**Chairman’s Report**

**AGM 2023**

**28th November 2023**

Monthly Updates have covered the detail each month, so this is a summary and vote of thanks for support from you all.

Any organisation is only as strong as the members and volunteers, so I welcome the involvement of new volunteers and the increasing effort by existing ones. Following a successful trip to ICE we attracted Martin Pilbin, a newly retiring Civil Engineer. We have a new member supporting the finance function, Chris Richardson, who has been working with Derek to assist and act as back up for the Treasurer’s position.

We also have Denise Tinley, who is looking to take over involvement with wildlife and ecology after the loss of Eddy Case a year ago tonight.

Our working parties have been involved in tree management mowing, hedge cutting, bramble bashing, fencing, digger driving, etc, etc. We now have sufficient numbers trained on digger driving and even managed to find them something to practise on when we cleared the Draycott ditch and created a bypass pipe to reduce flooding. All of this is only possible due to David Savidge’s continued planning, organising and “supervising”. Of course, David also is our go to technical drawing provider and runs the Engineering Group.

Don and Tony have refused to recognise that the Cottages are “complete” and continue to find and finish jobs. This may be influenced by the café’s hospitality We have also built up a reasonably new team of 22 volunteers on the trip boat and between them they have provided around 70 trips during the “summer”. Their passion is a good way to spread the message to potential supporters and to ensure city centre visibility.

We also had our volunteers – mostly familiar faces – at the events we attended this year. We visited Breaston, Chellaston, Langley Mill, Chesterfield (Staveley) and Shardlow. We created quite a bit of interest, especially with the Riverboat displays and once people had stopped to look our volunteers grab them to explain what they might be missing.

I’m sure you will have noticed that our publications work much more smoothly now. With Peter producing the Packet based on my monthly updates and distributed by Andrew on the website and emails and Chris for postal copies. Peter also updates various other local publications on our behalf to spread the message further afield. The quality and reliability of the output is so much better and I believe this really helps to build awareness for us.

We have also had a busy schedule of members meetings with speakers drawn from a variety of sources including our members themselves. My thanks go to Anne for finding and organising the speakers and Eileen. We already have events planned for the next 6 months with speakers covering James Brindley, The Friargate Line, The Woodland Trust, the Ilkeston Tramway and the Carlisle Ship Canal.

And last, but not least we have the directors and coopted supporters. These people devote time behind the scenes on a daily basis. We have already seen the challenges that Derek has dealt with this year. From Anne, who creates reliable minutes from our long and technical discussions, Chris, Paul and Mike, who have been pushing through the land purchases, Duncan who has managed planning issues and ecological surveys, Mike, our Vice Chairman, who has successfully promoted the cause to the city pretty much single handed and with Mike Wood has developed plans for the Derby Arm in the face of many challenges.

I offer my thanks to all volunteers and ask that as members you appreciate how the organisation has built over the years and the strength we have in so many areas.

Indeed it is interesting that this comes at a time when the IWA seems to be in disarray. Now on the eve of the thirtieth anniversary of the project foundation we can see developments in so many areas.

In summary we now have:

* Potential to move sewers at Sandiacre – conversations with STW have been moving matters on at pace.
* At Chellaston we are in ongoing discussions with developers to restore a kilometre alongside the new housing estate, although this will undoubtedly be at least five years away.
* These cottages and café that generate rental funds for our operations and restoration and provide a base to impress third parties. The recent setback from flooding will cause a hiatus, but it appears we will be fully insured for the estimated £100,000 liability and tenants are prepared to wait for the repairs due to be completed in February. We are also looking to avoid a repetition by improving flood barriers, dredging water courses and diverting water flows. Paul will elaborate on that later.
* A Riverboat that is generating publicity and funds, albeit after a long bureaucratic process with the Council. The delays over a pontoon continue, but we are more confident now of success in the spring. The boat survived record river levels thanks to speedy action by us. The arrival of the pontoon will make matters so much more straightforward. Support by the new Labour administration also seems to be developing.
* The Atkins report into the Derby Arm has been very positive and in a different climate we might already have found funding support to move forwards. The speedy development by St Modwen may require us to change approach, but the financial viability is now well established.
* We have completed a full ecological survey of the line to identify opportunities for Biodiversity Net Gain.
* Draycott is progressing behind the scenes as we grapple with the challenges of getting water voles and engineering to be coordinated. We now sit with a more comprehensive approach to the engineering design with experts in place to manage the process and a more rigorous design brief. Whilst we are still finding it difficult dealing with neighbours we are confident that we can have an engineering solution and firm quotes in place early next year. We’ve also looked at funding the work and through Martin Pilbin’s contacts are looking at generating multi million pound funding to provide flood management and water transfer projects.
* Roger raised the need for a more strategic approach to engineering and we have put in place a review through the engineering group of key areas of concern. This has led to conversations with the electrification team at Network Rail about plans at Raynesway, which was key to Roger’s concerns.
* The funding base we now have has allowed us to look at acquisition of land at Swarkestone and around here and Paul will update on the progress he’s made and expectations for the near future.

So it has been a busy year with continued progress from an increasing active and numerous band of volunteers.

Thank you all and here’s to 2024.