



# Yeovil Country Park Management Plan 2023- 2027



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## 1.0 Introduction

Yeovil Country Park (YCP) is 63.5 hectares (157 acre) country park that wraps itself around the southern and eastern sides of the busy market town of Yeovil. The Country Park is comprised of 5 main land holdings all of which have very different characters and special features. The Country Park was designated in 2002 when South Somerset District Council established ownership of all the land units. Since then the Country Park team have created the infrastructure and wildlife management schemes needed to cope with the heavy public use on the site. In 2005 the Country Park won its first Green Flag award to the delight of the team reflecting the high standard of maintenance and community engagement on site. This accolade has been retained consecutively ever since.



Photo:

*Ninesprings woodland and lake in it's close proximity to the town of Yeovil. Credit: Steve Shearn*

The Country Park is in a unique position; only 5 minutes' walk from the bustling town centre and offers an incredible array of peaceful open access green space for residents and visitors. This plan is needed to direct the management on site for the next 5 years as the ranger team seek to provide increased opportunities for the public to connect and engage with their Country Park and the various forms of heritage it has to offer.

The Country Park's five land units include Riverside, a narrow corridor of woodland with reedbeds following the river corridor of the Yeo, opening out into area of riparian meadow and wooded escarpment with a population of otters, and valuable habitat for many species of bird, small mammal, invertebrate and reptile. Moving westwards Wyndham Hill has the landmark 4 lime trees on its summit and supports a mix of pasture grassland and newly planted woodland. Travelling along the old railway line, now cycleway, that links the units of land you next reach Summerhouse Hill. A steep incline takes you southwards to the best views of Yeovil and a stand of 9 parkland oaks within the grazed land unit. Stands of gorse are dotted around the pasture and provide cover for birds and wildlife. Penn Hill Park is further north and more firmly within the town of Yeovil. In two parts, the park is predominantly amenity grassland, with shrub beds and ornamental trees. The final unit of land Ninesprings. The best known and most heavily used area, Ninesprings has a unique character all of its own. The Victorian Valley Gardens, lake, ponds, meadows and woodlands are full of plant life. They are perfect for exploring via the network of winding paths and a wide variety of wildlife can be seen, including kingfishers and water voles.

The children's play area is popular and the addition of Ninesprings Café in 2014 turned Yeovil Country Park into a destination for visitors from further afield. Many events are organised from the meadow area adjacent to the cafe. With such a diverse range of sites and habitats, the Country Park supports a huge range of species, can accommodate many types of public users and is ideally placed to deliver a countryside experience to the residents of Yeovil and further afield.

*Photo: View from Wyndham Hill across to Summerhouse Hill*



## **1.2 Ownership and Management**

Yeovil Country Park is managed by a small, dedicated ranger team within the wider Countryside Team of Somerset Council. The Countryside Team sits within Climate, Environment and Sustainability service in the directorate of Climate and Place Somerset Council's Countryside Team own and manage a total of five sites across the district. These include Yeovil Country Park, Ham Hill Country Park and Chard Reservoir, Moldram's Ground and Eastfield Local Nature Reserves. The diverse nature of the sites in both the wildlife they contain, and their various recreational uses means that the team has established a multi-skilled and dynamic approach to site management which is proving highly effective.

The land is owned and managed by Somerset Council.

### 1.3 Location:

<b>Site</b>	Yeovil Country Park
<b>Parish</b>	Yeovil Town Council
<b>County</b>	Somerset
<b>District</b>	South Somerset
<b>Local Authority</b>	Somerset Council
<b>National Grid Reference</b>	ST 55481 15429

The best available maps for Yeovil Country Park are Ordnance Survey Maps Landranger 183 1:50,000 sheet, Explorer 129 1:25,000 sheet and Geological Survey Sheet 312 1:50,000 sheet. Aerial photographs of Yeovil Country Park are available to Council staff on the XMAP GIS programme.

### 1.4 Statutory Designations

Parts of Yeovil Country Park are designated as a Local Wildlife Site (LWS). LWS are designated by Somerset Environmental Records Centre (SERC), following survey and assessment using a criteria approved by the SERC Management Group to assess wildlife importance within Somerset. Unlike the nationally designated sites such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), LWS designation does not confer any legal or statutory protection. They signify the extent of the important wildlife habitats. The Local Wildlife Sites that intersect Yeovil Country Park are:

\*These sites are adjacent to Yeovil Country Park

<b>SERC Reg</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>ST51/022</b>	Newton Copse*	Broadleaved ancient woodland
<b>ST51/070</b>	Ninesprings Pond and Stream	Site with important aquatic species
<b>ST51/109</b>	Aldon Park*	Grazed land with access for dog walking by purchase of an annual ticket.
<b>ST51/127</b>	Riverside Walk	Riverside area of woodland on steep banks
<b>ST51/065</b>	Wyndham Hill Wood	Semi-natural broadleaved woodland on steep slopes adjacent to disused railway line
<b>ST51/005</b>	Summerhouse Hill	Unimproved and semi-improved acid grassland
<b>ST51/026</b>	Ninesprings Wood	Ancient woodland site predominately broadleaved and conifer plantation stands

