



Open Water Safety Policy



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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Within parks and public open spaces of Witney there are a range of open water features which enhance the environment for the enjoyment of people of all ages. These include lakes, rivers, Sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDs) through to tributaries which flow from small streams into fast flowing rivers like the river Windrush. The Council recognises the positive contribution that well managed water spaces can provide to the area, enhancing the environment, through leisure use, supporting tourism and healthy living objectives.
- 1.2 These features, however, present a potentially significant risk to people in summer when it is hot and swimming in cold water is attractive; and in winter when people are attracted to and may put themselves at risk by walking on ice over deep water.
- 1.3 Witney Town Council (WTC) through their risk assessment process will do all that is reasonably practicable to protect people from danger, and this policy has been established with this objective in mind.

2. Water Safety Policy - Statement of Intent

- 2.1 The Town Clerk is responsible for ensuring the appropriate management arrangements and resources are in place so as far as is reasonably practicable, all open water facilities and other areas of open water such as culverts, rivers, and streams, are maintained in safe conditions for the benefit of users.
- 2.2 The Council does not support or approve the use of any area of open water for swimming or any other water recreational activity.

3. Safety Criteria for Management and Design

- 3.1 There is continuous work being carried out to open water areas within our ownership, for example de-silting, water edge treatment etc. Before such work is undertaken several design factors will be taken into consideration to further improve safety.

4. Legal Responsibility

- 4.1 Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, the Council are responsible for the following:
 - identify what could cause injury or illness in your business (hazards)
 - decide how likely it is that someone could be harmed and how seriously (the risk)
 - take action to eliminate the hazard, or if this isn't possible, control the risk to as low as reasonably practicable

5. Risk Assessment

- 5.1 An annual review of risk management is carried out to ensure mitigating measures are kept up to date. Additional reviews will be undertaken in line with any internal or external driving factors.
- 5.2 A generic risk assessment will apply to all open water areas along with site specific RA's as and where necessary.

6. Signage

- 6.1 The risk assessment will assist in supporting the need and location of suitable signs to maximize safety. Where a risk assessment has previously identified areas known to be attractive for swimming, additional "signs, normally positioned at main entrances to the site in addition to those displayed within life buoy stands, will be positioned at regular intervals around the water's edge. Where possible the standard UK signage pictogram protocols should be adhered to:
 - Warning - Black and yellow
 - Prohibition – Red and white
 - Mandatory - Blue

7. Communication

- 7.1 The Council communicates the risks and dangers of open water through multiple platforms such as the Council's website and social media in alignment with awareness days, weeks, campaigns, hot spells and seasonal times of the year.
- 7.2 The Council will use awareness guidance in their communications on Water safety from ROSPA and other agencies and groups who specialise in highlighting the risks to reduce drowning and injuries.

8. Safety Inspections/Hazard Identification

- 8.1 We will ensure that routine safety inspections of open water are undertaken by WTC staff with any additional inspections to be undertaken as required. The risk assessments will be updated, amended or reviewed accordingly.
- 8.2 Inspection of rescue equipment is carried out weekly and recorded electronically. The results of all inspections will be recorded and maintained by the Biodiversity & Green Spaces Officer. Ad-hoc audits will be undertaken by the Compliance & Environment Officer.
- 8.3 Safety inspections will monitor:
 - The provision and condition of rescue equipment.
 - Safety signs and other information notices.
 - Condition of the water and surrounding edges/banks.

- 8.4 All inspections will identify any missing or damaged equipment, signage etc., and will be recorded in the inspection report. Where the inspecting officer considers this to represent a significant hazard, immediate action will be taken to rectify and resolve the problem
- 8.5 Water sampling will be taken from time to time where we believe the water quality may pose a risk to users of the environment. Where appropriate we shall communicate any concerns via social media channels to the local community.

9. Supervision of Open Water Sites

- 9.1 Full time supervision is deemed to be neither reasonably practicable nor the most effective reaction to a water hazard. However, where employees are present on site, they may take a proactive approach in educating the public and highlighting the common dangers around open water. Angling is the only approved activity for WTC open water sites and supervision is not deemed to be necessary as the angling group their own safety guidance and responsibilities for their members. During periods of higher risk (prolonged periods of hot weather or ice risk), more frequent inspections might be undertaken.

10. Rivers and Brook Courses

- 10.1 In circumstances where rivers or brook courses run through parks and public open spaces under normal conditions the depth of water is negligible, and only in flood conditions the risk to users of the site increases. It is not practical to sign or provide lifebuoys for all sites where rivers and brook courses flow, in the event of such storm or flood conditions the use of the local media shall be used to highlight the potential increased risk to possible users of these sites.

