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**Agenda Item:** Lake and Country Park - Operational Update

**Meeting Date:** Tuesday, 26 November 2024

**Contact Officer:** Biodiversity & Green Spaces Officer

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The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on the work and projects within the Country Park in recent months.

### Background

Over the last three years the lake and Country Park has had a substantial amount of maintenance to the blue and green infrastructure (trees, bank work, fishing, meadow creation, wetland creation, removal of invasive species, bird/owl and bat box installation) to mention just a few. We have also experienced some issues such as Blue/Green Algae, and flooding. The Council also entered for the second year the In Bloom competition in the Country Park section. The council also has been given the opportunity to apply for funding to create Two Community Orchards.

### Current Situation

**Blue/Green Algae:** This has all but dissipated and the Green Spaces staff are monitoring the situation and have purchased a water testing kit.

**In Bloom:** The Council achieved a Silver Gilt award. It could take a further three years to have the infrastructure to obtain a gold award and officers are keen to work towards this. The feedback from the Thames & Chiltern judging panel is included as **Appendix A**.

**Orchards:** The Council is applying for funding to plant two community orchards, one in Thorney Leys and one on Snipe Meadow. The bids should be in to the District Council by the end of the month.

**Lakeside Allotments:** There has been a number of posts on social media regarding flooding on the lower plots and that Witney Town Council should carry out work to the ditches that surround the site. None of the watercourses are within Witney Town Councils remit,

- Emma's Dyke is under Environment Agency management
- The ditch bordering the field on the main entrance side is the Farmers responsibility
- The ditch on the Lakeside Apartments side is managed by the flats management company

Officers have checked the areas immediately adjacent and previous reports on this have been provided to the Council which indicate to take any action to avoid this happening is cost-prohibitive and would not be guaranteed to succeed.

**Fishing Platforms:** The Council and Witney Angling Society have agreed a design to create fishing platforms around the lake where there is at present “ad hoc” swim stations and have agreed that members will volunteer to carry out the work under the guidance of the Green Spaces team.

In addition to the above, there has been regular day-to-day maintenance at the Lake & Country Park and other Council areas including, clearing of vegetation, habitat making, hedge-cutting, and management of wildflower planting areas. The Biodiversity Officer has also been working with the Communications and Community Engagement team to enhance information available via the Council’s website by way of a new webpage <https://www.witney-tc.gov.uk/parks-open-spaces/witney-lake-and-country-park-biodiversity-page/> This was partly in response to responses in the Council’s resident’s survey about residents not knowing the Lake & Country Park was there. This also provides biodiversity information.

Further updates have been made to Members via Councillor Committee bulletins.

### **Impact Assessments**

The Town Council has a duty to consider the effects of its decisions, functions and activities on equality, biodiversity, and crime & disorder. Consideration should also be given to effects on the environment, given the Council’s Climate Emergency declaration in 2019.

- a) Equality – None of the above reports have any effect on people’s equality
- b) Biodiversity – Algae, has had a significant effect on the water quality for a number of weeks this is now dissipating so the lake is slowly returning to normal BUT we are still getting an influx of river water with a very high Nitrate content

Orchards – This project will increase the biodiversity of Snipe Meadow (we will be monitoring to what level over time).

The Fishing platforms will create “micro” habitats underneath them and allow escape areas for young fish.

- c) Crime & Disorder – Both the Orchard and the fishing platforms could be open to being damaged and measures to capture and report this are in place
- d) Environment & Climate Emergency - The Blue/green algae could have an effect on the lake flora and fauna (this is being monitored). The Orchards will hopefully improve air quality, and the appearance of the local environment.

### **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.

All risks have been looked at for the above projects and plans developed to help mitigate them.

- Algae, regular monitoring
- Platforms, damage from public
- Orchard, eating unripe fruit

### **Social Value**

Social value is the positive change the Council creates in the local community within which it operates.

The platforms will be of great use to the fishing club and also act as a stable area for members of the public to watch wildlife on the lake.

The orchard will provide a great resource for the public to “wild harvest” fruit and provide an “outdoor classroom” for schools to use as needed.

### **Financial implications**

- Blue/Green Algae: until the Council has a means of managing the risk from water incursion from the Windrush during flood events, it is open to a repeat of this potentially dangerous occurrence.
- In Bloom: The cost to bring the site to the standard needed is covered at present by the assigned budget.
- Orchards: main funding from WODC and any extra cost year on year will need to come from the Country Park budget.
- Fishing Platforms: Witney Town Council and Witney Fishing Society will share costs for the construction of the platforms within existing budgets.

### **Recommendations**

Members are invited to note the report and

1. Support the plans to develop the Country Park and associated costs,
2. Request any extra information if further clarity is needed to understand the report contents.