

WITNEY LAKE AND COUNTRY PARK LOCAL NATURE RESERVE



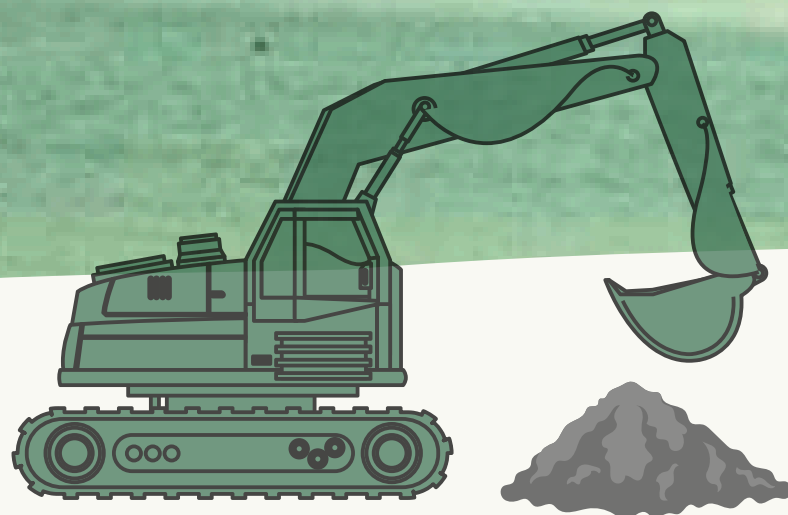
WITNEY
TOWN COUNCIL

WITNEY IN BLOOM

IS ORGANISED AND FUNDED BY WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL

2025 BRITAIN IN BLOOM PORTFOLIO

HISTORY



Witney Lake and County Park Local Nature Reserve is a 37 hectare Park that offers a picturesque area for recreation, whether that be taking the dog for a walk around the Lake's footpath, rambling through the tranquil landscape or relaxing whilst enjoying a picnic.



The Lake, bought by Witney Town Council on 12th Sept 1988, is a flooded gravel pit dug initially for gravel used whilst constructing the Witney bypass (A40) in the mid 1980's.

Today the Country Park sits between streams of the meandering River Windrush and includes a deep lake up to 5.2 metres, whilst a traditional hay meadow and wet grassland are being managed in partnership with Natural England and Freshwater Habitats Trust. A recent study by the Lower Windrush Valley Project and Freshwater Habitats Trust found 110 bird species and a large variety of plants including 3 Stonewort species.



VOLUNTEERS AND PARTNERS



**Abingdon
& Witney
College**

COMMUNITY & PARTNERSHIP

L D Ā DESIGN

Bridewell Gardens have an open invitation to send their gardeners to support the Green Spaces team. Bridewell is a mental health recovery service using social and therapeutic horticulture to support wellbeing. Through purposeful outdoor activity in a peaceful setting, individuals build confidence, learn new skills, and connect with others who share similar experiences. It's not just about gardening — it's about finding hope, identity, and strength in recovery.

Abingdon and Witney College and Audley Travel also host their annual litter pick at the Witney Lake in partnership with Witney Town Council. Both involve at least four litter pickers from each organisation to help keep our green spaces litter-free.

The Green Spaces team recently hosted a corporate volunteer day with 10 staff from LDA Design — a 100% employee-owned consultancy of landscape architects, urban designers, and planners. LDA Design is dedicated to creating great places that address the climate and biodiversity crises, taking a holistic, people-first approach to design that promotes wellbeing, sustainability, and stronger connections between people and nature.



VOLUNTEERS AND PARTNERS



COMMUNITY & PARTNERSHIP

We have regularly welcomed residents from the Asylum Seeker's Hotel to carry out conservation volunteering.

Regular “Taster Days” are held for volunteers and our own volunteer team is currently being built.

Nicholas - a Biology student needing some practical experience in conservation management - was given a placement at the Witney Lake and Country Park. He attended multiple sessions with us and helped in many various tasks.

We've also been collaborating with Jessica to explore potential outdoor spaces for dance. Jessica is a qualified conscious dance and nature connection facilitator, as well as a yoga and meditation teacher. She also brings over 35 years of experience as a chartered physiotherapist. These sessions are designed to build a deeper connection with nature, community, and support mental and emotional wellbeing.



