

To: Sharon Groth sharon.groth@witney-tc.gov.uk
Subject: Witney Treescapes Opportunity Report

Dear Sharon,

I'm pleased to now be sending you the Treescapes Opportunity Report for Witney.

This email has some general advice on sensitivities around sharing the report; some observations on what your report shows; ways that we can help you take the report forwards.

The report should be easy to follow, but I'd recommend also having a look at the [Treescapes Guide](#) on our website, which gives some additional information. Please keep in mind that mapping is an imperfect exercise, and is only as good as the data that we have to put into it; we are aware that the maps are not perfect, and welcome feedback. It is particularly tricky to get reliable hedge data (we are working with University of Oxford and Google on a more accurate, high resolution hedge data set, which should be ready in the autumn).

Sensitivities around how the report is shared and used:

- Collaboration between stakeholders is key to nature recovery – local residents, landowners, farmers, businesses, community groups, etc.;
- The majority of any parish will be privately owned, so strong relationships with local landowners / farmers are key to nature recovery efforts;
- We would thus recommend not sharing the report widely before you've started conversations with local land owners, who can understandably feel sensitive to suggestions as to what should or should not be happening on their land;

Observations on the report

Hopefully these observations are useful, but they are based only on the report; your local knowledge may well suggest other opportunities – so much depends on local relationships, details of exactly what is already in place, and so on.

Witney is of course a largely urban area, but has a number of important existing natural assets. These include the River Windrush and Madley Brook; water courses often have high value nature sites along their banks, which is the case in Witney: there are areas of species rich grassland, woodland, as well as some high wildlife value and core nature recovery network sites (p10). The total area of woodland is 5%; although this is lower than the county and country averages, it seems reasonable for a largely urban area, especially as garden trees are not taken into account, and there is a relatively high amount (6%; p13) of species rich grassland, which is a very valuable and biodiverse habitat. Protecting, managing and building on existing natural assets is a vital part of nature recovery.

There are some opportunities for new woodland, species rich grassland or agroforestry (p16-21) in what are coming up as agricultural areas mainly in the south east and south west of the parish. It may be possible to work with landowners in these areas to find out how they feel about nature recovery, and whether they would be interested in joining the parish in taking action; we are happy to provide Opportunity Reports for landowners, which are also free of charge. I'm not sure if any of them would be part of the north east Cotswold farmer cluster, but we may be able to look into that.

Hedges and woodland buffers (p17 and 18) can link and expand existing woodlands without taking up too much space in agricultural areas; they also provide amenity value in urban areas. We find that parish and community groups find hedges a relatively approachable starting point for nature recovery activities, and can point you in the direction of useful resources to find out more about what other parishes have done in this area. Please note that it is difficult to get accurate hedge data; we are working with the University of Oxford and Google on developing a more accurate data set for this, so please keep this in mind when looking at hedge opportunities in the report.

Within the town we have mapped opportunities for trees in open spaces (p22); you will know better than us what opportunities actually exist on the ground, but seeing them all mapped out may be a help you think strategically where to focus efforts. As well as trees in open spaces, there are opportunities for garden trees – several parishes have run successful free garden tree giveaways, and they can be a great way to get the community involved in nature recovery efforts.

Looking at where the draft Nature Recovery Network lies (p27), which largely follows the Windrush and to some extent Madley Brook, could be a good starting point for considering where to focus your efforts; it looks like there is overlap with a number of public open spaces. Please note that the Nature Recovery Network is a draft, but we expect it is likely that it will be refined in its final version, rather than extensively changed. You could also look at where there are opportunities for natural flood management (p39) or air quality improvement (p41) to help decide where your best opportunities lie. Your report shows where introducing treescapes would provide multiple benefits (p46-49), but this is focused on agricultural fields, and Witney itself is classed as “other”, i.e. non-agricultural land; looking at the map however, there are large parts of the town where air quality improvement and biodiversity gain overlap, even though these do not appear in the maps.

Next steps

Once you have had a chance to digest the report we would be happy to arrange a Zoom call with you to discuss the report with you and to consider next steps. We’d recommend getting together a working group of people interested in taking the report forwards before arranging this call; some or all of them can attend. If you are keen to take matters further we have a range of **further services we can offer to support you:**

- Maps showing the landowners, managers, and publicly owned land in your parish so that you can plan who to get in touch with;
- We can advise on who to approach for more detailed advice on various aspects of treescape establishment and nature recovery;
- We can put you in touch with other parishes in the area who have received one of our reports;
- We can provide Treescape Reports for farmers within the parish (free at present);
- A guide for developing a Nature Recovery Plan for the parish.

Congratulations if you’ve got to the end of this lengthy email! I look forward to hearing back from you and talking more about your report.

Best wishes,

Martha Crockatt, PhD

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