

WITNEY LAKE AND COUNTRY PARK

MANAGEMENT PLAN SUMMARY

2024-2034



Written by Carl Whitehead, Biodiversity and Green Spaces Officer

April 2024

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Where are we now?

Introduction

This management plan has been written by Carl Whitehead, Witney Town Council's Biodiversity and Green Spaces Officer, who has responsibility for the Witney Lake and Country Park. It has been created in response both to his employment and Witney Town Council's current Open Spaces Strategy. We also plan to recruit a Green Spaces Operative to support the B&GSO

Information from previous reports and surveys has been utilised in the writing of this plan, including the previous management plan written by Adrian Shaw in 1995. The 1995 plan was actioned for the period of both Adrian's employment and that of his successor, Nigel Boden, but the Lake and Country Park was without formal management between December 2004 and July 2022. A number of the aims and objectives in the 1995 plan have been incorporated into this updated plan. It is anticipated that the current management plan will become live from 1 April 2024. After this, it is expected that the document will be regularly reviewed with a yearly re-evaluation of its aims and objectives to ensure that it continues to provide a working and relevant framework for the Park's management.

The following habitats found at the Country Park are considered to be Habitats of Principal Importance (HoPI) for the conservation of biodiversity in England under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 and are important components of the biodiversity resource of the Lower Windrush Valley:

- The Lake (a eutrophic standing body of water)
- The pond on Snipe Meadow (a freshwater pond)
- The broadleaved woodland fringing the Lake's eastern bank (a wet woodland)
- The remainder of the broadleaved plantation woodlands (lowland mixed deciduous woodland)
- The River Windrush and Emma's Dyke (water courses)

A study by the Lower Windrush Valley Project and Pond Conservation (now Freshwater Habitats Trust) in 2004 recorded 110 bird species, 80 species of invertebrates and 52 different wetland plants on the site. Over the past two years, the meadow and grassland have been managed with the aim of increasing biodiversity and work has been undertaken to commission new reports and surveys to provide updated baseline data (see detailed list below).

Management Reports and Surveys

| | |
|-----------|---|
| 1995 | Management plan by Adrian Shaw |
| 2001-2023 | Water level monitoring by Smiths |
| 2004 | Lower Windrush Valley Project ecological assessment on Pit 37 |
| 2005 | Windrush in Witney, Recommendations |

| | |
|------|--|
| 2017 | Site review by Continental |
| 2021 | Phase 1 habitat survey by Dr Frank Lucas |
| 2023 | Lake water quality assessment by Dr Mike Bowes |
| 2023 | Lake survey by Dr Robert Aquilia |
| 2023 | Ariel survey of Snipe Meadow by Smiths |
| 2023 | Bathymetric survey of Lake by Smiths |
| 2023 | Arachnid & invertebrate survey of Snipe Meadow by Lawrence Bee |
| 2023 | Arachnid & invertebrate survey of Mill Meadow by Lawrence Bee |
| 2024 | WODC Local Nature Recovery Plan |

The Country Park Today

The Country Park attracts a wide range of users including (but not limited to):

- Walkers
- Dog walkers
- Runners
- Fisherman
- Cyclists
- Photographers
- Parents/carers and children
- Geocachers
- Community groups such as Nature Now

The Country Park currently has the following amenities:

- Information and interpretation boards (those installed between 1997 and 2004 need updating/replacing)
- Dog bins both general rubbish and re-cycle
- Waste bins
- A defibrillator
- Cycle racks.
- Life rings
- Benches; both seating and picnic
- Fishing platforms (including two disabled access platforms)
- Quarter mile marked one mile running/walking circuit

Since Carl Whitehead was employed in July 2022, the following projects have been undertaken/completed on the Country Park:

- Bank stabilization (ongoing) 60m so far
- Replacement dog bin installation (ongoing) X6
- Life ring installation with funding from Witney Angling Society (ongoing)
- Fence replacement and new fence installation (ongoing)
- Planting 200 meters of native hedgerow including oak standards every 8 meters with funding from the Woodland Trust
- Hedge management (ongoing)
- Bird box building including three owl boxes built by the Witney Shed
- A tern raft built with the support of the Witney Shed and installed