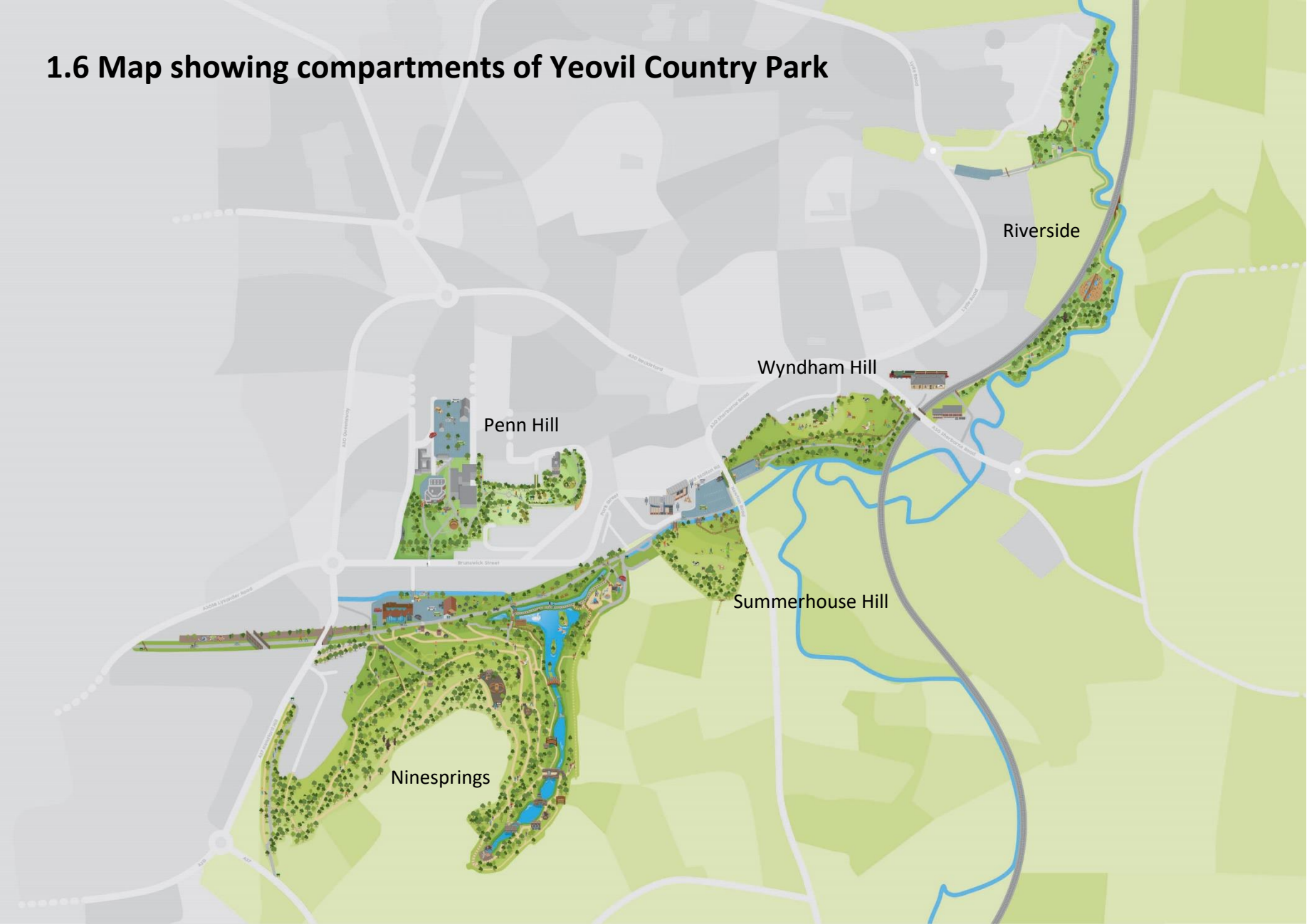
### 1.5 Size

The entire country park is approximately 63.5 hectares in size, around 157 acres.

Ninesprings 19.8ha (49 acres)

Summerhouse Hill	5.6 ha (14 acres)
Riverside	23 ha (57 acres)
Penn Hill	4.1 ha (10 acres)
Wyndham Hill	10.8 ha (27 acres)

**1.6 Map showing compartments of Yeovil Country Park**



## Compartments

To describe areas of the Country Park and to discuss their future management Yeovil Country Park has been divided into management compartments.

Site	Compartment	Habitat type
<b>Ninesprings (NS)</b>	The Valley Gardens	Woodland and Water
	Hillside Woods	Woodland
	Braggchurch	Woodland
	Southwoods	Woodland
	Memorial Arboretum	Ornamental trees and Grassland
	Lake and Pond	Water
	Meadows	Grassland, scrub and specimen trees
	Ninesprings Railway Walk	Edge Grassland, Scrub and Strips of scrubby woodland
<b>Penn Hill (PH)</b>	Formal Park	Grassland and Specimen Trees
	Old Penn House Garden	Grassland and Specimen Trees
<b>Summerhouse Hill (SH)</b>	Grassland	Grassland, gorse scrub and parkland trees
<b>Wyndham Hill (WH)</b>	Open Field	Grassland and specimen trees
	Escarpment	Woodland
	Wyndham Railway Walk	Water, woodland and amenity grassland
<b>Riverside</b>	Birchfield	Scrub and grassland
	Water Meadows	Grassland
	New Plantation	Woodland
	Railway Entrance	New woodland
	Reedbed	Reeds and willow
	Wooded Escarpment	Scrub, willow and some mature trees

## 1.7 Physical information

### 1.8 Altitude

The altitude across the compartments varies from low lying floodplain meadows to steep escarpments & hill tops. Some approximate figures for each compartment follow:

Compartment	Altitude
Ninesprings	40 - 85m
Summerhouse Hill	35 - 90m
Penn Hill	50 - 80m
Wyndham Hill	30 - 75m
Riverside	25 - 40m

### 1.9 Topography

Yeovil lies on a distinctive landform feature known as a dip slope with the land gently sloping southwards. To the south of the town, from Yeovale Leisure Centre to Goldenstones, the dip slope reaches a narrow river valley, with a low but attractive wooded escarpment. Viewed from the west

edge of town, the broad perception is of the greater part of Yeovil being cradled by this wooded escarpment. The sites that make up Yeovil Country Park generally lie to the south and east of the town centre, covering areas of both the escarpment and the lower dip slope. These sites are linked by the river valley of Dodham Brook and River Yeo, which runs east and north between these landforms through the south-east edge of town.

