

STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Date:	Monday, 12 June 2023
Title:	In Bloom Competitions
Contact Officer:	Communications & Community Engagement Officer - Polly Inness

Background

Witney Town Council enters individual green spaces for The Thames and Chilterns In Bloom awards. For some years the whole town was entered in the large towns category, but it became apparent that with a lack of resources and interest from other authorities and stakeholders, that Witney could never achieve Gold. The Council has achieved Gold for individual sites (The Leys) and continue to strive for Gold with other parks and cemeteries. This report is intended to provide information about plans for this year's competitions. The Council also run a Schools in Bloom competition (best wheelbarrow) and supports Community Gardeners in different parts of the town.

Current Situation

This year the Council has entered Witney Lake and Country Park and two of its supported Community Gardening groups have entered the 'It's Your Neighbourhood' (IYN) competition of their own accord so that they can be judged and receive feedback for their own efforts.

Judging Day

Judging this year will take place on Monday 3rd July. It is customary for the Mayor to accompany judges and officers on the judging tour. Judges will visit the IYN gardens, have lunch and receive a copy of the Council's portfolio before visiting the Lake to judge the main entry. The school wheelbarrows are collected at the end of June for display on the Leys throughout the summer. The works team water and maintain them during this time. The Thames and Chilterns In Bloom judges and the Mayor will select their winning barrows on the way to judging the lake.

Enhancing Visitor Experience at the Lake

It is proposed that some of this year's In Bloom budget is spent on education and enhancing the visitor experience. With this in mind, a trail of rubbing posts with information boards has been investigated. See **Appendix 1**. These are available in different materials, metal, wood and plastics. Consideration should be given to longevity, vandal proofing and being in keeping with the natural setting. There are even braille versions of the information and rubbing boards.

Carnival and Wheelbarrow Judging

The Rotary Club awards a £100 prize to their favourite barrow at the Carnival, the following weekend (8th July) and the Peoples' Choice is selected in a voting exercise at a stall run by The Communications and Engagement Officer and The Planning and Stronger Communities Administrator. This year there

are plans to widen the appeal of the Council's stall by offering some rock painting activities. Children can paint two rocks, one to take away and one for the Council to keep for use in its window displays to promote In Bloom or Biodiversity & Green Spaces Officer activities. The theme will be nature based.

Support for Community Gardens and Schools

This year schools that entered were each given a wheelbarrow, two bags of compost and a voucher for £30. The theme is a Meal in a Barrow and barrows are due to be collected at the end of June and taken to the Leys where they will be watered and cared for by the Works team. The Community gardens (Edible Gardens, Witney Horticultural Society Bed and Burwell Community Garden) were each given a voucher for £50 towards plants and equipment.

Community Gardeners Water Butts

There is never enough water for the gardeners in the summer months and it hasn't been feasible for the works team to fill butts every week as requested. Only the Edible Gardens small butt is fixed to a suitable down pipe at the back of Lakeland's building. Witney Horticultural Society have a water butt that is not plumbed in and do not have a rain gathering system. They have requested a larger butt and offered their small one as a second butt for EG Group. The Biodiversity & Green Spaces Officer and the Communications and Engagement Officer have spent time looking for a solution nearby. The WHS do have contacts at the Ice Centre and it may be that despite not having a suitable downpipe, they may be able to help with some supply of used water.

Unless they are able to plumb in, it isn't sensible to agree to their request for a larger butt which the Council could not hope to keep full. A more viable solution is still being sought.

Welcome to Witney Planters

A previous underspend on the In Bloom Budget led to the suggestion that any underspend is used to create an impact project. The one currently underway is for new planters at the Welcome to Witney signed entrances to the town. Council decided to ask The Witney Shed to create wooden ones and asked about capacity to do this as well as desired materials. The Shed recommends pressure treated wood. Proposed design is attached as Appendix 2. The signs are all different sizes, so each bed needs to be sized accordingly.

Environmental impact

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

Consideration should be given to the materials chosen for any nature trail boards installed at the lake, those used for planters and a sustainable solution to watering problems encountered by community gardening groups.

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.

Financial implications

Described here or as stated in the report above.

- All projects are predicted to be within the budget of £7,250 (4215/402)

Recommendations

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

1. That the Lake and Country Park visitor is enhanced with a nature trail of information and rubbing boards; and
2. That the members agree the suggested design for the Welcome to Witney planters.