- Re-furnishment of WW2 pill box on Mill Meadow including the installation of an information panel
- Installation of new safety and information noticeboards
- Creation of a one-mile marked running/walking circuit
- Installation of a new 12ft field gate and installation of a re-furbished 12ft gate
- General maintenance including paths and overhanging branches/vegetation clearance.
- Removal of 5 tonnes of Himalayan Balsam from water courses and around the Lake
- Creating a fenced area within the nature reserve to provide a safe nesting area for the Lake's swans.
- New entrance gate at Mill Meadow
- Mill Meadow cut and collect and Flail of Snipe meadow.
- X12 wildlife rubbing posts & X12 look out for nature signs installed around Lake and Country Park
- Installed X2 re-cycled plastic benches and X1 recycled picnic bench on lake side
- Entered into a partnership with Natural England and Freshwater Habitats Trust, Nature based Solutions program to manage parts of the Two meadows we look after to preserve and increase biodiversity (report in Appendix)
-

Legal Compliances and Policy Context Frameworks

The management of the Lake and Country Park is subject to a number of legal provisions and statutory obligations. These include:

- Statutory Instrument 2004 No.118 Prescribed Descriptions (England) Order 2004 (established statutory crime and disorder strategies)
- The Local Government Acts 1972, 1999 (established Best Value Authorities) and 2000 (established promotion of economic, social or environmental well-being)
- The Local Government and Rating Act 1997
- The Dogs (Fouling of Land) Act 1996
- The Environmental Protection Act 1990
- The Litter Act 1983
- The Public Health Acts 1848 to 1875
- The Enclosure Act 1845

In addition, a number of local policies need to be considered including:

[Witney Town Council Open Spaces Strategy](#)

Review of Biodiversity Opportunities in the Windrush Valley:

https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/file/countryside/smreview_of_biodiversity_opportunities_in_the_lower_windrush_valley.pdf

West Oxfordshire Local Plan:

<https://www.westoxon.gov.uk/media/feyjmpen/local-plan.pdf>

Site Description

The Lake is a flooded gravel pit (known as Pit 37) and was dug initially for use in the construction of the A40 Witney bypass in the mid-1970s. It was purchased by Witney Town Council in September 1988. Today the Lake and Country Park covers 91.5 acres (37 hectares) and comprises, the Lake (which has a depth of up to 5.1 meters and is eutrophic), a traditional hay meadow (Mill Meadow) and a wet grassland (called Snipe Meadow and originally another quarry site). The distance around the Lake measures 1.8 kilometres (approximately 1.1 mile), it has an area of approximately 83,000m² and a volume of 277,493,000 litres. The hay meadow and the grassland are located between tributaries of the River Windrush. The southern end of the Lake is set aside as a nature reserve, with the northern end being designated for leisure activities such as fishing. The grazing land to the east and north of the Park was classified as being an Environmentally Sensitive Area by Natural England following the introduction of the scheme in 1987. To the west, the Park is bordered by an area of small paddocks and allotments, behind which is the village of Ducklington. The site stands at around 80 meters above sea level.

The Lake

The Lake is triangular in outline and bounded to the east by the River Windrush and the west by Emma's Dyke. Neither of these connect directly to the Lake, but they provide groundwater feeds and contribute to floodwaters in extreme conditions. The Lake is partially divided into two by a promontory supporting overhead power cables. The promontory marks the start of the nature reserve area. The entire Lake is tree lined with regular, but small, open areas allowing access for angling 'swims' and dog walkers. The promontory is cordoned off with the shoreline to the northeast also being inaccessible.

Mill Meadow

Mill Meadow comprises 4.9 hectares which includes a wet area of 1.944 hectares, 0.0801 hectares of which is currently fenced. The meadow is a semi-improved neutral grassland, floodplain meadow which was grazed ten years ago. There is a public footpath (No:410/15/10) which transects the meadow and connects the Country Park to Langel Common. We will also utilise a grant from Councillors Priority Fund (£2000) to create a Dragonfly area within the meadow

Snipe Meadow

Snipe Meadow comprises 6.399 hectares which includes several ephemeral ponds. A footpath (No:194/3/10) crosses the eastern edge of the meadow. The main field is a semi-improved neutral grassland, largely dominated by coarse grasses including tall fescue, tufted hair-grass, Yorkshire fog, timothy, common bent, false oat-grass, cock's-foot and hard rush covering approximately 5.93 hectares. Within this area, a

small clump of approximately 0.46 hectares of tall ruderal vegetation has also been established. The remaining areas of the meadow are dominated to a varying degree's by broadleaved herbs including meadowsweet, greater plantain, creeping thistle, creeping cinquefoil and red clover with a further scattering of tall ruderals including common nettle, hogweed and occasional hemlock.

