
Agenda Item: Lake and Country Park Management Plan

Meeting Date: Tuesday, 26 November 2024

Contact Officer: Biodiversity and Green Spaces Officer

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Town Council's Country Park Management Plan that outlines the vision, objectives, and strategies for managing the country park in a sustainable and effective way. It serves as a guide for managing the park's natural, historical, recreational, and community assets to offer a blend of outdoor activities, wildlife conservation, landscape management, and visitor services.

The current plan can be viewed here:

<https://www.witney-tc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Witney-Lake-and-Country-Park-Management-Plan-Summary-2024-2025.pdf>

Background

Local Nature Reserve (LNR) The Lake and Country Park has no status at present.

Meadows Update: Snipe and Mill Meadow have had substantial work on to improve biodiversity through a grant from Natural England.

Water Sampling: In response to the blue/green algae occurrence this year it was felt that the water quality needs to be monitored.

Path work: The extreme flooding over the last couple of years and increased usage has caused the path around the lake to become very worn with multiple potholes and "scouring" from water ingress/egress. This increases the level of maintenance required during the months of Spring. Several comments were received the Council's satisfaction survey 2023 regarding accessibility around the lake.

Grants: The council is looking to obtain more grants to develop and improve the Country Park with a number of external funders.

Current Situation

LNR: The Country Park has at present no official status and officers are looking to gain a status of Local Wildlife Site (LWS) It would be helpful to designate the Country Park as a LNR at a council level. Officers have informed Natural England of an interest to designate the Lake and Country Park, and upon approval by council can proceed with the application.

Meadows Update: Through funding from Natural England and the council's own management program it has been possible to begin restoration of 3ha of wildflower meadow on Mill Meadow and the creation of "scrapes" covering 0.1ha as part of a wetland creation program on Snipe Meadow.

Water Sampling: A water testing kit has been purchased (Oase professional water analysis kit). This tests for Nitrate, Nitrite, pH, Carbonate Hardness, Total Hardness, Ammonia/Ammonium, and Phosphate, to investigate if the excessive water flow from the river Windrush over topping is carrying excessive Nitrate and Potassium into the lake and causing the occurrence of the large algal bloom that was present earlier in the year.

Path Work: The path around the lake has suffered greatly from high usage and the effects of the long-term flooding. It is proposed to cost out the materials, machines and staffing needed to, repair where needed upgrade where necessary, and widen where needed.

Grants: £9,500 has been received from Natural England for the management of the meadows, and £1,000 from the WODC councillor fund for the creation of a dragon fly area on Mill Meadow. Also £1,700 from WODC for the creation of a community orchard on Snipe Meadow.

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 –Equality in biodiversity in green spaces refers to the idea that all species regardless of their size, role, or ecological status should have the opportunity to thrive and be represented within urban and natural green spaces. Achieving equality in biodiversity involves not just conserving a wide variety of species, but also ensuring that ecological systems are designed and managed in ways that support diverse species' needs. This can be applied to urban parks, nature reserves, forests, and other green spaces, aiming for a balance where no group of species is disproportionately favoured over others.
- b) Crime & Disorder –Green spaces such as Lakes and Parks can contribute to reducing urban crime by making spaces more inviting and safer for residents.
- c) Environment & Climate Emergency –This is deeply intertwined with both the protection of biodiversity and the fight against climate change. Both challenges require urgent and comprehensive action, as they not only affect the country's natural systems but also its economy, society, and future well-being.
- d) All aspects of this report are to action our responsibilities to this situation

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.

The path around the lake has had some substantial "scouring" from both water flowing from the Windrush across the path and into the lake and exiting the lake in various locations back into the river and Emma's Dyke. Should this occur again there is a high probability that this

will happen again. This does lead to the path around the lake not being DDA (Disability Discrimination Act) compliant and inclusive for all. We need to obtain the necessary permits from Environment Agency before we are able to carry out the work needed to restore and protect the path around the lake.

Social Value

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

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This value can be understood through various lenses, such as cultural, economic, health, and ethical considerations.

The aim of all the projects is to provide a resource that can be used by all to have areas that are safe, fun and interesting to visit.

Financial implications

- The path work does have a substantial cost in both time and money, (around 6-8K) but it is needed to maintain a valuable council asset.
- The other projects will all be part of the prescribed management plan for the Country Park

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and approve

1. Officers to apply for LNR status,
2. To note the updates on the meadow, water sampling and grants,
3. Officers to obtain costings to prevent flooding of the lake with work to raise and widen the path.