

Green Infrastructure South West Web Portal: Partnership Delivery Case Study



Apex Leisure and Wildlife Park

Location

Highbridge, Somerset



Lead Organisation

The Friends of Apex Park Improvements Group deal with the parks activities supported by Sedgemoor District Council (contact: Marina Turner – marina.turner@sedgemoor.gov.uk)

Main Issues raised and highlighted

Sedgemoor District Council aims to manage Apex Park for the benefit of the community and encourage wildlife in terms of providing opportunities for community members to improve and promote the use of, awareness of and care of facilities within Apex Wildlife & Leisure Park in order to make the park a welcoming, safe and enjoyable environment for all.

Main Partners

Sedgemoor District Council own the site and who part arrange the maintenance of the site along with the Friends of Apex Park Improvements Group.

Funding Streams

Apex is funded to be able to provide maintenance and develop the site. The maintenance is funded through Sedgemoor's Clean Surroundings Budget. The development is funded by the Parks Policy budget and events and workshops are funded by the Friends of Apex Park Improvements Group.

Policy Framework

Sedgemoor District Council has the following documents that it abides by and is regularly reviewing:

- Environment statement/policy.
- Grounds Maintenance Charter.
- Apex Leisure and Wildlife Park Management Plan (2006-2011) Revised 2009.
- Apex Leisure and Wildlife Park Marketing Plan.

Aims of Project

- To reduce the distance local people have to travel to access leisure facilities.
- Improve the use of Apex Park.
- To work in partnership between Sedgemoor council and the Improvements Group or other interested parties to help manage and look after the park to enhance its value to the community.
- To make changes which will be of benefit to those visiting the park and the flora and fauna living within it.

Description of the project

Apex Leisure and Wildlife Park is a 42 acre site which lies between the towns of Burnham-on-Sea and Highbridge located next to the Bridgewater Bay Estuary. Apex Park was once used as clay digging areas which is how the lakes were formed. At the centre of the park the clay digging works have been conserved and extended to provide a three and a half hectare lake with reed fringed banks providing a natural habitat for protected birds. In 1994, Apex Leisure and Wildlife Park was declared a County Wildlife Site by the Somerset Environmental Records Centre. The Park was recognised primarily for its importance as an aquatic site for over wintering and breeding wildfowl and breeding warblers.

Apex Park adjoins Bridgewater Bay estuary which is recognised as a site of international importance for nature conservation with the following types of status: Ramsar Site as listed by the Secretary of States under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance for their wetland wildlife and particularly as waterfowl habitats. Special Protection Area classification under the EC Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds. The Bridgewater Bay site is also recognised as a site of international importance for nature conservation and Natural England has designated it as a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

The park attracts thousands of visitors each year, catering for activities ranging from model boating to dog walking and angling to ornithology. Its many habitats attract a diverse range of wildlife including Cetti's Warbler, Great Crested Grebe, Smooth Newt, Common Frog and butterflies. Most areas of the park are accessible to the public with good pathways for viewing the lake and car parking facilities including wheelchair access, picnic tables and secure bike points. There is a circular walk around the lake which is suitable for less able users including pushchairs and wheelchairs. Cycle way tracks include a south-north link along the eastern edge of the park, connecting into the heart of both towns and a recently constructed link to the adjacent Brue Estuary which forms part of the National Cycle Network. There are also

several footpath links giving direct access from the adjacent residential areas.

The Friends of Apex Park have now been active for more than 8 years. The group was set up to help improve the park for the benefit of local people and visitors to the area. The group holds events etc throughout the year. All of their work has been recognised which is why Natural England and Somerset County Council have recently recommended that the Park be designated a Local Nature Reserve of which the legal declaration is currently being processed.

When using pesticides within the park it is the preferred option to use no chemical pesticide but to use organic cultural methods where possible. The use of horticultural peat in the grounds maintenance operations is not permitted, only the use of a local recycled green waste product, Wyvern is allowed. Particular attention is paid to the conservation and management of natural features, wildlife and fauna, landscape features, buildings and structural features. These features serve their function well without placing undue pressure on the surrounding environment. The key natural elements in the design are lakes, reed beds, wildflower meadow, spinney, hedgerow and a mix of manmade recreational facilities i.e. skate park, children's play area and kick-about. Low maintenance specifications apply to grass cutting and seat/litterbins are made of recycled plastic. Tree planting has now taken place which will provide more shaded areas. There are also large areas of natural vegetation acting as a sponge for increased rainfall and enhancing evaporation.

Delivery mechanism/long term adoption of project

- Green waste arising from the site is redistributed within the park or recycled elsewhere.
- Surface rainwater is captured in the lake and used for the irrigation of planting schemes within the towns of Burnham-on-sea and Highbridge, where water levels permit.
- The park and immediate surrounds has a network of paths which support cycling and walking to work.

Outputs/Outcomes/Benefits

- Increased community involvement in green spaces.
- Increased quality of environment.
- Links created between parts of local area.