In the north-west corner of the site bounded by the Windrush to one side, there is a small outlier area of approximately 0.12 hectares, which in addition to the coarse grasses listed previously, contains cleavers, broad-leaved dock, creeping buttercup and occasional spear thistles and cut-leaved cranesbill. The western edges of both the main meadow and the smaller outlier area are dominated by a five- to fifteen-meter-wide band of tall ruderal vegetation including common nettle, great willowherb and Himalayan balsam, with hogweed and occasional purple loosestrife, meadowsweet, a comfrey species and a sedge species.

Towards the centre of the meadow at NGR SP 36043 08479 is the largest of the ephemeral ponds. It is kidney-shaped and covers approximately 0.013 hectares. When it was last surveyed in July 2021, the pond was holding shallow water to a depth of approximately 20 centimetres which suggests that it may be a viable long-term reservoir for aquatic flora and fauna. Emergent species were noted as including amphibious bistort and a sweet-grass, with a fringe of silverweed, hard rush and a sedge species.

Where do we want to get to?

Vision

The vision for Park is: 'To work with the community to create a world class, vibrant and safe country park that promotes, health and wellbeing, biodiversity, education, and is accessible to all. 'To achieve high quality green spaces across Witney, including spaces that are nationally recognised for their quality and attractions'. The management of the country park contributes towards achieving this aim.

The Country Park needs to be managed over the long term in such a way as to conserve and enhance its biodiversity, whilst respecting and maintaining the amenity value of the site. Management should contribute to the delivery of the Oxfordshire Nature Recovery Network by taking account of the geographic location in the Lower Windrush Valley. The most effective way to achieve consistent long-term management will be through an integrated management plan with widespread support from stakeholders.

The meadows are the largest single components of the site. The current condition suggests that they have had no recent management. They are now dominated by dense tussocks and mats of coarse grasses and rushes, together with scattered invasive tall ruderal species including common nettle and creeping thistle. This is typical of habitat of this type once traditional management by mowing and/or grazing has ceased. It generally leads to a loss of biodiversity. It may be offset by reinstatement of appropriate management.

Assessment and analysis

Ecology

We need to increase the biodiversity value of the whole site and maintain any area that has a high value in that state. This will be achieved by an active work program and an annual review and, if needed a re-survey of the habitat. We will also use the biodiversity metric to calculate the Biodiversity Net Gain for our holdings to both know the “value” both financially and biologically

Landscape

We plan to improve the overall landscape value of the site where we can make changes to increase the biodiversity while still maintaining the character of the landscape.

Management

We will have a 10-year plan and program of work to improve, develop and maintain the site in its best condition and fit for purpose for the future. The plan will be used as an “organic “document and will be adapted as when needed if policies, legal requirements and needs change

Visitor and Community Needs

There is a need to have a thorough assessment of the users of the site and tie this in with the local open spaces policy and will endeavour to keep customer satisfaction at it highest by listening to their needs and implementing them where possible.

Management Objectives

The following tables detail the objectives and goals set to achieve Witney Town Council’s vision and adhere to the Open Spaces Strategy.

| ACTION | HOW | RESOURCES | TIMESCALE |
|--|--|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Bird and bat box building and siting | A 10 bird boxes have been made by the Witney Shed team and these will be sited in the appropriate areas to support and promote our diverse small bird population. They will have an entrance hole which can only be used by species smaller than Great Tits. | BGSO/Volunteers | Y1 |
| Owl box siting | The Witney Shed team have built 3 owl boxes which will be installed in locations most likely to attract Barn Owls. | BGSO/Volunteers | Y1 |
| Carry out Stonewort survey using boat and grapnel or snorkelling | WTC's aquatic specialist will be asked to undertake this survey | BGSO/Ecologist £1,000 | Y1 To be done 12 June 2024 |
| Develop and implement a management plan for the Witney Lake and Country Park | Ongoing and will be completed by April 2024 | BGSO | Y1 WITH AN ANNUAL UPDATE AND REVIEW |
| 1 mile running/walking circuit | The Lake has a 1-mile marked course for use by walkers and runners. | BGSO/Volunteers | Y1 |
| Carry out a botanical survey of Witney Lake | Unless and until evidence is obtained to the contrary, Witney Lake must continue to be protected and managed as one of the foremost Lakes for aquatic plants in the Lower Windrush Valley. A full repeat of the survey undertaken in 2004 (Pond Conservation) is a priority. This survey has already been undertaken by Dr Robert Aquilia (see Appendix) | Ecologist | Y-1 |
| Chestnut fencing installation 6 of 13 posts installed | This will be constructed at the Avenue 2 access point to the Country Park using staff and volunteers | BGSO/Volunteers | Y1 |