### **1.10 Water Regime**

The Country Park contains a number of water features, from the springs in the Valley Gardens, Ninesprings Lake, Dodham brook and the River Yeo. All water heads eastwards into the river Yeo and these watercourses support a diverse range of wildlife.

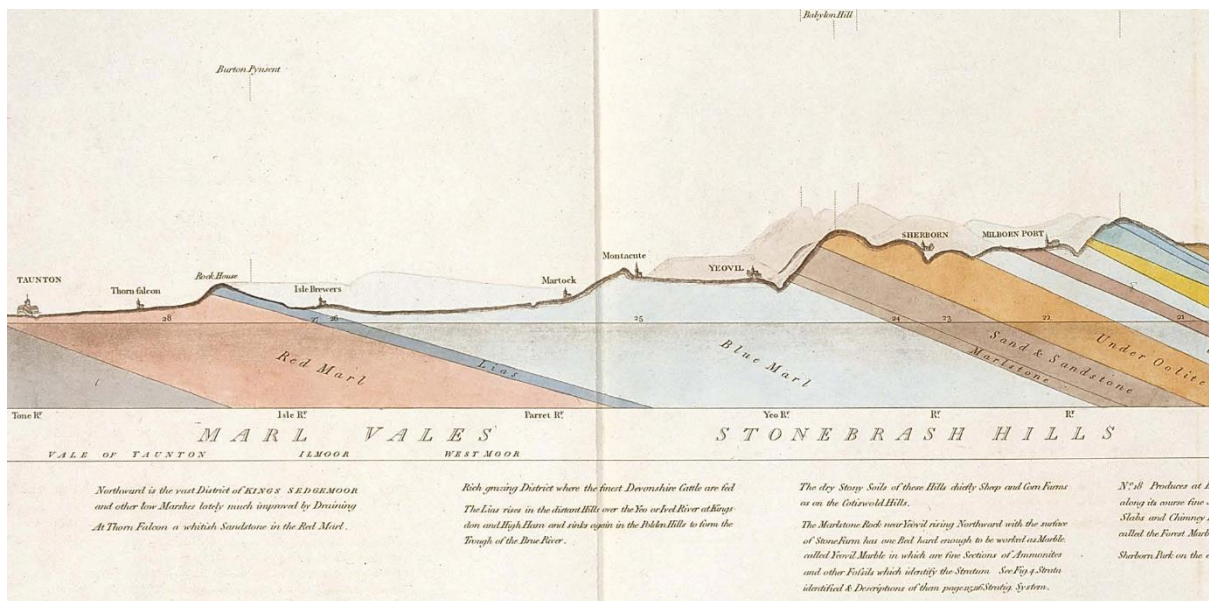
The Dodham brook first enters the park at Goldenstones, where it is a natural channel, it winds past the lake and play area and after descending a weir is encased in concrete as a flood relief channel. The brook was encased in the 1970's and in 2022 the Yeovil River's Community Trust embarked on the 'Dodham Brook Project' funded by the Green Recovery Challenge Fund to enhance the biodiversity of the culverted channel section.

Dodham Brook receives most of the runoff from the town and to prevent pollution of the brook, and further downstream, the Environment Agency and Country Park rangers jointly operate a pollution boom that can be deployed on the sighting of any pollution heading downstream. Erected outside Goldenstones, the boom stretches across the water, and floats on the surface preventing oil and chemical slicks from travelling downstream.

Other sources feeding into the brook include the springheads in Ninesprings. Upwards of 12 spring heads have been counted in the Valley Gardens, so Ninesprings is not an accurate name for the site. The springs serve to drain the land of Aldon Park that rises above it to the south. The springs all feed into a central valley stream, travelling through the semi-ancient woodland, which opens out into the lake at Ninesprings. The significant amount of leaf litter collected on its journey downstream coupled with the very sandy soils have left the lake very silted. A subsidiary of the lake is the Ninesprings pond. The lake is left without disturbance for wildfowl. The lake has two outlets into the Dodham brook, and a sluice board is operated by the rangers in times of high or low waters. With the sandy soils of the area bank side erosion is a problem on the Dodham Brook and the River Yeo. The Dodham brook is a tributary of the river Yeo at the base of Wyndham Hill, near to Yeovil Golf Club. The river meanders out of Yeovil on its eastern side, and despite the large Wessex Water sewage treatment works, supports a great range of wildlife.

### **1.11 Geology**

The varied landscape and ecosystems of Yeovil Country Park are underpinned by its geodiversity. The local geology was first described by the maps and sections of William 'Strata' Smith (1769-1839) and has international recognition in that the most recent substage of the Early Jurassic is designated as the Yeovilian.



Part of the Geological view and section through Dorsetshire and Somersetshire (1819) William Smith.

Within Yeovil Country Park, Ninesprings and Summerhouse Hill are the scarp face of the 'Stonebrash Hills' formed by the Bridport Sand Formation (Yeovil Sands, Sand and sandstone) laid down around 175 million years ago as a delta in the shallow seas of the Early Jurassic. Penn Hill and Wyndham Hill are outlier hills of this formation. The sandstone contains bands of more resilient limestone, visible in the 'Hollow Lanes' of the area, and resulting in the characteristic steep slopes.

The lower part (Down Cliff Clay Member) of the Bridport Sand Formation contains less permeable clays resulting in the emergence of water at Ninesprings, feeding the Country Park's waterfalls, lake, Dodham Brook and eventually the River Yeo.

In the nineteenth century, this sand and clay was extensively worked in local brick yards for the expansion of Yeovil. Many of the older buildings, such as St Johns Church and Preston Abbey, made use of the Beacon Limestone Formation (Junction Bed, Yeovil Stone or Yeovil Marble) which underlies the Bridport Sand.