VOLUNTEERS AND PARTNERS



COMMUNITY & PARTNERSHIP

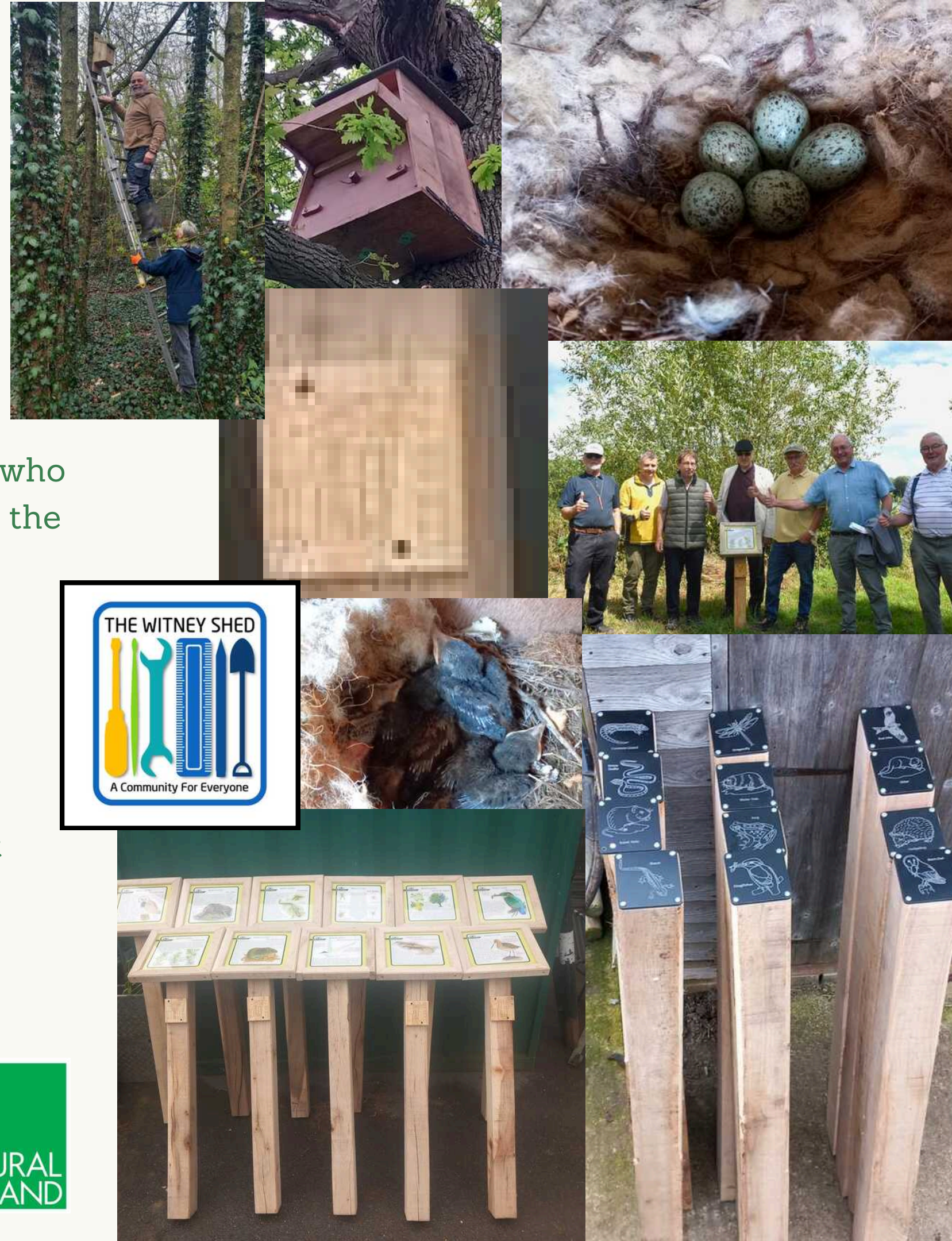
We're proud to have a strong working partnership with the Witney Shed, who make fantastic use of the cut wood we provide. Their team has supported the Lake and Country Park by crafting wildlife habitats and essential site infrastructure, including nest boxes, signage posts, and rubbing posts.