| ACTION | HOW | RESOURCES | TIMESCALE |
|--|--|---|-----------|
| New noticeboards and interpretation signage Ordered 19/03/2024 expected del:20/05/2024 | We have 3 access points onto the Country Park and would like to have a main sign and information board at the Avenue 2 entrance and a smaller noticeboard at the other access points (see Appendix for location map and board designs) | BGSO/Volunteers This action has a £7,000 budget already agreed | Y1-2 |
| Provide information noticeboards about the effects of flea and tick treatments, requesting that recently treated dogs are not allowed into the water. | This is in action now | BGSO £300 pa | Y1-2 |
| Update Fishing Society agreement This is with Town Clerk | The original agreement was signed in 1991 and requires a number of updates. | BGSO/SMT | Y1-2 |
| Rubbing posts for self-guided walks as well as 12 "Watch out for nature" interpretation boards | We are looking to install approximately 12 rubbing posts and interpretation boards to create a mini safari for younger users to experience with their parents/carers | BGSO/Comms Team | Y1-2 |
| Allow to fall or fell some trees into the Lake to provide invertebrate and fish fry habitat – trees with many small branches are preferable. | This will be a winter task | BGSO/Works Team | Y1-3 |
| Remove shading trees from a short section of shore along the south side of the Lake where the edge is shallowest. This will encourage marginal vegetation to re-establish so long as access is prevented by fencing off the regenerating vegetation. Some planting can be undertaken to encourage a quicker result but should be as diverse as possible and not include Typha which tends to quickly dominate. | This will be an ongoing and the aim is to begin within Year 1. Turfs from the ephemeral ponds can also be used | BGSO/Works Team | Y1-5 |

| ACTION | HOW | RESOURCES | TIMESCALE |
|--|---|----------------------------------|------------|
| Around the Lake there are several areas that are suitable for developing as wildflower mini meadows. These would be developed using an appropriate wildflower mix and managed in the same way as the larger meadows. | Areas would need to be prepared and an approximate seed mix chosen Pre work carried out June 2024 | BGSO/Volunteers | Y1-8 |
| Maintain Geocache sites – the Country Park is home to a number of geocache sites and the Town Council supports this activity that promotes health and wellbeing | Liaise with Geocache groups to confirm locations and routes. | BGSO/Volunteers | Y1,3,5,7,9 |
| Enhance visitor experience | Conduct a visitor survey | BGSO/Admin Team | Y1,3,5,7,9 |
| Support SSE to carry out tree work underneath power lines to maximise biodiversity. | We have a 3-year work program for SSE to manage all the trees under power lines that cross the Country Park. It has been agreed with SSE's contractors that use will be made of the cleared wood in other habitat creation projects | SSE Contractor | Y1,4,7,10 |
| Carry out E-DNA testing to determine what wildlife (mainly amphibians) are present in the water bodies on site to assist with habitat maintenance and development(cost per test is around £250 | Freshwater Habitats Trust (FHT) are able to supply of E-DNA tests | BGSO/Volunteers Cost of tests | Y2 |
| Green Flag accreditation | Once we have a management plan in place, an application will be made for Green Flag Status for the Country Park | BGSO and Project Officer | Y2 |
| Graphic Artist Walls Projects | A number of graphic artists have been given permission to use the underpass at Avenue 2 to create ad hoc artworks. Discussions have been undertaken regarding the creation of a commissioned entrance image for the Country Park | Graphic Artist £1,500 | Y2 |

| ACTION | HOW | RESOURCES | TIMESCALE |
|---|--|--|------------------------|
| Tern raft building and siting | The building has been completed by the Witney Shed and has now being installed and we already have terns on it | BGSO/Volunteers | Y2 |
| Open/Woodland Day to include crafts, events and experiences | A decision needs to be made about the best time of year to hold the event and contact needs to be made with local groups including the Wychwood Trust to get them onboard. Once initial temperatures have been taken, a project plan and timetable will need to be put into place. | BGSO/Comms Team/Project Officer/Volunteers | Y2 AND ONGOING |
| Install a deer fence and gate on peninsular to provide a barrier to stop dogs entering this area. | Installation of a 2.4 meter galvanized fence and gate. | BGSO/Volunteers £400-£500 | Y2-3 |
| Creation of a Volunteer Team to support the management of the Country Park This will be developed more once we have the new member of staff in post | Create a recruitment strategy and put a training programme in place. | BGSO | Ongoing |
| Apply for Investors in Volunteers (IiV) accreditation. | Once a Volunteer Team is in place and has undertaken a sufficient body of work this should be recognised with an application for IiV. | BGSO and Project Officer | Free to apply for Y2-3 |
| Site designation for Country Park | Apply to Thames Valley Environmental Records Office (TVERC) and Beds, Berks and Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) to have the Country Park designated as a Local Wildlife site (LWS) and a Local Nature Reserve (LNR). The process could take up to a year but attainment of this | BGSO and Project Officer | Y2-4 |