11. Edge gradients

- 11.1 The critical feature of all water edges is the gradient above and more importantly, the gradient below the water line. How the edge is then treated will be influenced by environmental factors. Where the water edge is open and accessible and is to remain so, the edge profile should be graded appropriately.
- 11.2 It is recommended that shallow water (less than 0.66m) should be extended a minimum of 2m from the water edge, via 1:3 gradients, and a further protective margin of 1.75m with depths from 0.65 to 1.36m via a 1:2.5 gradient. This reduces the risk to the public by removing sudden change to depth and temperature. Whilst Witney Town Council acknowledge the risk profile associated with different gradients, in reality as a natural environment it is difficult to engineer all area to a safe condition. Individual high-risk areas may be subject to a specific review.

12. Planting

- 12.1 Where access to the water's edge is not required, but either a steep gradient (Falling risk) or very shallow gradient (swimming temptation) exists, planting of vegetation and natural vegetation will provide adequate and aesthetic protection.
- 12.2 Regular recorded inspections and maintenance of such will provide an effective natural deterrent to enter open water in these areas.

13. Shallow gradients

- 13.1 The attraction to enter the water at these points are increased and to deter access planting of water plants (reeds, willow etc.) can assist in discouraging persons entering the water at these points.
- 13.2 Regular inspections and maintenance of such will provide an effective natural deterrent to enter open water in these areas.

14. Environmental Management

- 14.1 Weekly inspections include identifying any signs of pollution (oil/blue green algae/etc.) where wildlife may be put at risk. Any pollution discovered by WTC staff will be reported immediately to their line manager for the appropriate guidance provided by the Environment Agency to be taken.
- 14.2 It is often the case that the Environment Agency will report the presence of blue green algae to us. In such cases, we will ensure that appropriate warning notices are displayed around the affected area.

15. Fish Deaths and Environmental Incidents

- 15.1 Where incidents of large-scale fish deaths or other wildlife deaths are identified or reported these will be fully investigated by the Biodiversity and Green Spaces Officer with the support of the Environment Agency. In such cases, a plan may be established to minimise the threat to life of further fish stocks, every reasonable effort shall be made to minimise the source of the contamination and ensure the water quality is returned to safe condition as soon as reasonably practicable.

16. Ice on Open Water

- 16.1 When ice develops on open water at its sites, the Council will ensure that appropriate and adequate warning signs are displayed at all access points to the Lake and Country Park, and at primary access points to the open water. These signs will provide a clear warning of the danger for visitors to the Lake & Country Park. During periods of ice

build-up, more frequent inspections may be conducted.

16.2 When ice forms on open water it is the Council's policy not to break ice as it forms. The management of rescue equipment during icy conditions is addressed in Appendix 1.

17. Provision of Information

17.1 The Council recognises that the provision of appropriate and adequate information on water safety is crucial to share with staff and members of the public for both leisure and working activities in the vicinity of open water areas for accident prevention.

17.2 This information is made available in several ways:

- **Public Education**

The Biodiversity and Green Spaces Officer will provide information on all aspects of water safety through an outreach program to local schools and community groups. This direct form of education is supported by the Emergency Services to highlight the risk and precautionary measures that can be taken.

- **Site Information**

Information is provided at key points of access to areas of open water that provide details of the layout of the area. A map will be included at our larger open water location, (Witney Country Park), displaying the location of life preservers, the defibrillator, and access points for emergency services.

Signs will also include hazards in accordance with the recommendations of the RoSPA National Water Safety Committee and the requirements of the Health and Safety (Safety Signs and Signals) Regulations.

- **Council Website and Social Media**

Regular timely posts on social media platforms help raise awareness by providing guidance of the hazards associated with open water.

The digital notice board in the Admin Office window provides timely guidance on the dangers of open water during periods of extreme heat and cold weather conditions.

18. Rescue Equipment

18.1 The Council will provide life preservers in suitable and highly visible mountings at key locations around areas of open water. The locations of these are carefully considered and assessed taking into account likely points of access to water and places where a rescue attempt may reasonably take place.

18.2 Weekly inspections are implemented and recorded to check the condition and location of these preservers. Any remedial works identified are rectified in a timely

manner according to the risk presented. Where vegetation around life preservers stands is identified as an issue on inspections, this will be cleared to ensure life preserver stands are visible.

- 18.3 Life preservers are seen by the public as a key element in lifesaving and it is recognised that in spite of their role in rescue attempts and as a warning reminder, life preservers are subject to vandalism and misuse.
- 18.4 Vandalism is a key concern and wherever possible vandal resistant components will be installed with incidents recorded and reported to the Council and the Police.
- 18.5 Where appropriate and as a result of a risk assessment, additional rescue equipment may be available in a vehicle for staff whilst they are working on or near open water. Staff who might be reasonably expected to have access to such equipment will receive appropriate training as to its use.