To date, they've contributed:

- 24 bird boxes
- 3 owl boxes
- 9 bat boxes
- 11 information posts
- 12 rubbing posts
- A frame for our notice board
- A tern raft built to a WTC design

Other partners include:

- Chilterns River Trust
- Lower Windrush Valley Project
- Environment Agency
- Natural England



VOLUNTEERS AND PARTNERS

COMMUNITY & PARTNERSHIP



- The Gill Mill Aggregates team generously offered the use of their excavator to help create new wetland areas in Snipe Meadow. This work aims to restore and enhance the original wetlands and introduce up to four additional scrapes.
- We're currently collaborating with a local running club to develop a one-mile circuit around the Lake, promoting healthy lifestyles and wider community use of the space.
- We've partnered with local schools and the ICE Centre, which supports vulnerable young people with a range of disabilities, to improve access and engagement. Schools are being offered use of the rubbing posts and interactive trail books (available in both PDF and printed formats). For the ICE Centre, we've facilitated minibus access to a quarter-lake circuit, where accessible paths allow for wheelchair use. The centre has already visited and enjoyed the experience, and we have further plans to enhance accessibility across the site.
- Kids Planet is taking full advantage of the Country Park and picnic areas, giving children the chance to engage in natural play and connect with the great outdoors.





The Lake and Country Park has received:

- £9,500 from Natural England for use on the meadows
- £2,000 from Cllr Duncan Enright from his councillor's priority fund
- £1,500 from West Oxfordshire District Council to create a community orchard
- 2/3 total cost of £1,428 for hedgerow products paid for by the Woodland Trust.