| ACTION | HOW | RESOURCES | TIMESCALE |
|--|--|---|-----------|
| | status will be necessary for the application of future grant funding. | | |
| Carry out hedgerow planting and management There are a number of hedges around the Country Park that have had little management for a number of years, and we aim to lay or coppice as many as appropriate. This will not only increase the life of the hedges it will also increase the biodiversity value significantly as the hedges mature | We are looking to obtain funding to increase the number of hedgerows throughout the site. And make full use of the annual budget set by the council | BGSO/Volunteers | Y2-4 |
| Creation and siting of floating platforms. The Lake has at present just one small floating island for birds to nest on and for young fish to use as a refuge against predation from birds such as Cormorants. We would like to have within the Lake as a whole, a number of floating platforms to provide additional habitats for the flora and fauna. | These can be made by volunteers and staff | BGSO/Volunteers, | Y2-4 |
| Buy floating planted islands anchored offshore to offer bird nesting habitat as well as rich invertebrate habitat if the roots can grow through the platform into the water below. | These can be built by staff/volunteers and with potential funding we could be more expansive in our plans | BGSO/Works Team and contractors £11,000(Biomatrix) | Y 2-5 |
| Reptile Hibernaculum creation | As we have Grass Snakes and a number of other amphibians present on the Country Park, we will create at selected areas, Hibernaculum's to provide breeding and hibernating habitats to allow them to lay eggs and also overwinter on | BGSO/Volunteers | Y2-4 |

| ACTION | HOW | RESOURCES | TIMESCALE |
|---|--|---|---|
| | our site. These can be made with the help of the volunteer team | | |
| Reinstate management of the meadow by an appropriate mowing and/or grazing regime to control invasive ruderal species and enhance its biodiversity value. | We are managing the meadows by mechanical means at present and we will also look at potential use of graziers in the future | BGSO/Contractors | Y2-5 WITH AN ANNUAL REVIEW AND IMPROVEMENTS |
| Creation of Otter Holts | We plan to build an Otter Holt at two locations within the Country Park. They will be made using natural wood products collected during normal management of the site. | BGSO/Volunteers | Y2-5 |
| Running event, We are looking at the possibility of having a running event that makes use of the whole of the Country Park | Work with local running club to set a course and run the event | BGSO/Volunteers, and Local Running Club | Y3 |
| Small mammal survey of Snipe and Mill Meadow | Use Longworth traps and ask local mammal group to assist | BGSO BBOWT | Y3 |
| Social and Medical Prescribing, We have the opportunity to use our green spaces as part of a plan to improve both the mental and physical wellbeing of people that are referred to us | Contact local GP's and support groups and offer the use of the Country Park as a venue for physical and mental therapy | BGSO and Project Officer | Discussing with Nature Now team Y3-4 |
| Increase perimeter complexity by creating small promontories from the bank in the northeastern side where access is not public. | These should slope gently into the water at the end to provide shallow submerged habitat for plants and emergent bank for wildfowl nesting | BGSO/Works Team and Contractors | Y3-5 |

| ACTION | HOW | RESOURCES | TIMESCALE |
|--|--|---|------------------|
| | | | |
| <p>Create a submerged promontory or shelf.to recreate the habitat suitable for stoneworts A submerged shelf or promontory is suggested being built out from a point opposite the existing promontory. This is the easiest access point for vehicles being at the end of a concrete track and free of existing vegetation.</p> | <p>Gravel should be deposited to a depth of 20cms below low water. Ideally once deposited, a channel should be created to prevent access from the shore. If stonewort's are still present, they should colonise quickly from dispersing oospores We are also looking at other areas of the Lake to site this habitat</p> | <p>Biodiversity and Green Spaces Officer (BGSO)/ Works Team/ Contractor 50 Tonne 5-10mm gravel @ £800;00 per 10 tonne</p> | <p>Y3-5</p> |
| <p>Car Parking Requirements The Country Park suffers greatly from a lack of car parking locations and as an ongoing process</p> | <p>we will be looking to facilitate partnerships with WODC, local businesses and even potentially purchasing/leasing land to create our own car park.</p> | <p>BGSO/WTC</p> | <p>Y3-6</p> |
| <p>Installation, repair and replacement of Gates/Styles We have over a dozen both metal and wooden gates around and at the entrances to the country park. It has been a number of years since the they have been either serviced, repaired, or replaced if needed. This work is of high priority to provide security and access to areas within the Country Park</p> | <p>We have an ongoing repair and maintenance program for all our gates</p> | <p>BGSO/Volunteers Gate-4ft =£82:00 Gate 10ft = £145:00</p> | <p>AS NEEDED</p> |
| <p>Path repair/Maintenance We have many paths within the park, and they include grass and ballast pathways.</p> | <p>To maintain the grass paths a structured mowing regime is needed and the Ballast pathway around the Lake needs consistent annual maintenance, as I want to try and maintain this as a DDA access for all compliant pathways.</p> | <p>BGSO/Volunteers and works team</p> | <p>AS NEEDED</p> |

