

WBCT Swindon Branch Meeting November 2024 – Work Party Activities

As the year turned the corner into autumn, we were lucky with the weather on most work party days with only one washout and a few showers. The welfare unit came into its own, especially at the start of one corporate work party when we had eight people squeezed in to avoid an early downpour, along with another five in the storage container!

During September and October, we had six corporate work party days which were a great help in all our work during this period and were enjoyed very much by all participants. Thanks to Rachael Wells for arranging these events and to the boat team for providing trips and a great venue for lunch on the Dragonfly. Excellent feedback has been received from all the corporate volunteers and organisers.

We also had another three new starters during this period which has boosted our numbers for the work parties.

At the beginning of September, the contractors organised by Swindon Borough Council (SBC), came to fix the collapsed brickwork in the aqueduct over the River Ray. This involved the installation of a couple of coffer dams in the river to control the water levels. The work could then be carried out to repair the brickwork in the barrels of the culvert, and fill the sink hole that had appeared on the surface. Further work involved clearing both faces of the aqueduct, so that whole structure can be assessed and repaired in the future.



The main event for our own work parties throughout this time has been the bank repair trial on the Rushey Platt section on the canal near the Skew bridge.

This involved much preparation from the project team led by Adrian Hannay to complete the design and get all the materials, plant and equipment required to carry out the work. The preparation also involved filling



many sandbags with clay which was helped by a corporate work party from BT who filled over 70 bags on their day at the canal as well as a few other preparation tasks. Many more bags were filled by our

own volunteers on the regular work parties and during the trial. The trial itself was carried out over a weekend of three full days (Friday – Monday) when we had diggers and dumpers in operation as well as a good number of volunteers throughout the period. Many thanks to all those who gave up their time during the weekend, especially those who also work full time throughout the week. A particular thanks to Marco who was there for the whole weekend driving dumpers and working in the canal. Also, thanks to James for operating the excavator all day on Saturday.

The trial section consists of three rows of wooden posts, layers of clay filled sandbags, brushwood fascines (bundles of sticks!), and topped with coir rolls which will be planted with reeds. These are all wired in place, and the whole 20 metre structure is then lined with clay and backfilled with soil. Much of the structure was put in place over the trial weekend and has now been completed by the regular work parties. The lining and

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backfilling will continue until the section is completed. This work involved volunteers in waders puddling the clay by foot and occasionally getting stuck in the mud! There were plenty of banksmen on hand to pull out the puddling



volunteers, sometimes without their waders which need to be extracted separately! (I mention no names!).

A video of the work is available to view on the trusts YouTube channel.

Alongside the bank repairs we have used the corporate work parties to build “dedges” (fencing made from cut wood) along the towpath.



Due to the numbers of corporate volunteers involved we have completed a good length of “dedging”

We have also collaborated with the West Vale branch at Shrivenham to get one more of our volunteers trained as an excavator operator. Further first aid training was also carried out in early October with four Swindon volunteers getting certificates which helps our overall health and safety capability. Thanks to all those who have given up their time for the training.

There has also been plenty of maintenance work to keep us busy with equipment and facilities in the compound.

We have also now got extra help with all the admin required as Shirley Hansen has now taken this on. We have just established a central storage area for all trust documentation and are busy organising and loading all the documents needed.

We also continue to work with the joint development management team at East Wichel. They have recently linked us up with the Willowbrook Care Home Community Manager who is very keen to be involved with the trust. The care home is due to open in the new year.

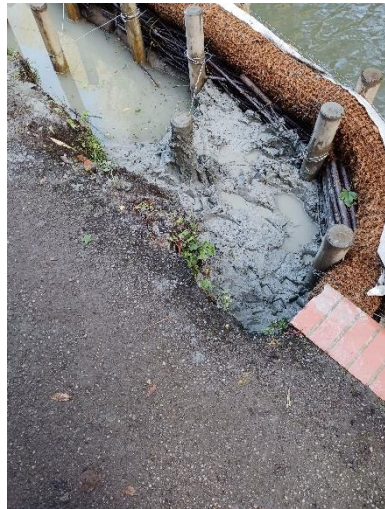
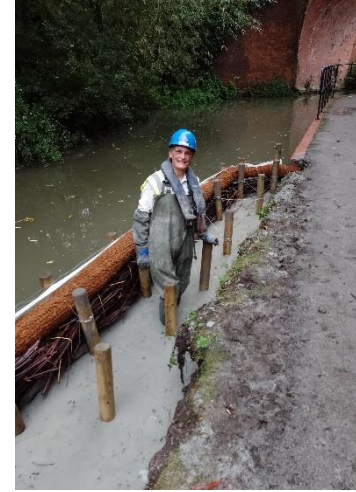
We are hoping for a drier winter than last year so that the great progress this year can continue over the next few months!

Henry Sullivan – Work Party Organiser

PTO. For more pictures!

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The Bank Repairs in pictures



Pulling the waders out!

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Corporate Work Party Events

Vets4Pets



BT



Serco/MOD



Credit Tony Johnson



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Corporate Work Party Events (cont.)

Novuna Vehicle Solutions



Eden Red



STFC UKRI