EVENTS

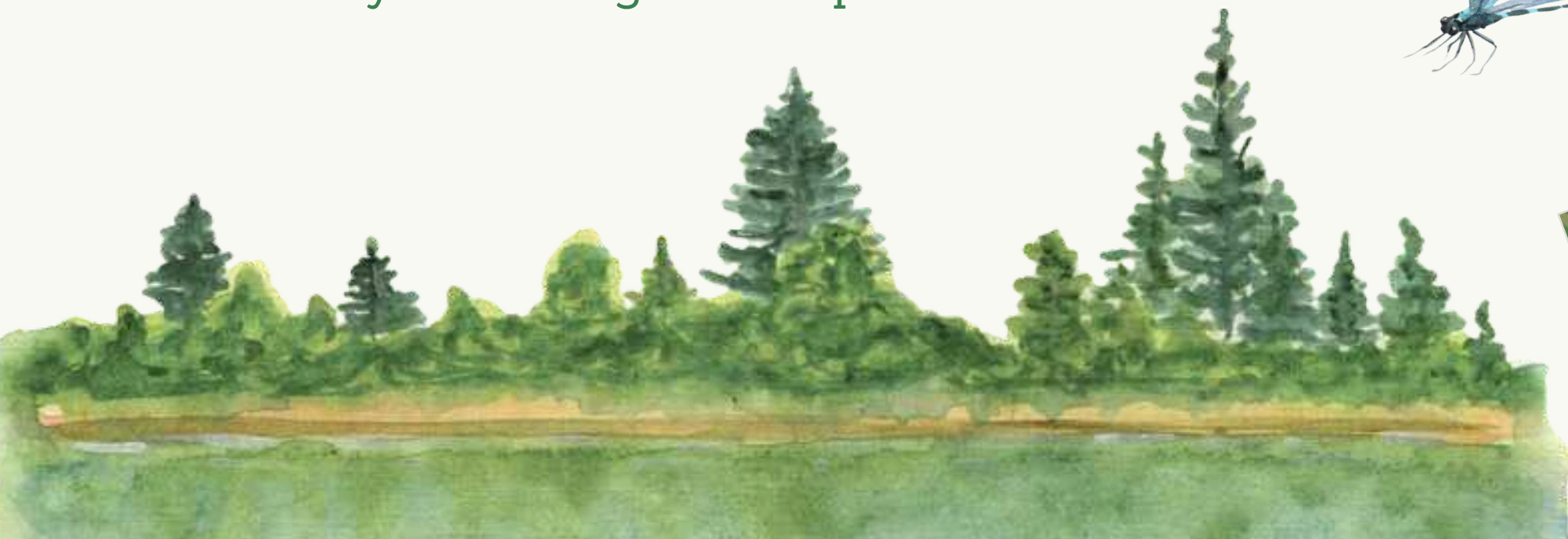
ACTIVITIES



Our Biodiversity Officer, Carl, hosts guided walk-arounds of the Country Park upon request, engaging with local schools, the ICE Centre, and any other interested groups.

We inaugurated our rubbing posts with the help of Lois, a six-year-old Eco-Champion from a local school. Lois had the honour of cutting the ribbon alongside Mayor of Witney (2024-25) Councillor Owen Collins and was awarded a tour around the Lake, along with a rubbing booklet.

These booklets have since been made available to local schools and anyone visiting our reception.



EVENTS

ACTIVITIES



The Green Spaces team hosted a brilliant Corporate Responsibility Day session for a consultancy of urban designers, landscape architects, and planners. This is an important way for us to build relationships with local businesses and organisations and for them to support local community.

The group completed three tasks:

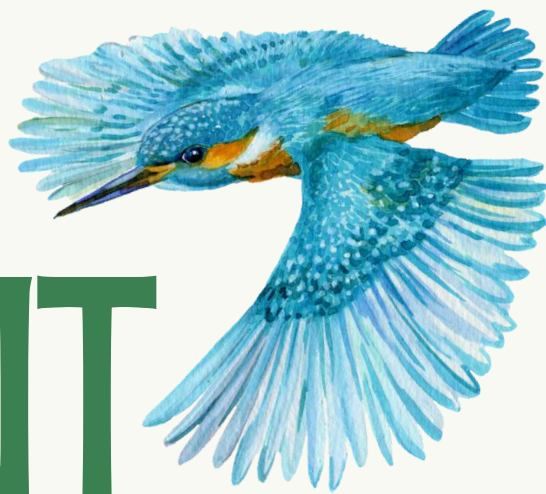
- Weeding a newly planted hedgerow.
- Constructing a log pile habitat for small animals and insects.
- Watering the new orchard.



There are a number of Geocaching sites around the Witney Lake and Country Park. The caches are located so that you do not need to stray from the public footpath and details can be found on the official Geocaching website: www.geocaching.com/play



SITE DEVELOPMENT



- One tern raft has been installed to enhance nesting opportunities for these protected bird species, and we plan to install further platforms for water birds.
- Willows along the river corridors have been pollarded to reduce shading and promote the growth of diverse bankside vegetation.
- WTC's aquatic specialist conducted a targeted Stonewort survey, contributing to our understanding of rare aquatic plant species.
- Two accessible picnic benches with extended table edges have been installed to better accommodate wheelchair users and promote inclusivity.
- A new interactive walking leaflet has been introduced, helping visitors explore the lake with engaging information about wildlife and points of interest.
- Hedgerow management has begun, specifically designed to support insect population.



