

WBCT Swindon Branch Meeting February 2025 – Work Party Activities

The first month of the new year was welcomed with an excellent turnout for the work parties on both Wednesdays and Sundays. This included three new starters joining us this year so far.

We have needed to adapt the work to the weather conditions and only lost a couple of work days throughout January. The wind, rain and frozen canal dictated our activities on occasions as we needed to clear fallen branches and the ice stopped any work in the canal at times.

However, we did manage to get our work punt on to the canal to clear the vegetation on the far bank nearer Beavan's bridge.



We are planning to install a bund (dam) across the canal at this point to help with bank

repairs at Rushey Platt. The bund will enable us to lower the water at Rushey Platt, whilst maintaining the level for the boat trips near the Waitrose jetty. We needed to clear the area so that we could get the measurements necessary for the design. A couple of options are now being considered.

During this clearing work we came across a shrub that needed pulling out with a winch. As our winch was on loan to West Vale branch for their work at Uffington Gorse, I had a visit to the site to collect it. Thanks to all the volunteers there for getting it ready for me and for showing me around the Uffington Gorse canal. There is a footpath leading to the canal which has been resurfaced and is available for public access. I strongly recommend a visit as the canal looks great in this woodland area and very different from the canal in other places.

The preparation for the next stage of the bank repairs continued with a delivery of several rolls of wire mesh. These were brought to the compound on one Sunday work party by the project manager Adrian Hannay. In order to store these in the containers we needed to make some room. A couple of volunteers took the opportunity to have a good clear out and reorganise both our storage containers in the compound. Much appreciated.

On the same day, we were pleased to welcome Anita and Chris Churchouse from the Pewsham branch. Anita has recently started volunteering with the trust and has taken on a role to assist with first aid across all branches. All our first Aid kits were checked out and brought up to date as needed. Anita and Chris were also able to have a walk along the towpath with us and see this section of the canal in Swindon.

During one Wednesday work party the energy company SSE were in the area around our compound with several people surveying the area for a potential new underground power cable. They took my details and a couple of weeks later came on site to drill an investigative bore hole in the field next to our compound. Due to the boggy nature of the field, the contactors were unable to get their equipment directly on to the site from the road. Thanks to all the work carried



out last year to create a stable surface for the compound, this was a much better option for them to get access. We

allowed them to use our compound as an entry point and overnight storage for some equipment. All was restored to normal the following day.

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The winter season is the best time to clear the hedgerows and cut back any overhanging trees and so we continued this work along the towpath.



One of our major tasks in January was to clear the brambles and vegetation along the bank at the Rushey Platt section to look for potential leaks in this area. We found a few damp patches which we have been monitoring. Sure enough, when the rain returned recently, the canal level rose and a leak was visible with water flowing from the canal. For the first work party in February, we switched our activities to leak repairs! More details in the next report.

Henry Sullivan – Work Party Organiser

Whenever we work along the towpath we always take a litter picker and bag to clear any rubbish along the way.



South Swindon Parish council support us by providing equipment and removing the collected bags of rubbish. Early in the month, Colin contacted them to ask for more bags and also more pickers and rings for the bags. In due course these were delivered to my door. We are very grateful for the support we have from the parish council.

We had some great news recently as Swindon branch chair Chloe Ford has been successful in securing funding for resurfacing a section of the towpath near Beavan's bridge. The Wichelstowe development joint venture team will provide the funding and the planning for this work is now underway.



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