

Oxfordshire Branch Chairs report AGM 26th March 2024

I must start with some thanks – to Rodger Badger – who has undertaken the work of branch treasurer for which I am very grateful. We will look to approve the accounts shortly, Rodger has unfortunately decided that he is not able to continue as treasurer for the forthcoming year, a topic that I will come back to.

I must also thank Jenny Hodgson Paul Jones and Verna Smith who helped put the IWA stand up and man it at the Banbury Canal Festival. The festival is a great opportunity to speak to a much wider audience than many canal festivals that are visited only by canal enthusiasts. At the Banbury festival there are dedicated canal enthusiasts, but also lots of local people with an interest in the canal and quite a few people who had headed into Banbury to shop and tripped over the festival. Exactly the sort of environment for the IWA to really push its renewed campaigning message.

Final thanks to Jenny Hodgson, Chris Jones and others who have helped sort out the arrangements for this meeting as I was unable to due to some significant recent family and business challenges.

All of which brings us to the future. The need for the IWA and its campaigning message has never been stronger given the growing crisis the Canal and Rivers Trust, the Environment agency and other navigation authorities seem to find themselves in. The IWA nationally/ centrally is facing its own significant challenges but is trying to address them. Here in the Oxfordshire branch we face more than challenges the branch faces EXTINCTION.

Verna Smith, who has recently stood down as IWA regional chair, twisted my arm to take on the chair of Oxfordshire Branch a few years ago Robin Williams was the secretary until last year when he relinquished the role and Roger Badger is having to give up the Treasurers role. I cannot, nor would I want to run the branch on my own. For the branch to continue it has to do more than just about function it must run and operate properly, attending events, monitoring and responding to planning applications that affect the waterways and above all actively engaging and campaigning for the waterways.

Unless between 4 and 6 people are willing to put themselves forward at this AGM meeting to take on official branch committee roles then the memberships has only 1 choice which is to vote to close down the branch and furthermore to agree that the balance of Branch funds be put into central IWA funds for general IWA purposes.

If the branch members decide to put themselves forward, stand for committee positions and to continue the IWA campaigning fight I remain very happy to continue with a branch committee role to support this and we can agree an ambition of monitoring and responding to planning applications affecting the waterways in the branch area and manning stands at Oxford and Banbury Canal Festivals in September/ October 2024