WBCT Swindon Branch - January 2026 Work Party Activities

General

It seems like a long time since the last report in October last year and there has been a great deal of activity in all locations with fantastic volunteer support throughout the period. The regular Sunday and Wednesday work party days have continued along with a few concentrated weeks of full-time effort including volunteers, contractors and corporate days.

There was also a well-attended volunteer social at the Wichel Inn in November. Thanks to everyone who was able to attend and many thanks to all volunteers and supporters for all the great efforts throughout the year.

WestLeaze



The bank repairs at Rushety Platt have been the key activity in this area over the past few months. This work began at the end of October with a two-week exercise of repairs with contractors Keystone Environmental. This was followed up with another full week in November and continuous work on the regular work party days.



We have now completed a 140-metre stretch of the bank between the old railway bridge (aka Skew Bridge) and the spill-weir at Rushey Platt. This work involves removing the damaged bank, renewing the clay lining of the canal and reinstating the bank structure and wildlife habitat. A large quantity of clay and many other materials were transported to the site with the continued use of machinery and a great manual effort from all our volunteers as well as the contractors. We also had corporate teams from UKRI and AECOM which boosted our numbers and made a huge contribution to the total effort. They also enjoyed the experience of working on the canal including lunch on the Dragonfly trip boat!



The repair work now continues on regular work party days to finish off the top-soil surface of the bank and carry out the planting needed before the spring.

Whilst we were carrying out the repair work, a forestry operations team from Swindon Borough Council also came to the site nearby to remove a potentially dangerous tree along the towpath that we had reported earlier. A large storm-damaged tree was removed and the area made safe.

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In early December the work on the river Ray aqueduct repairs continued with the removal of foliage along the towpath and the erection of a wooden fence. All this work was carried out by Swindon Borough Council ahead of further structure repairs to the aqueduct expected later in the year.
This clearing has opened the view of the river Ray from the canal and now provides a great opportunity to see these Swindon waterways much more clearly and all the fantastic wildlife in this area.

Mouldon Hill

Work has continued on the Sunday Work Party days at Mouldon Hill where good progress has continued in the line of the canal. We have had a winch in use for the last few weeks and have cleared a good number of trees from the bed of the canal.



The wet weather has meant that water has now returned to the base of the canal, so we now need wellies and waders to work in the area. However, it is great to see water in the canal which was dry all summer and full of growth.
Despite the heavy rain, we have generally been very fortunate with the weather and been able to make good progress with all the clearing. One exception was when we started in the dry, but the rains came in while we were fully occupied with the winch in the canal. We carried on as the rain persisted and were very wet by the time we decided to call it a day, but good progress made!
We are now preparing for the visit of the WRG (Waterway Recovery Group) forestry team who are joining us for a weekend in February to help remove the trees in the canal. We are hoping for reasonable weather for 13th-15th Feb.

East Wichel



Work has continued on the development of the new canal at Wichelstowe and we were delighted to visit the site in December when the development team showed us around. A good stretch between Foxham Way and Mill Lane is now completed and in water.

Good progress has been made in Swindon over the last year and we are all looking forward to further progress in all areas throughout 2026.

Henry Sullivan - WPO Swindon Branch