| ACTION | HOW | RESOURCES | TIMESCALE |
|---|--|---|--|
| Hedgelaying around the Country Park | We have 150 metres of laid hedge within the Country Park and this was planted in 2014, there are also a number of gaps within this hedgerow, and we will be filling those gaps to create a continuous green corridor along the Lake pathway. We also have 200m of new hedge planted by volunteers on Snipe Meadow we are also looking at other areas which through potential funding we could create more hedgerows. | BGSO/Volunteers | £4;00 per metre for rows and infill AS NEEDED |
| Public Outreach | Maintain an active social media Presence and update pages on a regular basis | BGSO/Publicity Officer | As Needed |
| Obtaining Grant Funding FHT grant application agreed £9,405.60 for 10 years of management of Snipe and Mill Meadows £2000:00 from Councillor Fund 2/3 total cost of £1428 for hedgerow products paid for by Woodland Trust | There are a number of environmental grant funders that we can apply to for support with identified projects within the country park and working with the project officer we will optimise these opportunities. | BGSO and Project Officer | ONGOING |
| Corporate Volunteering and support | We are planning to invite local businesses to both support financially and through staff involvement the development and management of the Country Park | BGSO/ Admin Team | ONGOING |
| Bank Stabilisation Program | We have carried out 60m of bank stabilisation and will do another 60 m in the near future and then assess the need to do more once a Biodiversity Action Plan is drawn up | BGSO/Volunteers Ongoing funding is in place to carry out annual work around the Lake | ONGOING |

| ACTION | HOW | RESOURCES | TIMESCALE |
|--|--|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Boat Work | We have a ridged boat with an outboard motor that can be used for surveys and management of the Lake | BGSO/Volunteers | ANNUAL |
| Academic projects | We have a link with Oxford Brookes Collage and the team carrying out the Environmental Consultancy module of their degree. We have provided a number of projects which are reviewed each year for the students to choose from | BGSO | YEARLY |
| Nature Now and Forest School Projects This has been renewed for 2024/25 | Witney has a strong commitment to developing the younger members of the town to have a love for the natural world they live in and so WTC have partnered with the local "Nature First" team to offer training and experience days for both young people and the people who care for them | BGSO/Volunteers | £2,400 for X6 sessions YEARLY |
| We want to start a programme of talks from local experts on a number of environmental subjects such as, birds bats moths etc: | There are a number of local speakers who will willingly carry out talks for both a younger and older audience | BGSO/Volunteers and Local Experts | YEARLY |
| Review of Biodiversity Opportunities in the Lower Windrush Valley, Conservation Enhancements for Other Habitats and Features, LWVP (2020) suggests a number of ways that the biodiversity of the Lake and Country Park might be increased. Any uptake of these suggestions should be reported to the Lower Windrush Valley Project. These could include, but are not limited to: | Measures to enhance the river corridors for water voles and otters. | BGSO/Works Team 1.5K | ANNUAL |
| | Pollarding of willows along the river corridors to reduce shading and encourage bankside vegetation. | BGSO/Works Team | ANNUAL |
| | Installation of bird and bat boxes into the young woodland areas to create nesting and roosting sites where few currently exist. | BGSO/Volunteers £300-£500pa | Y1-2 |
| | Planting of new species-rich hedgerow(s) | BGSO/Volunteers Grant Funding | Y2-10 |

How will we get there?

Removal and Control of Invasive Species

Schedule 9 Species (including invasive non-native and licensed release only species) Overview Section 14 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 ('the Act') seeks to prevent the release into the wild of certain plants and animals which may cause ecological, environmental, or socio-economic harm. To achieve this, it makes it an offence *inter alia* to plant or otherwise cause to grow in the wild in Great Britain any species of plant listed in Schedule 9 to the Act.