Image © Debbie Cummings



SITE DEVELOPMENT



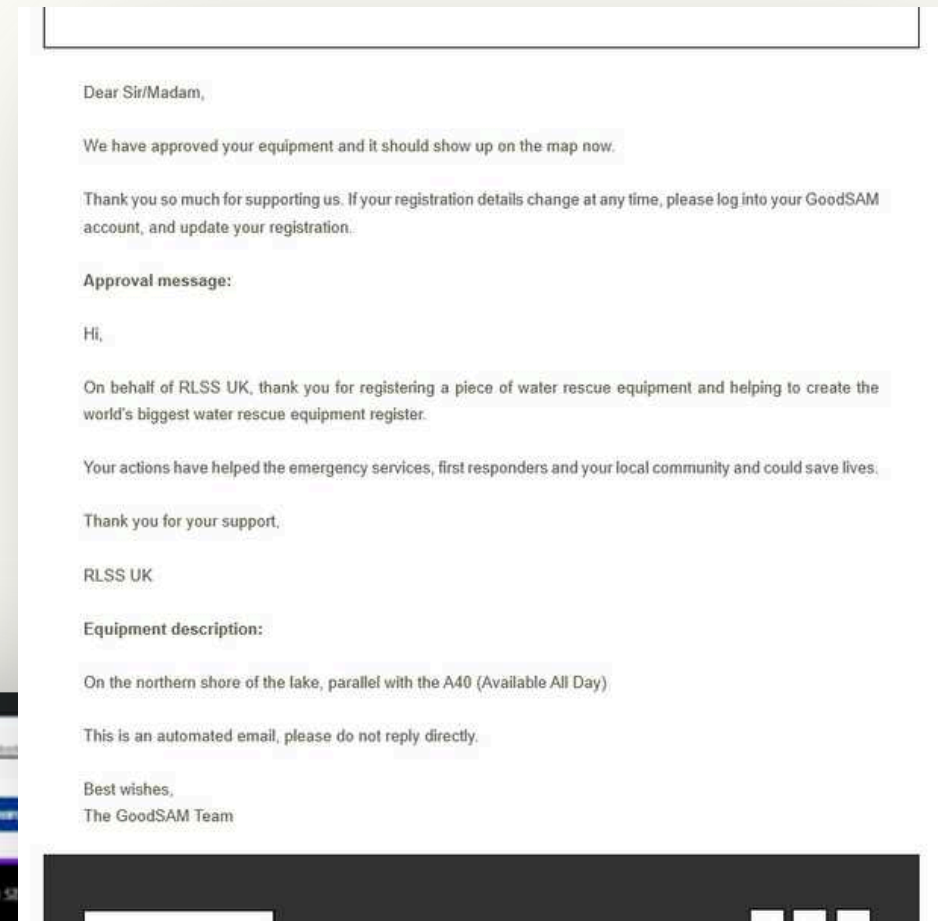
- Two new wildflower meadows have been established, including the creation of 3 hectares of wildflower-rich habitat on Mill Meadow.
- We're collaborating with the local Angling Society to improve fishing access through the installation of enhanced platforms.
- Two new scrapes have been developed on Snipe Meadow to support wetland biodiversity.
- A comprehensive botanical survey of the Lake has been completed, providing valuable insight to inform future development and conservation efforts.
- Detailed soil, spider, and invertebrate surveys have been conducted across both Mill and Snipe Meadows to deepen our ecological understanding of the sites.
- Completing a phase 1 survey of half the Country Park (other done 2 years ago)
- Habitat stacks have been installed
- A reptile survey is planned for the next 3 months.

There will be thinning over 2025 along the A40 strip (up to 200 trees) continuing to improve light and sight lines for lone walkers and others who feel vulnerable.



SITE DEVELOPMENT

- Life-saving equipment has been registered on the GoodSAM responder app, enabling faster emergency response and improved public safety.
- A dedicated webpage for the Local Nature Reserve has been launched, featuring a public survey to gather community feedback and inform future improvements.
- The new webpage also serves as a valuable resource for learning about the history of Witney Lake, with additional information on angling opportunities, life-saving equipment locations, and how to get involved through volunteering.



