WBCT Swindon Branch Meeting August 2025 – Work Party Activities

General

The summer weather has continued throughout August and volunteer numbers have been excellent for all work party activities. As well as the regular days on Wednesday, Friday and Sunday, there have been extra activities during this period which have all been well supported. We have also continued to have extra support from corporate events which have boosted our numbers.

Unfortunately, we had a break-in at our Westleaze compound with equipment and tools being taken from one of our containers. The locksmith arrived on site shortly after we discovered the break-in and the container was secured with a better lock. The intruders returned for a second attempt a couple of days later, but the new lock was secure enough to seal the door and prevent entry. However, we have also been unable to get in and (at the time of writing) we are still awaiting the return of the locksmith before we can gain access. Wiltshire police were contacted immediately at the time of discovery and have been working with us, although there was nothing left at the site which would help to track the intruders. We have received great support from the trust and general public after a social media appeal which has been very successful in raising funds to replace our losses. A huge thankyou to all involved. This will make a big difference and is very much appreciated.

WestLeaze

The surfacing of the towpath repair between Beavan's bridge and the housing estate at Wichelstowe was finally completed with the help of a corporate work party from RWE. They provided 10 volunteers for a day who were busy with wheel barrows moving the aggregate into place to complete the job. They also enjoyed a lunchtime excursion on the Dragonfly trip boat before the work continued in the afternoon.





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Early in August, we had confirmation that the environmental contractors on the Wichelstowe development (Keystone) were able to build a bund (dam) across the canal near skew bridge. This had been planned for some time and is needed in order to lower the water level in one section of the canal for the bank repairs, whilst retaining the existing level at the other end for the Dragonfly boat trips to continue. Adrian Hannay (WBCT Project manager for the bank repairs) arranged a meeting with Keystone which confirmed the logistics and all was then ready to proceed.
The Sunday work party got the pontoon into operation so that depth measurements could be made to confirm the quantities and equipment needed as well as the method to be used.



In order to build the bund, we needed temporary closure of a section of the towpath during the three days (Tuesday to Thursday) when the work was being carried out. This required a number of our volunteers to be on duty at several locations to redirect the public around the temporary diversion. All went well during the process and the bund is now in place so that the bank repairs can continue.
A big thankyou to everyone involved who made this possible.

Mouldon Hill



Work has continued at Mouldon Hill with clearing in the canal bed as well as keeping the towpath clear. In addition to the regular strimming and mowing, there have also been a number of trees with fully laden branches now hanging across the towpath which have needed clearing to keep the path accessible.
We have also been clearing a large amount of litter as we go and have been helped by Haydon Wick Parish council who remove the black bags filled by the work party.



East Wichel

Work continues on the canal between Foxham Way and Mill Lane.

Other Activities

A list of all the current and future work party projects needed in Swindon is at the end of this report with the current status and descriptions.

Henry Sullivan - WPO Swindon Branch

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Work Party Works & Projects

No:	Project	Location	Details and justifications	Updates and actions	Status
1	Work Compound	New site south of Beavans bridge	As an enabler for other work to take place (e.g. storing equipment and materials for various projects at an accessible location) this has become a priority after the loss of the previous area north of Beavans bridge. The inclusion of a slipway in this location could also serve as a boat turning point	Phase 1 (compound) completed Mar 2024, Phase 2 (Slipway) TBC Currently have 5 year planning consent, this may require an extension to look at possible winding. Need feasibility study.	* Done *TBC
2	Bank Stabilisation		Environmentally friendly (soft edging) approach using natural resources with stakes and backfill		Ongoing
3	Extension	Kingshill	Updated services locations requested from SBC (RH) following recent offer of support (July '21) Probable need for investigation trial holes to sample for toxic materials and exact location of abandoned sewer and water main to determine scale and nature of excavation and re-lining. Consideration for current services in towpath and nearby when carrying out any work including relevant permissions and authorisations Important extension for boat trips, condition and usage of canal in this area	Further trial holes, closer to Kingshill, could also help to determine potential for longer extension to open up this area. Previous site inspections have estimated that just one tree would need to be removed to create space for the turning point. Need 2-3 year lead time Not costed; residents currently regularly complain of smell in this area. Access for canoes etc will firstly need the path cleared and funding. Need a PM. Chloe to obtain schematics for services from Richard	*Ongoing *TBA

WBCT Swindon Branch Meeting August 2025 – Work Party Activities

4	Spillweir	South of Skew bridge	Rebuilding existing Spillweir and overflow into River Ray as proposed in 2017. Extension to the size of the existing spillweir to handle any additional spillages when further sections of the canal are connected (e.g. East Wichel and extension to M4) Building work can take place with the canal in water with the use of piling in front of the new structure. No services known to be present in the immediate area of work to the east of the canal, however the position of the gas main running to the west of the towpath, north of Skew is to be confirmed. The drainage consultants for Wichelstowe will need to be consulted to understand what plans they have made for the longer term.	There is some mortar work repair needed on the foundation of Skew Bridge adjacent to the spillweir. This falls under the responsibility of SBC who have carried out repairs in the past. There is potential for this repair to take place at the same time as the spillweir work due to the location De-silting the area below the water inlets from Old Town will also be needed and could be carried out at the same time. Dependent on levels determined by new canal development beyond Waitrose Chloe to connect with SBC and JV	*TBA
5	Aqueduct	River Ray	Repair carried out by SBC in Sept 2024 after work party discovery of sinkhole in Feb 2024. Phase 2 of SBC repair (aqueduct facing walls) in planning - 2025	WBCT involvement involves working with SBC where required Sept/Oct: Henry to keep everyone informed of progress when known	Ongoing
6	Widening of canal	South of Beavans bridge and addition of turning point	Narrow stretch and uneven bank (on opposite side to towpath) creates navigation challenges, especially when vessels need to pass. Narrow stretch all the way between Beavans bridge and Peglars Way, but more so (and more uneven) on stretch nearer Beavans bridge which was not reinstated during housing development. Turning point would also be beneficial which could be incorporated with slipway if this is included in compound work. Banks could be dredged and straightened along this stretch - potentially during compound work.	The land in this area is earmarked for allotments. Timing and plans may need collaboration and alignment with canal improvements to maximise benefits to both Narrow stretch causes passing issues, dredging required and testing for toxins. Need to be done before allotments in place. Chloe to talk to JV ref: dredging / bank / space etc	*Ongoing *TBA

