes through Deepcut, Frimley Green and Mytchett within Surrey Heath Borough – having given the village of Deepcut its name (after the deep canal cutting). The entire Canal and in some areas land important to its setting was designated as a Conservation Area in the 1980s.

The Canal in a derelict state was purchased by Surrey and Hampshire County Councils for public recreation in the mid-1970s. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s the County Councils supported by the District and Boroughs and many hundreds of volunteers restored the Canal to a navigable state.

About the Basingstoke Canal Authority

The Basingstoke Canal Authority (BCA) was established in 1991 as an unincorporated local authority partnership to manage the waterway as a whole for public recreation (including navigation) and nature conservation. The BCA partnership consists of both County Councils, and 6 District and Borough Authorities, which govern the BCA through a Joint Management Committee. They are supported and advised by other stakeholders, such as the Basingstoke Canal Society (a registered charity that campaign and support the Canal).

The Canal has become very well used as a doorstep greenspace with an estimated 1.75 million visits per year, with a particular hot spot being in Mytchett – Frimley area due to the location of Frimley Lodge Park and the Canal Visitor Centre being in close proximity. This Surrey Heath section of towpath is enjoyed for air and exercise and closeness to nature free of charge by up to 18,000 people per month., including approx. 1500

people per month taking part in the Frimley Lodge Park Run. Cycling is also permitted on the towpath. Its proximity to residential areas as a doorstep greenspace was highlighted during the Covid 19 pandemic, when use was up to 3x normal levels.

Although fully navigable by craft up to 22m (72ft) long, most waterway users are in canoes, kayaks and paddleboards – this is also complimentary to the core purpose of owning the Canal for public recreation. The Basingstoke Canal Canoe Club is based at the Canal Centre at Mytchett. The BCA generates around 11% of its revenue funding from boat licence and mooring fees.

As a man-made waterway one of the key roles of the BCA is to manage water levels continuously so that it doesn't overtop and flood housing, which is now in some instances built right up to the waterway, or directly below its embankments. Similarly, the aging infrastructure is continuously inspected, with BCA staff either taking urgent action if required or advising the appropriate owner that major maintenance is required to a built asset.

The BCA always have someone on duty 24 hours / 365 days per year to ensure that there is a rapid and proportionate response should something go wrong. Unsurprisingly, staffing costs take more than 60% of the BCAs budget – to employ the Rangers and Lock Keepers who look after the waterway on a day to day basis.

As well as the small team of paid staff the BCA engage with volunteers and voluntary organisations (such as the Basingstoke Canal Society) to assist in running the waterway and helping with public engagement through schemes such as the Lengthsman programme.

All of the maintenance activities carried out by the BCA are guided by a Conservation Management Plan agreed with Natural England, so that it compliments and enhances the SSSI.

In summary

- The Canal is a significant historic landscape feature with many C18th features, it is prominent in the southern end of the Borough and is a conservation area in its own right.
- It is a 32-mile blue-green space, acting as a corridor for nature. It links other green spaces such as the military ranges and Frimley Lodge Park.
- The Canal is an SSSI for aquatic plants and invertebrates – including the entire length in the Surrey Heath. It was the most diverse freshwater body in England when last redesignated in 1995.
- The public enjoy the towpath and other accessible areas of canal land for free – enabling people to exercise and get close to nature. In 2021/22 there was an average of 18,000 people per month using the Surrey Heath section of towpath
- The water is also available for public use, but chargeable. However, canoeing, kayaking and paddleboarding remains a low-cost accessible activity.
- The BCA are a key mitigation in keeping the historic assets of the Canal safe for continued use, and that water levels are continually managed.
- The Canal is managed in partnership to make the best of the resources we have, including capital investment by the County Councils.
- The BCA engage with the community to help run the Canal this includes over 20,000 hours of volunteering a year.



Public
recreation -
1.75m visits
per year



Conserving
heritage assets



Significant for
biodiversity