To the northeast, the landscape opens to the alluvial 'Marl Vale' of Riverside. This broad valley of the River Yeo was formed by meltwater eroding the softer siltstones and sandstones of the Dyrham Formation (Pennard Sands, Blue Marl) during the tundra conditions of the last Ice Age.

### 1.12 Climate

Despite sitting on the southern edge of Yeovil, the topography of much of the Country Park means that the slopes of Ninesprings and Summerhouse Hill are north to northwest facing. In the winter this means that much of the grassland in these areas do not receive any sun and so if a hard frost or snow were to form, they can lie on the ground for many days, until daylight temperatures increase.

Microclimates are commonplace across the site, influenced by the habitats that are present. Ice commonly forms on the lower lake and ponds at Ninesprings but the open water in the Valley Gardens remains ice free, due to the protection that the surrounding woodland provides. The Valley Gardens of Ninesprings and the woodland escarpments across the country park also provide much needed shade in the summer, helping to mitigate the effects of a warming climate.

## 2.0 Health, Safety & Security

### 2.1 Appropriate facilities and activities

Yeovil Country Park provides a wealth of leisure provision – both formal and informal. The Ninesprings Play Area has been in-situ near to Ninesprings Lake for over 30 years and remains extremely popular with young families. The play area was last updated in 2009 and in 2023/24 capital funding from SSDC will enable the play area to be updated further, with themes taken from the surrounding natural environment to ensure the play area is integrated into the wider country park.



A 'Woodland Play Zone' was installed at the top of Ninesprings in 2008 with BBC Breathing Places funding. The area comprises natural play features such as balance beams, stepping stones, a story telling area and fairy doors. This area has been integral to many events held in Ninesprings, including the popular Halloween Trail. The play features were constructed using wood from the country park, but are now in need of repairs and new features added.

At Riverside, a play trail was created in 2016, with external funding from the Heritage Lottery Funded 'V3; InVolve, Visit, Volunteer' project, using materials sourced from the country park to create a network of balance beams, stepping stones and a seesaw. Wooden carved sculptures and a willow dome add to the interest. Additional roped play features have been procured and will be installed in 2023.

Much of the country park is situated alongside an old railway line which now serves as a popular shared cycle and pedestrian path, from Lysander road in the far west of the country park to Sherborne road on the East. Ninesprings, Summerhouse Hill and Wyndham Hill are linked by this shared path which is regularly used by families and commuters.

The open access nature of Yeovil Country Park and its accessibility to a large population has meant that the country park has been popular for a variety of external events in the past, including Parkrun, schools cross country races and 5k night races. Parkrun has now moved to a new location outside of Yeovil but the space that the country park can offer are still used by organised groups such as Yeovil Road Running Club and features in the annual Yeovil Half Marathon.



Park Yoga is delivered weekly from May to September in the Country Park, offering free outdoor sessions, supported by the Friends of Yeovil Country Park. These sessions attract 50 – 100 participants on a Sunday morning.

There are various weekly volunteering opportunities at Yeovil Country Park including practical conservation and wildlife surveying. These are discussed in more detail in the

Community section on page 33.

Public and community group events are organised annually by the ranger team. This is covered in more depth in the Marketing & Communication section on page ....

## 2.2 Seating

There is a variety of seating across the country park, from the informal wooden 'perching benches' to more formal black metal benches and picnic benches. Most of the benches at YCP are memorial benches and the team receive many more requests each year. The country park is almost full for benches & so existing benches that have not been dedicated are now offered as memorial benches. Requests for new benches are carefully considered by the rangers, but it is unlikely that any new locations in existing land will be agreed.

## 2.3 Ninesprings Café, toilets and other facilities

Ninesprings Café was built and opened in October 2014, part funded by external grant funders and as part of the Heritage Lottery funded V3 project. It serves hot & cold drinks, ice creams, sandwiches and cakes that are pre-packaged/made, like main coffee chains such as Costa. The Café has proven very popular with visitors to the Country Park, and during the Covid pandemic, increased its popularity further which was evident in the continued increase in income since 2020. The internal café space doubles up as an interpretation space with wooden interactive features on the wall for children and information & pictures about the park's heritage on the walls. The internal interpretation was funded as part of the V3 project.



To the rear of the café is a ranger's centre with office, kitchenette, resting space, staff toilet and workshop. This is the base for the ranger and volunteer team and for use by the café staff. The workshop is a key storage facility for tools and equipment used by the rangers, as well as a workbench and sink for indoor maintenance, repair, and construction tasks. The rangers also have use of two shipping containers for storage of the site ATV & power tools, event equipment, fencing/gate materials and other occasional use materials and equipment.

There are currently two public toilets at YCP, located on the outside of the Ninesprings Café building. They are unisex toilets with one containing baby changing facilities and the other has disabled access. There is also a customer toilet within Ninesprings Café itself. The toilets are opened at dawn and closed at dusk each day and cleaned once a day by external cleaning contractors, who have a contract with Somerset Council to service all the public toilets in the district.

There are two small, locked compounds for use by the rangers that comprise recycling bins, fuel storage facilities and other equipment or material needed for site works.

## 2.4 Security

CCTV is provided on the Ninesprings Café building, looking out into the country park and at all entrances to the building itself.

The rangers manage personal security around the wider country park by ensuring there are clear sightlines whenever possible, in an effort to reduce areas where people may be able to hide. Rangers are also on site five days per week. The rangers have built up a good working relationship with the Police local beat team, who help to patrol the site in the evening and at weekends. There is also an established Park Watch scheme that was implemented in 2010 with the aim of encouraging residents and visitors to report anti-social behaviour (ASB) issues to the Police and building a rapport with the local beat team to help prevent issues from occurring. During the Covid 19 pandemic, the Park Watch scheme lost some of its momentum but new meetings and re-promotion is planned for 2023.

