

On behalf of the Shropshire Union Middlewich Branch Adopters' many volunteers, I would like to thank Roger Preen of Calcutt Boats for his kind compliments in his letter 'Green Tunnels' concerning the high standard of vegetation maintenance on the Middlewich Branch (WW Dec).

SUMBA was created by canal

enthusiasts in April 2014 and works in close partnership with the Canal & River Trust's North Wales & Borders Region under its 'Adopt Your Local Canal' initiative. In the last two-and-a-half years our group has grown way beyond our initial expectations - we now have an active volunteer base in excess of 50 people and hold up to five maintenance work parties a month throughout the year, including hedge laying. By the end of last November we had completed our 103rd work party and had accumulated over 1,100 volunteer days involving more than 5,200 hours.

Every one of our volunteers is immensely proud of their adopted length of canal and works extremely hard to maintain it in a condition that regularly receives compliments from users of the canal - not just boaters. I would suggest that instead of people complaining about overgrown vegetation on the towpath and offside, or the condition of moorings, locks, towpaths or leisure facilities etc, they do as we did in 2014. Adopt a bridge, lock or length of canal and help CRT to improve the visual appearance of the canal system that we all love to use - it's very rewarding and keeps you fit!!

Graham Russell, Nantwich

Maintenance matters

We would agree with the comments (Waterlines, WW Dec) from John Henn regarding the need for CRT to properly maintain the critical winding holes on its network and from Roger Preen about getting to grips with the 'green screen'. Both these issues are subjects that the Inland Waterways Association has addressed in the past with the Canal & River Trust and continues to do so at national, regional and local level.

A big part of the 'winding hole problem', which was the subject of a major IWA/ Historic Narrow Boat Club joint project in 2015/16, lies in the fact that the winding hole register that CRT inherited from its predecessor, British Waterways, is in our view incomplete and unreliable. IWA is still working to help CRT improve its database to capture all recognised winding holes, but, although that will be an improvement on the current situation, it still doesn't address John Henn's point about ensuring that full-length winding holes in critical locations, such as tunnel portals, are adequately maintained. We will continue to press CRT on this subject at every opportunity.

IWA identified over a year ago that hedge maintenance was not being properly or consistently managed, and that stretches of canal were becoming 'green tunnels' and so losing interest and context. We understood from our discussions with CRT that it would be resurveying all its hedges with a view to them being re-established at a manageable height. We are still waiting to see the results of this exercise.

All of this costs money, of course, and we have to recognise that CRT has finite sums at its disposal. Roger Preen's favourable comments about the Middlewich Branch perhaps show a way forward - the big improvements in vegetation management there have been underpinned by a very active adoption group, demonstrating how crucial voluntary efforts still are to the maintenance of the waterways. IWA has always been an organisation of active volunteers and remains so today.

Gren Messham, chairman, IWA's Navigation Committee