

Chiltern Branch

Chairman's report



Over the years, Chiltern Branch has raised funds of around £50K, most of which have been donated to Wendover Canal Trust (WCT). We currently hold funds totaling £15K – this was intended to fund a slipway to be built for trail-boats to be launched and recovered from the Wendover arm; however, for a variety of reasons that option is no longer viable. We are now considering 2 options; to build a footbridge over Bear Brook to give access from a car park to the towpath on the Aylesbury arm and to build a pedestrian swing bridge to replace ‘Oliver’s bridge’ (Bridge 11) on the Wendover arm. Either project would bring benefits to the local community but replacing Oliver’s bridge would remove yet another obstacle to navigation on the Wendover arm.

So, potentially 2 very worthwhile projects, which need only the continued enthusiasm of an active IWA branch to be delivered. **They may never happen! Why?** Chiltern Branch may not exist a year from now if we fail to strengthen the committee or say, a volunteer panel. John Brice has been the driving force behind Chiltern Branch fund-raising and volunteer activity for more than 30 years; due to deteriorating health, John has been forced to retire from the committee. Dick Pilkinton and Sheila are shortly relocating out of the area, so will be lost to the branch. Chiltern Branch needs a new committee to bring a fresh approach to how and what we do to promote and protect our local waterways. The opportunity is here and now for new ways for the branch to function; there is no right way; we will find a way to accommodate people with the skills and enthusiasm needed to move us forward; please just contact me to discuss your thoughts.

So what did we do in 2024? Many of us had a very enjoyable boat trip and lunch organized by the branch with Waterways Experiences (WE); another great waterways charity that enables many deprived and disabled groups to get afloat. Based at Nash Mills WE will again be our hosts this year but for a trip south instead of north.

We had a stand at the Marsworth Steam Fair in June; great fun and raising in excess of £500. Unfortunately, we do not have sufficient fit volunteers to attend in 2025.

Of course many of us also enjoyed the very interesting series of talks organized by Colin Bird.

Beyond Chiltern - 2024 was another difficult year for navigation authorities; first, too much water causing considerable damage and there is no evidence the change of government will bring any benefit to the waterways. Now all navigation authorities, waterways businesses and related charities including the IWA will be

hit by increased employment costs. However, under the guidance of Charlie Norman, IWA has delivered a new 'All Parliamentary Party Group for Waterways' (APPG); members may not realise that all APPGs must be re-created after a general election. Particularly difficult when many interested MPs lose their seats. There can be no doubt that waterways in general are deteriorating and whilst we can probably all identify wastage and poor practice, lack of funding is by far the largest concern. IWA will shortly introduce an updated version of our data management system; we are working with Compuco to install CiviPlus. Later this year CiviPlus will enable members to see and update their own membership details; you will also be able to link your membership to more than one branch, say local and where you moor your boat.

So, to close – whatever your interest in our waterways, please make sure you enjoy them in 2025, but look closely and consider what we risk losing if the funding situation does not improve. To resolve all our concerns with annual funding of our waterways would require less than 5 hours of the annual expenditure on the NHS (now there is food for thought).

Finally, please do not underestimate the value you could bring to Chiltern Branch, the IWA and our waterways if you just spare some time!

Best regards, Dave Chapman

IWA Chiltern Branch Chair.

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