



Thames & Chilterns in Bloom - Parks and Open Spaces Marking sheet

NAME OF ENTRY: Witney Lake & Country Park

LOCATION: Witney

ASSESSORS: Ted Smith & Phill Snell

DATE: 24 July 2024

WEATHER CONDITIONS: Warm, Sunny and Dry

SIZE/TYPE	<i>Pocket Park/garden</i>	<i>Park</i>	<i>Large Park</i>	<i>Country Park</i>	<i>Cemetery</i>	<i>Church Yard</i>	<i>Commercial</i>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

MARKS	<i>Community</i>	<i>Maintenance</i>	<i>Environment</i>	<u>TOTAL</u>	AWARD	<i>Gold</i>	<i>Silver Gilt</i>	<i>Silver</i>	<i>Bronze</i>	<i>Cert. of Ach.</i>
	<input type="text" value="7"/>	<input type="text" value="8"/>	<input type="text" value="8"/>	<input type="text" value="23"/>		<input type="text"/>	<input checked="" type="text" value="x"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

SUMMARY

Witney Lake and Country Park is a good example of the positive outcome that can result from a former industrial site. Its origins lay in the construction of the Witney bypass, the A40 in the mid 1980's. The site was dug as a source of gravel to use in the build. Subsequently it was decided to flood one pit to form a lake, while back filling the rest of the 27 acre site to create a traditional hay meadow and wet grassland. To further add to the attractiveness of the site, it is bounded by the River Windrush. The exciting element here is that Witney Town Council, post COVID and in response to the declaration of a Climate Emergency, has invested in extra staffing to enhance and improve this resource for the benefit of all. The results of the input of staff resource are clearly visible, even over the period of the last year since our previous visit.

The Town Council and its team are to be congratulated on this and we continue to look forward to see how this Park develops in the years to come.

AREAS OF ACHIEVEMENT

1. Key to the success of the Parks development has been the choice of the Bio-diversity Officer and his assistant, who are both enthusiastic and knowledgeable. In addition to putting together a work programme for themselves, they have readily engaged with Park visitors and developed successful relationships with outside groups and resources, such as BBOWT, Men's Sheds, the Woodland Trust, the local angling club and others.

2. One of those engagement groups from the local community has been Witney Sheds. This group has been used to great effect building and installing bird boxes, information posts and rubbing posts, the latter aimed at attracting young people's interest. Much of this is made from recycled wood and plastic, that would otherwise be disposed of within the Witney area.

3. As part of the above, signage is being reviewed, replaced and refurbished as necessary. Included in this is a deliberate identifiable branding exercise, extending to seating as well. The impact of this can now clearly be seen, giving the impression of a well-cared for and maintained Country Park.

4. Accessibility is being addressed where possible, with the local angling society building fishing platforms out into the lake and some picnic tables being modified for wheelchair access.

5. Historically, this had been a site with basic management and maintenance. It is pleasing to see the strides forward being taken with the advent of more staff resource and the achievement of this involving relevant groups in the local community and Wildlife and Conservation Sector. This includes undertaking surveys of the lake, meadows and their flora and fauna, to establish base line data, thus determining ongoing management.

6. In light of the above, areas of targeted and programmed maintenance are now taking place including the removal and control of invasive plant species, 'opening up' pathways through the Park to encourage a safer feel, 'scrapes' within the existing wildflower meadow and bringing in Oxfordshire native wildflower rich grassland cuttings in order to improve the quality of the meadows and, finally, the building and installation of two tern rafts.

7. Good to notice the presence of a female, wild swimming group, a point that further proves the diversity of activity in this Park and its importance and relevance to the local community.

8. Excellent range of inter-active leaflets available for the site, to cater for all age groups. (We presume a programme exists to update and change the jokes and word searches – which one judge very much enjoyed!)



AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

1. Primarily, more of the same. Continue surveying, upgrading infrastructure and the maintenance of the Park. Excellent forward momentum being achieved, as previously stated.

2. Pursue and ensure areas of work identified in Maintenance Programmes for 2024 – 25 are achieved.

3. Ensure achievement of Local Nature Reserve status for the Park.

Parks Category Scoring Matrix

<u>For each section individually:</u> 9-10 Gold 7-8 Silver Gilt 5-6 Silver 3-4 Bronze 1-2 Certificate of Achievement	<u>For overall/total marks:</u> 26-30 Gold 20-25 Silver Gilt 14-19 Silver 8-13 Bronze 0-7 Certificate of Achievement
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