WBCT Swindon Branch Meeting August 2025 – Work Party Activities

7	Splillweir	Rushey Platt	Requires refurbishment (or rebuild) following slippage of lower half of brickwork. Dependent on levels determined by new canal development beyond Waitrose	This would prevent issues to the allotments. Chloe to seek consent from SBC. Need to obtain bricklayers (maybe Swindon New College?)	TBC
8	Permanent compound	Wichelstowe	Built by developers at Wichelstowe and awaits further development before WBCT can take possession of the site Will require installation of new and existing storage units	Site now registered to WBCT, 6 parking spaces available. Need new (or good quality storage units - current one leaks, and need to make case for support when received	Ongoing
9	Signage	Swindon central	Signage along the canal	CFS completed in 2024. Next steps TBD The history hub is looking at this along with blue plaques for where old bridges were.	*Done *TBA
10	Towpath Resurfacing	Beavan's Bridge	Towpath resurfacing	Main work completed May 2025 – further fine surfacing layer required Chloe to order the limestone required and order PPE. Timing to be agreed so no clashes.	*Ongoing *TBC
11	Canal Dredging	Westleaze	Required in a number of places along the Westleaze stretch and in other locations		TBA
12	Life rings/holders	Westleaze / East wichel	New Life preservers and holders required due to a number of posts having rotted and also very old life preservers (general safety issue)	Needs agreement with SBC and Wichelstowe Joint development team Chloe to talk to SBC and Keystone ref supply and install.	*TBA *TBA

WBCT Swindon Branch Meeting August 2025 – Work Party Activities

13	Fenders	Various	Replacement of fenders along wharf wall between Waitrose and H&W, and under Bridge at Peglars way – Some boards replaced in 2023, further work needed	Chloe and Colin to revisit to check needs and amounts etc using the boat. Henry to send spec to Chloe.	Ongoing
14	Slab levelling	Waitrose	Re-levelling of slabs alongside the boat at Waitrose –	Completed 2022	Done
			Mouldon Hill		
No:	**Project**	**Location**	**Details and justifications**	**Updates and actions**	**Status**
1	Storage/welfare facilities	Mouldon Hill	Storage units and welfare facilities required to enable continued maintenance and corporate work party groups	Chloe dealing with SSE to clearly access	Ongoing
2	Towpath resurfacing	Mouldon Hill	As done at Westleaze – Aggregate finished with fine gravel	(prefer not to edge as likely to rot etc)	TBA
3	Fence	Entrance to Mouldon Hill Country Park	Replace existing rotten fencing alongside the kissing gate and include a wooden gate.	Colin to measure up for amount of wood required Chloe to obtain a quote. Funded by Cricklade Country Way	Ongoing
4	Signage	Mouldon Hill	Signs along towpath – Signs in store. Posts needed	Chloe looking at costs	TBA
5	Flooding	Purton Road Bridge	Address issues with towpath flooding under Purton Road bridge.SBC involvement required	Chloe to get contact ref draining and pass to Henry who will contact SBC.	TBA
6	Bridge	Mouldon Hill	A bailey bridge, owned by the trust, is currently stored in a hedgerow at Mouldon Hill. This needs to be moved to a site on the canal. The best place is across	Shirley to find out the weight and measurements of the bridge. Chloe to talk to TA ref; assistance in positioning. CPP	TBA

WBCT Swindon Branch Meeting August 2025 – Work Party Activities

			the canal leading to the gate into the Mouldon Hill Country Park.	and RA would be required. Rod has provided details and original design for using bridge	
7	Lock Gates	Mouldon Hill	There are some old lock gates stored in the canal hedgerow near the lock These could be used as a feature/benches /entrance alongside seating along the Mouldon Hill stretch of canal	Colin to ensure lock gates are fully visible for Chippy to check and use if possible.	Ongoing
Future items					
1	Towpath	River ray	Reinstate footpath with signage between Purton Road and Cheney manor recreation ground Dependent on land ownership clarity between SBC and Nova Hreod Academy		TBA
2	Hayes Knoll	Hayes Knoll	Work to include this in Swindon Branch and create signage on-site		TBA
3	Mouldon Hill	Mouldon Hill |	Feasibility plan required for reinstating canal at Mouldon Hill	Would need to understand how we offset the removal of trees to get WWT on board.	TBA
4	Queen Camilla Plaque	Westleaze	Potential to increase the height of the plinth with plaque to commemorate the opening of the Jetty by Waitrose	Options needed	