
Agenda Item:	Biodiversity Update
Meeting Date:	Tuesday, 26 November 2024
Contact Officer:	Biodiversity & Green Spaces Officer

The purpose of this report is to update members on actions taken to improve biodiversity in green spaces under the management of Witney Town Council.

Background

Over the last three years there has been a concerted effort by the Biodiversity and Green Spaces Officer and more recently the Green Spaces Operative to increase biodiversity within the Country Park.

Current Situation

Wildflower Areas: The Council, have at present 8 areas officers are developing as both current and new mini meadow areas. Officers are reviewing the roundabout planting as it was not as successful as hoped last year. The other established areas will be “refreshed over the next 12 months and the new areas on the lakeside will be seeded in April.

Tree Works: Remedial works identified by the tree survey programme are in progress which will be completed by the end of March 2025.

Addendum – Officers are currently dealing with a request to remove a tree on Thorney Leys Road opposite B&Q that the resident feels should be removed as it blocks light to their property. The initial findings and assessment do not support this request in line with the Council’s tree policy (**Appendix A**). Likewise, a similar request has been received from another resident of Thorney Leys (requests attached as confidential **Appendices B & C**)

Biodiversity Policy: As part of the Council’s Statutory requirements under the 2021 Environment Act, it needs to have a Biodiversity Policy, so this has been created and is attached to this report for consideration as **Appendix D**. Many of the items suggested have already been completed or are underway but this document encompasses the necessary points and is based on a draft model. The Management Plan does encompass this as well.

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.

Wildflower areas: these are low risk projects, the work to create them does carry a risk as it involves working on the highway and crossing to pathway on a regular basis however these are managed with stringent health and safety control measures in place.

Tree works: Officers evaluate and sign off risk assessments and method statements from contractors before authorising works.

Biodiversity policy: This is a document that will of great use in future applications for funding and recognition as a serious protector and planner to improve, enhance and create biological habitats.

Social Value

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

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 Wildflower areas: The roundabouts will need around £300 in seed plus hire costs and X4 days for staff time
- The lake will need around £300 in seed and rotavator hire and work will be carried out by green space staff and volunteers

- All other areas will need around £300 in seed to supplement existing flora, and work will be carried out by Green Spaces team.

Tree work: is part of our programmed costs except the Thorney Leys tree by B&Q, this would cost up to £1000 to high pollard/or fell due to its location and the safety aspects that would need to be considered.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and;

1. Note the updates and work involved in enhancing the roundabouts and other areas with wildflower planting, and tree works,
2. Consider approval of the biodiversity policy as presented (as this has also been presented to the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee on 25 November, this may be subject to amendment),
3. Consider the request for tree works at Thorney Leys – whether to carry out some works to otherwise healthy trees, in contravention of the Council's Tree Policy.