19. Reporting Accidents and Incidents

- 19.1 Where a member of staff is involved in an accident while at work or witnesses a member of the public have an accident, they shall report this to their line manager or the offices as soon as physically possible in accordance with Council procedures. A summary of which is included in Appendix 1 All accidents will be reviewed and analysed to identify the cause any if any lessons can be learnt to prevent any reoccurrence.
- 19.2 Where the Council are notified of a member of the public being involved in an incident or accident, this will be managed in accordance with the procedures in Appendix 1. Members of the public are encouraged to report accidents and incidents to the Biodiversity and Green Spaces Officer by use of the Council's contact details displayed on site information boards.

20. First Aid Provision at Open Water Sites

- 20.1 With the exception of a defibrillator at the Witney Lake and Country Park, there is no first aid equipment stored on any Council open water locations.
- 20.2 First aid equipment, in accordance with the standards set out in the current First Aid at Work Approved Code of Practice, is carried on all Council service vehicles. A first aid kit is carried on the UTV vehicle and may be held locally by the Biodiversity and Green Space Officer.

21. Work on or Near Water

- 21.1 In circumstances where staff are required to work on or support staff carrying out such duties or activities on open water or rivers, they must be provided with buoyancy aids that meet International Standards Organisation (ISO) standard ISO 12402. The buoyancy aid might also carry the CE mark relating to standards EN 393

to 399. The use of a 30M recovery line with a throw baton may be useful in some circumstances.

- 21.2 In accordance with the above a minimum of two staff must be involved when the use of watercraft is required.
- 21.3 A suitable and sufficient risk assessment must be undertaken before any such work or activities are undertaken.

22. Review and Monitoring

- 22.1 This policy shall be reviewed every two years or sooner if legislation or organisational needs change.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Open Water Rescue Provision Guidance on the provision of life preservers

The Council recognises the value of providing life preservers at appropriate locations around all areas of open water. The location of life preservers is determined as a result of a risk assessment to ensure that they are provided at points where they may be easily accessible by any person who needs to use them for rescue purposes.

In determining the positioning of life preservers, particular attention is paid to locations where there have been previous incidents, fast flowing water, and the presence of very steep banks in areas accessible to the public.

It is generally recognised that:

Life preservers may be provided at strategic intervals around all of the areas of open water managed by the Council. (Guide 200 meters)

Vandalism and theft represent both a risk to members of the public if an in-water incident arises and a severe financial burden to the Council when replacement becomes necessary.

Life preservers are intended to be dropped into the water from a height or thrown a short distance to a casualty who is in the water. In severe winter conditions, the water surface on most lakes and ponds freezes. These conditions significantly reduce the value of life preservers as rescue devices.

Life preservers provided in such situations act as an attraction to vandals as they can be projected across the surface of the ice to a point where their recovery represents a risk to staff or others venturing onto the ice.

In situations where members of the public may choose to ignore warnings and venture onto the ice, they are likely to break through the surface within a few feet, and therefore reaching or wading distance, of the edge.

Appendix 2

Emergency Accident/Incident Reporting Procedure

Should any of the following work-related accidents/incidents occur to an employee or other person within your area of responsibility:

- A death or a major or serious injury to an employee requiring urgent medical treatment from a doctor or at a hospital.
- A death or a major or serious injury to a member of the public requiring urgent medical treatment from a doctor or at a hospital.
- A Dangerous Occurrence occurs on a site under your control e.g., collapse of a scaffold, explosion, release of toxic gas etc.

All accidents and incidents will be reported in accordance with the Council's Health and Safety Policy.

THE PRIORITIES FOR DEALING WITH ANY SERIOUS ACCIDENT/INCIDENT ARE:

- Assess the environment, do not put yourself at risk
- If appropriate seek help via 999
- Treatment of casualty.
- Make the site/area safe to prevent further accidents/incidents. Other than essential work to isolate the area the scene should be left undisturbed until the accident has been investigated.
- Notify your Line Manager and Compliance and Environment Officer.

Appendix 3

Guidance Note - Open Water Emergency Incidents

To ensure all staff members are responding consistently to open water emergency incidents, which include members of the public swimming/paddling, or any other unauthorised water activity follow the procedure below:

1. If unauthorised user(s) is in immediate danger, contact 999 for emergency services support.
2. In any event, contact your Line Manager or the office to record the incident, giving as many facts/details as possible.
3. If unauthorised user(s) is not in immediate danger attempt to “call in” the unauthorised user(s), stating the dangers, and the Council’s policy to unauthorised open water use.
4. After a period of time if the unauthorised user(s) are still in the water, make further contact with WTC, to seek further assistance. The office will contact the emergency services.
5. At no time should you leave the incident until:
 - (a) You are relieved by another member of staff, OR
 - (b) For a short period of time to make contact via the nearest telephone, then return to incident, OR
 - (c) If the incident has been resolved.
6. **DO NOT, AT ANY TIME, PLACE YOURSELF IN ANY DANGER. ALWAYS USE RESCUE EQUIPMENT PROVIDED.**

Appendix 4

Witney - Map of Open Water