Himalayan balsam is widespread across the site and in the wider Lower Windrush Valley Project area, on the fringes of the watercourses and in areas dominated by tall ruderal vegetation. At present there is no agreed best course of action to eradicate it, and any local attempt to eradicate it at Witney Lake and Country Park is certain to fail because of the prevalence of the species in the wider landscape. If a landscape-scale initiative to eradicate this species is initiated, then local measures should be taken to support the initiative. Meanwhile contractors operating on the site should be required to observe biosecurity measures to prevent the spread of Himalayan balsam from the site, notably the effective cleaning of equipment and clothing to prevent seeds or fragments of the plant being transferred to other sites.

Nuttall's pondweed appears to be well established in Witney Lake having been recorded in the present survey and previously in the Pond Conservation (2005) survey. As with Himalayan balsam it is likely that this species is prevalent across the Lower Windrush Valley Project area and any local attempt to eradicate it is likely to fail. If a landscape-scale initiative is initiated then local measures should be taken to support it, and in the interim, contractors operating on the site should be required to observe biosecurity measures to prevent its spread through the effective cleaning of equipment and clothing.

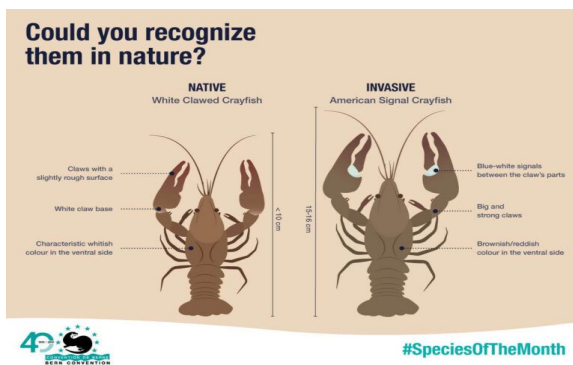
The presence of **Chalara ash dieback** in trees around Witney Lake and Country Park Nature Reserve requires further investigation and monitoring to ensure that dead or dying trees do not become a danger to visitors. Forest Research advise that 'With the exceptions of felling for public safety or timber production, we advise a general presumption against felling living ash trees, whether infected or not. This is because there is good evidence that a small proportion will be able to tolerate *H. Fraxinus* infection. There is also the possibility that a proportion of ash trees can become diseased, but then recover to good health. These, too, would be valuable for our research, although it is still too early to know whether there are such trees in the British ash population'. For further information see

Ragwort is a native species of the British Isles. It is a specified weed under the Weeds Act 1959. It contains toxins which can have debilitating or fatal consequences, if eaten by horses and other grazing animals. Ragwort is less likely to be rejected by stock if dried and contamination of forage (hay, haylage and silage) is a particular problem. Humans may be at risk from ragwort poisoning through direct contact (eg, hand pulling) or the consumption of contaminated food. We have mainly the Oxford Ragwort on our sites.



Oxford ragwort (pictured left) is easily distinguished from common ragwort when in flower because it has loose, spreading flower heads, while common ragwort's flowers are densely packed in tight umbel-like corymbs. The leaves of common ragwort are usually darker and more glossy and tough than those of Oxford Ragwort.

Ragwort also has a very positive side for biodiversity in that it is the larval food source for the Cinnabar Moth (pictured right).



Signal crayfish is an invasive aquatic species, are present throughout mainland UK and have severe negative effects on other aquatic biota. While no effective mechanism for their eradication exists, control attempts often make use of removal by trapping. We had a company that dealt with the removal and disposal of Crayfish but due to EU law this is now not possible.

Giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*) is a plant in the Apiaceae family (previously known as the Umbelliferae). This family includes some well-known plants such as parsley, carrot, parsnip, cumin and coriander.



Poison hemlock, *Conium maculatum*, is a member of the plant family Apiaceae, which contains a few important vegetable crops such as carrots, celery, and parsnip, and herbs such as parsley, cilantro, chervil, fennel, anise, dill, and caraway. It is a tall, invasive, highly poisonous weed that is sometimes mistaken for one of its crop relatives.



Mink Monitoring and control: As part of BBOWT's recent Chimney Meadows Wetland Restoration Project, They received some funding towards mink monitoring and control within the upper River Thames catchment, and this includes the River Windrush. The funding has enabled them to buy mink rafts, traps and remote trap monitoring units (Remoti), and they are looking for suitable locations to deploy them. We were asked if we would be willing to host a mink raft and ideally check them in monitoring mode (or even better - trapping mode), then we can provide you with the rafts, traps and Remoti units.

