

CLIMATE, BIODIVERSITY & PLANNING COMMITTEE

Date: Tuesday, 28 March 2023
Title: Open Spaces Strategy
Contact Officer: Park Ranger - Carl Whitehead

Background

PO3: We have 9 thousand trees on Witney Town Council land and there needs to be a planned and systematic approach to when and to what level they are checked.

PO4: We have had in the past the "Wild Witney" team looking at taking over a piece of land we provided.

PO6/LP4: We are in the process of collecting the base line data to better allow the ability to write a robust management plan.

LP2: We are installing marker posts around the lake at $\frac{1}{4}$ $\frac{1}{2}$ $\frac{3}{4}$ and a start finish post as the lake perimeter is 1 mile all the way round.

LP5: The angling club have around 12-15 swims (areas of usage)

EE7: There is a need to increase community engagement.

Current Situation

PO3: We as a council at present have a number of strategies to fulfil our responsibility to the public.

- The works team carry out on-site visual checks whenever we are working in a specific area.
- We react to public request to inspect trees using our level 1 tree inspection trained Ranger.
- We receive reports from our approved Tree Surgeon with regard to problems he has observed while carrying out other work for WTC.
- We employ Treework Environmental Practice to carry out surveys of all our trees on a 2 to 5 year rotation dependent on area and condition of the trees
- We use Treework Environmental Practice to carry out Static load tests on mature trees to provide evidence that they have a low risk level to the public

PO4: The Wild Witney group folded at the end of 2022.

PO6: We have commissioned a number of surveys of flora fauna and water quality within the country park and these will drive the work plan for the next 5-10 years

LP2: Giving the public a measured route around the Lake.

We also have a number of leaflets that come from other organisations that describe routes/walks which encompass our park.

LP5: The Ranger is at present working with the Angling Club to provide bank stabilisation and better swim creation around the Lake.

EE7: At present there is no consolidated process to allow members of the public to become involved in volunteering.

Environmental impact

Having declared a Climate Change Emergency at its Council meeting on 26 June 2019 – with this in mind Councillors should have due regard to the environmental impact of any decisions they make with regard to its facilities and services it operates.

PO3: We need to be aware that trees can present a number of environmental issues, such as.

- Ash dieback, This needs to be managed on an ongoing basis.
- Fungal infections weakening the structure of the tree.

PO6: The biodiversity of the park will be increased greatly through the work that is currently and planned to be carried over the next few years.

PO4: The site is now looked after by the current Ranger.

LP2: No impact other than normal wear and tear on pathway

LP5: By assigning specific areas and maintaining them this prevents areas of high biodiversity value being used by fishermen.

EE7: Volunteers can create a significant increase in Biodiversity.

Risk

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

PO3: Our comprehensive inspection program allows confidence that we have all issues as well as possible.

PO6: No risk

LP2: Increased number of users and conflicts over usage

LP5: No risk

That resources are purchased, and officer time used to recruit volunteers and there is a poor uptake.

Financial implications

- There is an ongoing cost for the tree surgeon and the tree inspection and static load testing.
- The site is now part of the country park and will be maintained as a “reservoir” for wildlife when cutting the meadows as part of the normal management of the site.
- Funding not available therefore ability to implement management plan not possible.
- Cost to maintain a “fit for use” surface.
- Costs of fishing swim improvements will all so increase biodiversity at water’s edge so an added bonus overall.
- There is an initial cost for tools and PPE plus advertising the opportunity. There is also an ongoing cost when tools. PPE and outreach materials need replacing.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and consider the following:

1. We have a Tree policy which outlines our strategy going forward.
2. We have a significant resource, and it needs to be made use of and maintained to facilitate use by as wide a range of users as possible.
3. Promote as a “health and wellbeing” resource.
4. The value of volunteers is enormous in both the output of their work and also more importantly the social interactions and wellbeing created in a group of like-minded well motivated and confidently led team.