The rangers are issued with Peoplesafe lone worker devices that they are registered to and instructed to carry when they are working on their own. The rangers are mostly working as part of a team and lone working is uncommon. Somerset Council also has a lone working Policy for further guidance and information.

## 2.5 Management of provisions, equipment, and risk assessments

The Countryside Ranger is issued with a Government Procurement Card with transactions and weekly spend limits to enable them to purchase the tools, equipment and materials they need for their jobs. All rangers undergo official accredited training in the use of technical tools and equipment such as tractor driving, chainsaws, brush cutters, wood chippers etc. The rangers carry out the day to day basic maintenance of these tools and this is recorded in line with PUWER. Any detailed repairs are carried out by the Council's in-house fleet mechanics or are sent off to specialists for repair. A full list of fleet, trailers and high-value tools is kept centrally & recorded for insurance purposes.

A full suite of risk assessments for YCP, associated works and activities is held centrally on a new system called B-Safe. The risk assessments are updated as required and a full revision of the risk assessments takes place annually in April to ensure they are all up to date and reflecting best practice.

Incidents, accidents and near-misses are recorded using an electronic form on Sharepoint, which is then directly sent to the reporting manager for a review and any issues arising are discussed personally with the ranger involved & with the wider team at a countryside team meeting and the relevant risk assessment is reviewed. The reports for incidents and accidents are held centrally by the Health & Safety team and are reviewed by the Health & Safety working party, which includes representatives across all the teams at Somerset Council.



## 2.6 Dogs

Dogs are welcome at YCP and indeed dog walkers make up most visitors to the country park & café. The network of paths and access to open land at Wyndham Hill and Summerhouse Hill provides an ideal space for dog walks.

There are dog waste bins across the site, usually within 50m of an entrance point. There are some

restrictions on dogs with regards to livestock and dogs must be kept on a lead when walking in an area where livestock are grazing.

There is a no dog zone around the Lake and formal play area in Ninesprings and dogs must not enter this area. This is to protect wildfowl, reduce disturbance to water vole habitat and provide a safe and clean space for children to play. There is a Dog Control Order for this restriction, which means that anyone not obeying the restriction could be subject to a fixed penalty notice, issued by an enforcing officer.

## 3.0 Maintenance of equipment, buildings, and landscape

### 3.1 The Rangers

The ranger team are highly skilled, professional conservationists who have a wealth of experience managing habitats and landscapes. The rangers help to set the direction of the management plan and are responsible for ensuring that their work programme encompasses the practical management tasks set out in the prescriptions table.

The ranger team currently consists of two full-time permanent members of staff, and a casual ranger. See staff structure in the appendices.

The rangers are highly trained with a repertoire of technical accredited skills including:



- Chainsaw; crosscut, maintenance, felling small-medium trees
- Brushcutters & clearing saws
- Tractor driving
- Woodchippers
- Polesaw
- Application of herbicide/pesticides
- MEWP training
- Trailer driving
- 4x4 driving
- ATV driving

The on-site ranger team are also supported by a Community Heritage Officer (CHO), who works across both the countryside and heritage teams. The CHO supports the rangers by delivering events and activities to the public and community groups in the country park. They also deliver curriculum-based sessions to schools. The CHO seeks funding to engage the community with the country park through free activities and events where possible.

### 3.2 Site Inspections

The rangers carry out annual site inspections on all site furniture, which includes items such as gates, benches, fences, signposts, information boards and interpretation. These inspections are recorded on the Council's GIS system called XMAP.

The rangers also carry out annual tree safety surveys. The rangers are trained to carry out basic tree inspections (LANTRA certified) and they cover all high-risk areas on site, such as benches, paths, roads, play areas and buildings in their inspections. The trees are recorded on XMAP and they are prioritised in terms of risk. The rangers then complete the works required during the autumn/winter season where possible based on the priority of the works.

The natural play areas are inspected weekly for any signs of damage or deterioration. Any play equipment deemed to be unsafe will be cordoned off and repaired, removed, or replaced as soon as possible. The play zone will be inspected quarterly by a RoSPA trained play inspection officer from the locality team.

## 4.0 Litter, cleanliness, vandalism

Yeovil Country Park has a full suite of litter and dog bins across all areas of the country park. Most dog bins are situated within 50m of an entrance point and litter bins are provided at key areas and spread throughout the country park. There are approximately 23 litter bins throughout the country park and 15 dog waste bins, some of which are dual purpose. Many of the bins were installed during the park's conception & have been added to over the years at the request of visitors. The requirement of this level of provision will be revised, following on from the success of Ham Hill's litter bin removal, however it is not the intention to remove all litter bins from YCP due to the different character of the site.



The site is litter picked and all bins are emptied twice a week on a Monday and Friday, with an additional midweek check during the busy school holidays or summer season.

In 2020 the country park was given a two-minute litter pick station, funded by CPRE; the countryside charity and this is sited outside of Ninesprings Café.

Fly tipping occasionally occurs in the country parks in various locations. General waste is disposed of by the ranger team and anything that needs specialist clearance is removed by the appropriate contractors. Fly tipping is reported to

our locality team, who can follow up on the enforcement & evidence gathering if possible.

As the rangers are on site five days per week, the response to fly tipping, littering and vandalism is usually dealt with on the day it is reported or the next working day if it is reported at a weekend. If it is something dangerous, Somerset Council manages an out of hours team who will deal with the immediate hazard. Any broken furniture or other hazards are removed from site and the area cordoned off until it can be repaired, removed or replaced. Priority areas are the various play zones anywhere there is livestock grazing. The tenant grazier lives close to the country park and can be called to upon to deal with any emergency repairs when the rangers are not available.