Biological Surveys

A number of Surveys have taken place to provide a baseline set of data to support and guide the development of the management of the Country Park. These are:

- Phase 1 survey of the nature reserve part of the lake and Snipe Meadow
- Witney Lake and Emma's Dyke water test
- Survey of Lake aquatic flora and fauna (see Appendix)
- Entomological survey of Snipe and Mill Meadow (see Appendix)

Wet Meadow management note

Some wet grasslands have been traditionally managed as floodplain or water meadows, and in these areas hay meadow management should be continued. Ditches and other water features are incredibly important for plants, invertebrates and amphibians and should be managed sensitively and protected from agricultural runoff. Water level management is important, in particular the maintenance of a high-water table in spring and summer, and management of winter flooding.

The Country Park comprises two meadows of differing characters, one (Snipe) is a meadow created after aggregate removal so has a "cap" of soil and therefore will lack true diversity of flora and fauna, but we will manage this in the appropriate way to maximise the potential going forward.

The other meadow (Mill) is a natural floodplain meadow and has benefited from grazing in the past. It will also have the potential for a seedbank that with correct management could be released and developed.

Finance and Resources

Budget

A budget has been agreed with the responsible Finance Officer and Head of Operations to enable all Year 1 projects set out within the Management Plan to be completed. A schedule of expenditure has been proposed for the next ten years. A number of projects within that ten years will require capital funding, but it is hoped that some of this will be secured externally via grant applications and sponsorship.

How will we know when we have arrived?

It will be necessary for detailed key performance indicators (KPIs) to be agreed by Counsellors.

However, the following are suggestions of measures of the success of the management plan:

- The attainment of LWS and LNR status for the Country Park
- Achieving a biodiversity net gain (evidenced by baseline and update surveys)
- Achieving liV status
- Being awarded Green Flag status
- Achieving a Gold award from Britain in Bloom
- Positive user feedback
- Meeting the legal criteria set out in local, regional and national green space strategies
- Delivering to budget

Monitoring and Review

The Management Plan will be a live dynamic document. It will be monitored and reviewed as set out below and any changes required will be actioned quickly and proactively in consultation with the relevant stakeholders.

- Weekly monitoring by the BGSO to inform schedule of works
- Quarterly overview carried out by the BGSO, Head of Operations and relevant stakeholders to ensure timeframes and budgets are being met.
- Annual review by BGSO and all relevant stakeholders to ensure the plan continues to be relevant and to deliver its stated aims.

Appendices

[Paper copies of these documents will be attached to the final Management Plan]

- Tenancy Agreement of Fishing Rights on the Lake at Witney Oxfordshire (being updated and with Town Clerk at present)
- Open Water Policy
- Metal Detecting Policy
- Tree Policy (awaiting agreement)
- Volunteer Policy (awaiting agreement)
- Pictures of proposed plastic furniture
- Breeding bird survey, 2023 James Curren (local Volunteer)
- Survey of Lake aquatic flora and fauna (Robert Aquilia 2023)
- Entomological survey of Snipe and Mill Meadow Lawrence Bee 2023,
- Budget: Current year budget

Freshwater Habitats Trust report on River Windrush Floodplain



Witney.docx

[Witney climate emergency presentation](#)

Here is the Nature-based Solutions story:

- [FHT is one of six pilot projects across England awarded a grant](#) by NE to deliver habitat restoration / creation in the 2023-24 financial year.
- The first year of the project is nearly complete, but NE have been successful in securing another year's funding to deliver more sites through the current six pilots.
- The interventions focus on measures that could provide carbon benefits at a landscape scale, e.g. grassland restoration, management of 'peaty pockets' (the grant's term). In our project, we've used the grant to continue our fen restoration work, to create floodplain wetlands and restore floodplain meadows.
- The grant covers the cost of capital works and the cost of management for the subsequent 10 years. Landowners are required to sign up to an agreement to take part and receive the land management payment. [Our agreement proforma is attached.](#)
- The management payment rates are based on CS:
 - £3,972 / ha for 10 years of fen management
 - £2,923 / ha for 10 years of grassland management
 - £5,076 / ha for 10 years of floodplain wetland management
- The funded sites provide research sites for NE to monitor carbon stocks and flows in the habitats over the 10-year management period. The landowner is required to sign up to giving NE permission to access the site to carry out the research.

- We have been asked to get together new sites to take forward, which is why I asked if you would be interested.
- The one limitation is that sites cannot be entered if they are in existing agri-environment scheme agreements.