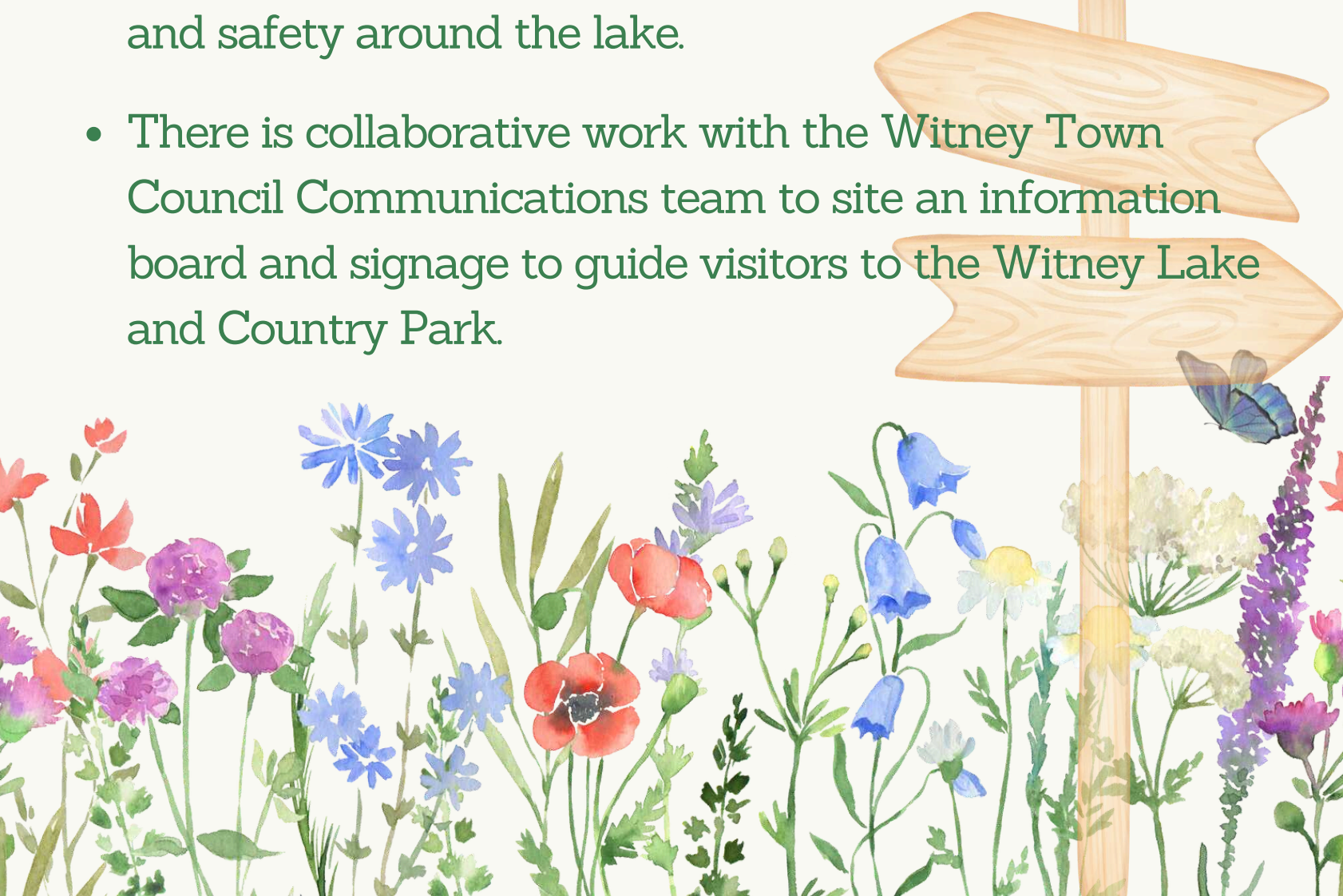
SITE DEVELOPMENT

- A full review, replacement, and refurbishment of signage has been undertaken. Some existing signs were repurposed for use in other areas of the Lake and Country Park, while new signage and noticeboards have been installed to enhance visitor navigation and information.
- Park furniture has been refurbished to support a consistent and recognisable visual identity throughout the Country Park.
- The WWII pillbox on Mill Meadow has been cleared and enhanced with a new interpretive sign, offering visitors historical context and a point of interest along their visit.