## 5.0 Environmental management

### 5.1 Somerset Council's Environment Strategy

In May 2019 South Somerset District Council formally recognised a climate and ecological emergency through Full Council and agreed to 'develop a strategy by the Full Council meeting in the Autumn of 2019, that sets ambitious targets to protect the environment and ecology; to reduce Carbon Emissions; and for a) South Somerset District and b) the Council to become carbon neutral'. In March 2023 this was adopted by the new Somerset Council and integrated into the joint Climate Emergency Strategy.

Yeovil Country Park has long been managed to improve biodiversity, increase carbon sequestration and create sustainable habitats. The work that is carried out at YCP to fulfil these aims, now also contributes to the Environment Strategy & its targets, including tree planting, habitat management, volunteering and education.

The strategy goes beyond the natural environment and the Ninesprings Café building was constructed with an air source heat pump and there are plans to retro fit solar PV panels to the roof.

You can read more about the council's Environment Strategy by visiting the website [Somerset's joint Climate Emergency Strategy](#)

### 5.2 Chemical use

Chemical use at YCP is limited but it is still required to deal with the more vigorous invasive species such as giant hogweed, Japanese knotweed, laurel, and occasional rhododendron ponticum. Other invasive species such as Himalayan balsam and ragwort are dealt with by hand utilising the volunteers or in some cases by mechanical means such as brushcutters or hand tools.

### 5.3 Peat use

Peat is not used at the country park and any trees or plants procured are done so from sustainable suppliers that do not use peat throughout the growth of their products.

### 5.4 Climate change adaptation

Tree planting has always been an integral part of the management and habitat improvement works at Yeovil Country Park. The freshwater habitats on site are managed to provide optimal conditions for a range of macrophytes and invertebrates, which in turn support fish, birds and mammals. The Yeovil Rivers Community Trust are working on a Green Recovery Challenge Fund project to improve biodiversity in the concrete culvert channel of Dodham Brook, between Ninesprings and Wyndham, Hill. In-channel features will create a more sinuous flow of the brook and provide small habitat and refuge areas for macrophytes to grow and resting places for invertebrates and fish. It is also assumed that these features will aid the movement of water voles and otters along the watercourse.

### 5.5 Waste minimisation

Recycling bins are due to be installed outside of Ninesprings Café in 2023. The decision has been taken not to install site wide recycling bins as the staff do not have the capacity to sort the waste. Two rangers currently spend two days per week emptying bins & litter picking.

Waste from the Café and the rangers is separated and recycled: glass, plastic and cardboard waste are collected weekly.

Yeovil Country Park is managed on a restricted budget and therefore sustainable use of materials is of upmost importance, not only for the environment but also to ensure that waste is minimised and every bit of material is utilised to avoid over expenditure.

Tree arisings resulting from safety tree works will either be logged up and sold as firewood, left on the woodland floor to decay and provide important dead wood habitat or utilised across the site for infrastructure repairs or projects, such as the Woodland Play Zone.

Chippings from tree work are either left in situ to provide habitat for insects and fungi or they are used for path repairs or play zone surfacing.

The use of disposable BBQ's is restricted to the designated area in Ninesprings, opposite Ninesprings Café. Temporary bans do get imposed during periods of drought when fire risk is increased.

### **5.6 Land Management Schemes**

In 2021, Yeovil Country Park entered into a Countryside Stewardship agreement with DEFRA for Summerhouse Hill and Wyndham Hill. Revenue payments are made for managing the grassland and hedgerows, with capital payments for planting of new hedgerows, addition of sheep netting to existing fence lines and laying of existing hedges. The agreement is for five years from 2021 – 2025.

Summerhouse and Wyndham Hill are grazed with cattle from a local tenant farmer. The stocking densities are low to ensure that there is a mixed sward height and the cattle are taken off the land from November to reduce poaching.



## 6.0 Biodiversity, Landscape & Heritage

### 6.1 Historical & cultural heritage

Yeovil Country Park was designated as such in 2002 when all the separate land holdings came together to join as one unified greenspace for the residents of Yeovil. Prior to that, each compartment was a separate entity with its own story.

#### *Ninesprings*

The Batten family of Aldon house owned Ninesprings and in the 1830's John Batten turned the valley into a garden. Labour was cheap, so Batten could afford to employ an army of gardeners to work on his project. Ninesprings was heavily landscaped: grottos, pools and waterfalls were dug; bridges and paths were built, and trees and plants were introduced, all to create a space in which to escape from the cares of everyday life. Many of these features survive to this day.



Local residents have fond memories of the thatched cottage that once stood beside one of the pools, where they could purchase ice creams and lemonade or cream teas. Others remember sneaking into the park when it was still in private ownership. Over the years the cottage unfortunately fell into state of disrepair. It was demolished in 1973, but a carved bench marks the area where it once stood.

The valley remained a private garden for over a century, but in the 1950s Ninesprings was opened to the public when it was leased to the Town Council. It was then purchased by the District Council in 1979.

Ninesprings became a part of Yeovil Country Park in 2002.

### *Dodham Brook*

Dodham Brook once played an important part of Yeovil's gloving industry, as both a source of water and a drainage ditch.



During a period of hardship in the nineteenth century, unemployed glovers were paid to clear out Dodham Brook, which runs through Ninesprings to the River Yeo. For many years Dodham Brook was not the haven for wildlife that it is today. The process of leather treatment and gloving manufacture saw chemicals such as arsenic, discharged into the brook. In those days Yeovil smelt very strongly and the Brook was contaminated. People still remember times when the water would run with the colours of the dye used in leather manufacturing. So unpleasant was the result that during the mid-twentieth century locals would describe the area as Hell, whilst Heaven was Ninesprings and Summerhouse Hill.

By 1952 Yeovil and the surrounding area was producing 50% of all the gloves in England. In 1980 around 10,000 local workers were producing around 580,000 pairs of gloves. Today, only one major manufacturer, Pittards, remains in Yeovil, manufacturing top quality leather and leather goods for export around the world. Yeovil football club's nickname, 'The Glovers', reminds us of Yeovil's glove-making heritage.

