

AINA CASE STUDY

THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Basingstoke Canal Conservation Plan



A ten year plan for wildlife and amenity at a nationally important SSSI

The Basingstoke Canal, managed by the Basingstoke Canal Authority on behalf of Surrey and Hampshire County Councils, is of national importance for its wildlife. A Conservation Management Plan has been prepared to guide the necessary actions to enable the canal's designation as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) to recover from its present unsatisfactory state, while at the same time ensuring the waterway continues to be a major recreational and amenity resource for the areas through which it passes. The Plan covers a ten year period from autumn 2008, though provision is made for adjusting actions as conditions or circumstances might dictate.

At the time of its most recent re-designation in 1995, the SSSI was home to 87 species of native aquatic higher plant species (approximately half the UK total), five of which are nationally scarce and the canal may have been botanically the most species rich aquatic SSSI in England. Twenty four species of dragonfly were recorded on the canal, two of which are nationally rare, plus a range of other notable invertebrates. This exceptional richness is in part a result of water quality and low levels of plant nutrients, whilst the mix of open water, marsh and wet woodland offers diverse habitats for a range of fauna.

The Conservation Plan uses a series of objectives from which to derive a list of practical management issues. These are then scheduled as specific actions where success in contributing to conservation is measured against set relevant criteria. Implications for other functions of the canal are defined and a timetable for implementation is proposed. Regular scheduled actions include monitoring of water quality, tree management, fisheries work, bank protection, control of non-native species and off-channel work as required. Dredging and vegetation control are approved via a conservation steering group.

Wildlife issues can inevitably bring limitations on waterway use and development, but in many cases the needs of conservation, recreation and amenity largely coincide and an important part of the Basingstoke Canal Authority's work is the balancing of conservation and recreation with the need to maintain and develop financial viability. Grants and external funding are sought to support the work and any amendments to the Conservation Plan require approval from Natural England.

The Plan can be viewed at www.hants.gov.uk/rh/canal/conservation-plan.pdf