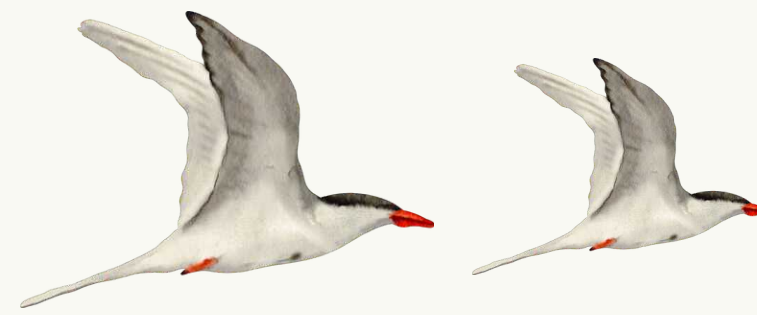
SITE DEVELOPMENT 2024 - 25

- A dragonfly area that had become very overgrown and dried out has been reinstated in Mill Meadow, part of the Lake and Country Park. A Councillor Priority Fund contributed some money for the project. The area has now been cleared and the spoil will gradually naturalise as the water clears over the next few weeks. Fencing has been installed to protect the area with a gate to allow access for mowing and other maintenance.
- Pot holes have been filled along 700m of the lakeside path to improve accessibility and safety around the lake.
- There is collaborative work with the Witney Town Council Communications team to site an information board and signage to guide visitors to the Witney Lake and Country Park.



ENVIRONMENT

- Public litter picking is supported by twice-weekly bin collections, including dog waste bins. Dual-purpose bins for both litter and recycling are in place, ensuring collected waste is appropriately sorted and recycled. In addition to scheduled maintenance, the team provides agile, on-the-spot responses to urgent issues such as broken glass or abandoned barbecues.
- Sustainability is a key focus—wood from old signage and gates is repurposed into nest boxes, new signs, and other practical uses. Reclaimed plastic, often collected from nearby businesses, is creatively reused in signage and bird boxes. A great example is the handcrafted information sign made by the Witney Shed (pictured bottom right).
- Graffiti is addressed promptly—staff carry removal kits and action is taken the same day it is discovered. A local graphic artist also contributes by regularly refreshing the artwork in the underpass leading into the site, creating a welcoming and vibrant entrance.
- The site is officially registered with Natural England as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR), and also we have applied for Local Wildlife Site (LWS) status through the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) and the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT).
- Ongoing monitoring of the site's biodiversity includes regular flora and fauna surveys conducted by both external professionals and internal staff.
- An application has also been submitted for Green Flag status, recognising our commitment to high standards of environmental management and public engagement.



MAINTENANCE PROGRAM 2024-25



PROPOSALS FOR DEVELOPMENT

The meadows represent the largest continuous habitat within the site. Historical evidence indicates that prior to recent restoration efforts, these areas had been left unmanaged for some time. As a result, they became dominated by dense tussocks and mats of coarse grasses and rushes, along with scattered invasive tall ruderal species such as common nettle and creeping thistle. The absence of traditional management practices- such as seasonal mowing or grazing and has led to a decline in habitat diversity and ecological value.

To reverse this trend, an active management programme is now in place, supported by annual habitat reviews and re-surveys where necessary. We are also implementing the Biodiversity Metric to calculate Biodiversity Net Gain across our holdings helping us quantify the ecological and financial value of our interventions, and ensure long-term benefits for biodiversity.

As part of our ongoing engagement with the community, our Biodiversity Officer Carl and Ranger Will carry comment cards while on site. We'd love to hear from you about your experiences around Witney Lake and Country Park LNR, your feedback helps shape how we manage and enhance the site for both wildlife and visitors.



MAINTENANCE PROGRAM 2024-25



PROPOSALS FOR DEVELOPMENT

We are continuing with the active removal and control of several invasive species across the site, including Himalayan Balsam, Nuttall's Pondweed, Hemlock, and Giant Hogweed. Efforts are also ongoing to manage non-native terrapins that have been released into the lake by members of the public, as they pose a threat to native wildlife.

In addition, we are working in partnership with SSE on a three-year rolling tree management programme for the areas beneath power lines running through the Country Park. It has been agreed with SSE's contractors that felled wood will be repurposed for use in other habitat creation initiatives across the site.

All of this work is carried out with a strong focus on protecting sensitive and endangered species within the meadows—such as the Great Burnet, a priority species found in Mill Meadow (pictured right).

We conduct monthly water testing to establish a comprehensive data baseline for tracking changes in water chemistry over time. In collaboration with the Cotswolds Rivers Trust, (Windrush catchment partnership & Cotswold wetland partnership) we also maintain three mammal monitoring rafts and two roach boards to support local biodiversity monitoring efforts.



WITNEY LAKE AND COUNTRY PARK

MANAGEMENT PLAN
SUMMARY
2024-2034



Written by Carl Whitehead, Biodiversity and Green Spaces Officer
April 2024