### *Wyndham Hill*

Wyndham was included in the 1845 boundary as well as the Town Railway Station, the railway line which ran along the foot of the hill now being Railway Walk. For a long time it was shown on Ordnance Survey maps as Windmill Hill. Wyndham Field, from which the hill rises, has been a recreation ground, hosting the Golden Jubilee celebration of Queen Victoria in 1887. For a short while, after 1890 around 24 acres were leased to Yeovil Borough Council by Prebendary E.N. Bates-Harbin. The name by which the hill is now known, together with Wyndham Street, commemorates the Wyndham family of nearby Trent, who were connected by marriage with the Harbins of Newton Surmaville, on whose historic estate the hill remains.



In 2013, cattle movement on the steep escarpments near the top of Wyndham Hill revealed human skeleton remains. Initial investigation by the Police deemed it to be historical remains. Further investigation by the Senior Historic Environment Officer at Somerset County Council, combined with the previous discovery of a Bronze Age flat axe in the same area in 1982 concluded that the top of Wyndham Hill was in fact a Bronze Age burial site.

### *Penn Hill*

Penn House was the residence of Peter Daniell in the first quarter of the nineteenth century and is surrounded by extensive grounds known as Penn Park. Penn House has had different uses over time, including a mental health hospital in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In approximately 2010, the house was divided into residential flats and that is how its use remains today. It is these grounds surrounding Penn House that make up the area now known as Penn Hill. Before Penn Hill was formally adopted as part of Yeovil Country Park, SSDC used the now Community Wildlife Gardens as an old nurse and the meadow and orchard on top of the hill were council owned allotments.

### *Summerhouse Hill*

The strip lynchets (cultivation terraces) on Summerhouse Hill provide evidence of medieval human activity and the site was once part of the Newton Surmaville estate. As landscape features of archaeological significance it is important that their conservation is considered in all management activities. The hill's name is derived from its former use as the location of the Harvin family's summerhouse.

### *The cycle path*

The current shared use path that links Lysander Road to Sherborne road follows the route of a historic railway line. A station at the bottom of Summerhouse Hill (where the cinema car park now stands) served the trainline that linked Lands' End to London, earning Yeovil the nickname of the 'Centre of the West' as it stood halfway along this line. The railway made Yeovil a major junction for



trade, sitting as it does on the corner of Somerset and Dorset and enabled the gloving and aerospace industries in Yeovil to thrive.

The railway line that used to run the length of the Country Park was closed in 1959, during a period when many railway lines were closed across Britain.

## 6.2 Management of natural features, wild fauna and flora

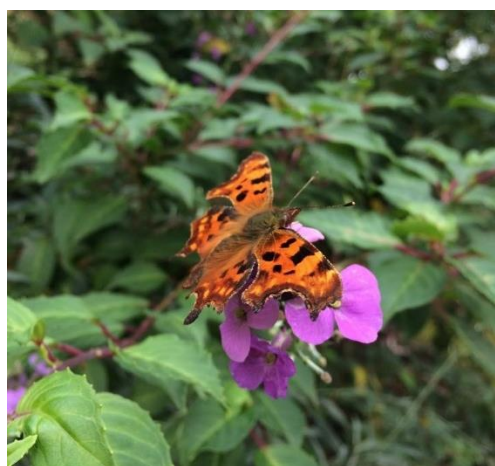
Yeovil Country Park supports a diverse network of habitats, including freshwater streams, rivers and lakes, meadows, semi-ancient woodland and scrub. These habitats combine to support a wealth of biodiversity, somewhat unexpectedly for an urban edge greenspace. Some species are rare and protected and therefore have specific habitat management aims and objectives to ensure that each habitat is sustainable and developed to its optimum state for biodiversity.

In 1998 a local wildlife recording group (now Yeovil Wildlife Recording Group) embarked on a full study of the wildlife of Ninesprings. That survey continues to be updated and now includes the whole of Yeovil Country Park. Over 2700 species have been recorded to date.

	2007	2014	2020
<b>Mammals</b>	22	22	30
<b>Reptiles and Amphibians</b>	6	6	7
<b>Birds</b>	83	96	105
<b>Fish</b>	10	10	10
<b>Invertebrates</b>	885	902	1054
<b>Flowering Plants</b>	384	490	510
<b>Ferns</b>	9	14	14
<b>Club moss</b>	1	1	1
<b>Mosses</b>	33	33	33
<b>Liverworts</b>	11	12	12
<b>Lichens</b>	unrecorded	unrecorded	3
<b>Fungi</b>	85	932	932
<b>TOTAL</b>	1529	2661	2711

Several wildlife surveys are carried out each year, to monitor the impacts of habitat management work. The surveys currently carried out include breeding bird surveys, reptile surveys, water vole surveys, otter surveys, wasp spider survey and harvest mice surveys. The team have aspirations to carry out bat surveys, wildflower transects, bee and butterfly surveys but these are dependent on time and the knowledge or experience of existing and new staff or volunteers.

### *Invertebrates*



Over 1000 species of invertebrates, from small aquatic larvae to large moths and dragonflies have been recorded in Yeovil Country Park (2020). A total of thirty-six species are rare in the country, such as Scarce chaser dragonfly and Clifden nonpareil (Blue underwing) moth. Others are so scarce they have places in the National Red Data Book of notable species. Glow worms and wasp spiders are abundant at Riverside, although populations may fluctuate from year to year depending on the flooding of their habitat adjacent to the river Yeo. Both species were only discovered in 2018 and therefore more surveys are required to understand the effects of flooding on their populations.

Butterflies are abundant in the country park with more common species such as brimstone and small tortoiseshell found across the site, whereas species such as marbled white and brown argus are more restricted to areas of rough grassland, found at locations such as Riverside &

Summerhouse Hill. 150 moth species have been recorded alone, which is a positive indication of good habitat management.

