

# CONSERVATION & ENVIRONMENT

## Natural environment: Withymead Nature Reserve



Withymead is an oasis of riverside wilderness; a haven for plants and wildlife; a place where Thameside boating once thrived. It is famous for its reed beds and Loddon lilies. The reserve was established by Anne Carpmael for the benefit of the community and is open free to the public. Many volunteers work there year-round.



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## Natural environment: Hartslock Nature Reserve

Hartslock Nature Reserve near Goring-on-Thames is an 11-acre section of a much larger SSSI. The reserve is primarily south-facing chalk downland surrounded by thick, ancient hedges and narrow tracts of mixed yew and deciduous woodland. Bee, pyramidal and common spotted-orchids, common twayblade and white helleborine grow on this sloping grassland. In May or early June, the famous monkey orchids flower here. These are so rare that they only grow in

two other places in the UK and are protected by law. The reserve, run by the Berks, Bucks & Oxon Trust (BBOWT) with local help, is also home to a wide range of insects, including butterflies, grasshoppers, bees and day-flying moths.



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**Green public spaces:**  
Lock Green  
Rectory Garden  
Gardiner Field



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## Resource management



### Icknield Farm Anaerobic Digester Plant

Anaerobic digestion is a multi-stage process converting waste organic material into a number of products including methane. The methane can either be used to produce electricity and heat or can be further processed and injected into the National Gas Grid for use offsite. Located in near Goring, the Icknield Farm AD plant has a capacity of about 5 MW and mainly

produces biomethane from pig slurry which is exported to the national gas grid. The facility, in operation since the end of 2014, is accredited under the Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) and Feed-in-Tariff (FiT) schemes. The residue is spread on local fields as fertilizer.

### Recycling & waste disposal



South Oxfordshire District Council has one of the highest rates of recycling in the country. It collects food waste weekly which goes to an anaerobic digester; garden waste and recycling are picked up on alternate weeks from general rubbish. There are charity clothing banks at both the Fire Station and the railway station. Many residents have dogs and the excrement is a constant source of public concern. Dog poo bins have been installed at local open spaces.



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## Resource management

### Litter

Two community litter picks are held each year, in spring and autumn. The parish council and the WI liaise with the South Oxfordshire District Council waste team to borrow equipment and dispose of the rubbish collected. Refreshments are served afterwards to reward the volunteers. Bloom volunteers and others help to keep the amount of litter down year round by carrying out regular picks.



### Water

Watering is vital to success and has always required careful management. It is labour intensive; the problems have increased with climate change. We have taken a range of measures use water responsibly and to ease the burden on our volunteers. Where-ever possible we try to harvest rain water and use watering cans. Many of the containers have reservoirs to make the best use of water, including the hanging baskets.

**Hanging baskets.** A hand propelled bowser was used when Bloom was in charge of the baskets, with solar panels to charge the bowser pump. Plastic baskets with reservoirs reduced the water consumption considerably as there is no wastage from run-through and the plants just use the amount of water they need according to the conditions. Watering sessions were cut from daily to three times a week.



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**Containers.** With nearly 40 planters, watering is a big job. Where-ever possible, rain water is used that is captured in large butts, e.g. on the Village Hall (right). Otherwise it is carried in cans from a source on the allotments or the tap fitted for us by SODC at the back of the public toilets. It is done according to need by volunteers who take responsibility for a particular area.



**Railway station.** The shallow artificial bank that we created on Platform 4 with beautiful permanent planting used to require watering with a hosepipe in dry weather – a



cumbersome process. We fund-raised to buy and install an automatic watering system which works according to the conditions via a sensor, thus ensuring that it is only watered when needed and obviates run-off. It can also be controlled remotely using a mobile phone app. GWR fitted a tap and supply the water free of charge. The bed is also thickly mulched each spring with peat-free locally produced compost to help retain moisture.

## *Installing the irrigation system*

The planting in the 7 containers on Platform 3 was designed to cope with dry conditions, but watering is still required once a week in dry weather. We fund-raised to buy and install a large butt which GWR plumbed into the guttering on the bridge for us. A dedicated volunteer looks after these troughs.



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The narrow bed by the path to the village on Platform 1 was originally full of rubble that was covered with membrane and a layer of bark. It is overhung with trees in places and so quite shady. We removed the membrane and added many bags of compost before planting with suitable low-growing perennials for the dry conditions. The planting worked, but we continue to add large quantities of mulch each year to help conserve moisture and feed the plants. A butt has now been installed like the one on Platform 3, to take rainwater from the bridge gutters, which will be used to water the border.



**Goring Lock.** The floral boat was watered by the lock keeper using buckets from the river.

**Recreation ground bed and BT site wild flower meadow.** The planting in both of these areas was designed to cope with dry conditions and they rarely need watering.

**Toilet containers.** These are hand watered using the tap provided by SODC.

## Sustainable gardening

Whenever possible we use perennials and shrubs in containers, underplanted with bulbs, to give interest year round. This is supplemented with annual bedding for extra colour if necessary. We have a nursery bed where we recycle plants and grow new ones from cuttings. The boat here has grasses and a canna that have been used before. The pelargoniums have been bought in from a local garden centre, as are all our bedding plants. The nursery buys them as plugs from a UK supplier and grows them on in its greenhouses using peat-free compost. Pelargoniums are overwintered and reused from year to year. We sometimes use an ivy-leaved pelargonium to provide colour, rather than petunias, so that we can grow it on for use next year. We are still on a learning curve with peat-free compost as it requires a different feeding regime.

Permanent planting in borders and beds is hand weeded. We do not use chemical sprays. Plants such as cornflowers and marigolds are allowed to seed down if they are attractive and add to the overall look of the area. We try to provide a wide variety of flowering shrubs and perennials to give a food source for pollinating insects.

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