### Flora

510 different species of flowering plants have been recorded (2020) from the huge and impressive Common Beech to the tiny speedwells (9 species). Common spotted and southern marsh orchids were recorded on Penn Hill in 2015-2017 but with no records since. However new records of orchids have occurred in 2022, with pyramidal and common spotted both recorded in the meadows at Ninesprings. Orchids do have a close symbiotic relationship with fungi and climatic or management changes may account for the change in distribution of these species. The rangers now carry out annual orchid surveys and record them on the GIS system XMAP.



### Fungi

932 species of fungi have been recorded (2020), from the bracket *Ganoderma* fungi that grow out from the trunks and bases of trees, shaggy inkcap on the pasture land, to the many varieties that grow from the woodland floor. Several species recorded are rare to the UK, such as *Antrodia ramentacea*. One particular species (*Basidiomycete spp*) found on dead buddleia stems in Ninesprings was previously undescribed and sent to KEW gardens for data analysis whilst a new British record of *Ceriporia spissa* was recorded in Ninesprings in 2010. The occurrence of many rare species of fungi in Ninesprings is likely due to the sites origin as a Victorian gardens, during which period, many rare and ornamental plants were

introduced into the valley gardens.

### Birds

105 species of bird have been recorded across the country park (2020) from common woodland birds such as blackbirds and robins to rare seasonal visitors such as Yellow Wagtail. The presence of freshwater habitats increases the variety of species seen, with Kingfishers a regular sight in Ninesprings and Riverside during the breeding season and occasional winter visitors such as dipper and water rail spotted in the valley gardens streams.



Photo: Kingfishers in Ninesprings. Credit: Jack Borland

The lake is home to mallard, heron, moorhen, little grebe (breeding since 2016), a pair of breeding swans (returned in 2017) and mandarin ducks.

Birds of prey are a common sight across the country park with common buzzard, sparrowhawk and kestrels frequenting the meadows and woodland edges. Tawny owls breed in the woodland at Ninesprings and barn owls can occasionally be seen hunting across the rough grassland at Riverside.

### *Aquatic wildlife & reptiles*

The Environment Agency carried out electro-fishing survey in 2012 in Dodham Brook and recorded stickleback, stone loach, brown trout and dace. Most abundant were bullhead and minnow, with the most surprising discovery of an eel.

Frogs and toad breed in the small lake next to the cycle path with over 98 individuals recorded in April 2012. Palmate newts are also common in the Ninesprings Lake and pond, with the addition of macrophyte planting in 2008 aiding their populations.

Red neck terrapins are a common sight in Ninesprings Lake and have even been spotted further up into the valley gardens. The rangers have been successful at catching several individuals over the years, which are rehomed to a local collector. As they are often in the Lake, they are difficult to catch & a new method of trapping them is still to be trialled.

Slow worms and grass snakes are more frequently found in rough grass and along the River Yeo.

### *Mammals*

Mammal life is considerable and varied. Small mammals such as bank and common voles, together with shrews are more often heard than seen, but no regular surveys have been carried out to monitor their numbers. Water shrews have also been seen in the source stream at Ninesprings.

Harvest mice were recorded at Riverside in 2018, with two nests found. Further surveys are required to establish baseline data on the size of this population. The harvest mice numbers will again fluctuate according to winter weather and the river Yeo's flooding cycles.

Foxes and badgers frequent the park, indeed both species are often seen as far into the town as Penn Hill. The soft Bridport Sands and steep banks make the country park an ideal site for sett building.

Roe deer are occasionally sighted in Yeovil Country Park, most commonly at Riverside. Due to the absence of visitors in 2020 during the Covid 19 pandemic, a fallow deer was recorded in Ninesprings.



Bats are abundant in Yeovil Country Park with 10 out of 18 British species recorded. The rarest species was recorded for the first time in 2018 by Dorset and Somerset Bat Groups who carried out mist net surveys. They recorded a female Barbastelle bat. Daubenton's and common pipistrelle bats can be seen hunting above the lake at dusk, with noctules and serotines spotted flying high in more open spaces. A known roost of lesser horseshoe bats is present on the edge of the country park.

In Dodham Brook lives the endangered water vole. A revision to their protection in February 2008 has conferred extra protection under the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act, making it illegal to disturb both the mammal itself and their habitat. Water vole populations are under threat from habitat loss and degradation often as a result of flood management engineering works along rivers. The rangers now monitor the water vole population by taking part in the National Water Vole Monitoring Programme (NWVMP) as organised by the People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES).

Otter 'spraints' or droppings have been found near Goldenstones under the bridge and the ranger team have witnessed otters in the river Yeo on many occasions, most recently in December 2022.

Otters have also been seen in the Valley Gardens and after several reports from the public in 2014, the rangers witnessed one fishing in Ninesprings Lake. It is assumed that this was a juvenile trying to discover their own territory.

The presence of the otters will deter mink from establishing in the river and its tributaries. This is good news for the water vole as mink are a voracious predator and will destroy a whole population of water voles in one breeding season to feed their young. However, photographic evidence of a mink at Ninesprings was received from a member of the public in 2023 and the rangers are in contact with a contractor who will trap them.



*Photo: Mink, otter and water vole all photographed at Ninesprings Lake*

### 6.3 Wildlife Value Site Description

The following descriptions are derived from the SERC survey of winter 2000, commissioned by SSDC to provide baseline data covering approximately 70 open spaces within Yeovil.

#### *Ninesprings*

Ninesprings includes a range of habitats; broadleaved woodland, scattered trees and tall-herb vegetation running along the banks of streams and ponds, areas of dense scrub with scattered trees, a lake and amenity grassland. The Local Wildlife Site (LWS) area of woodland appeared on the 1837 Tithe map of the parish and is possibly of ancient origin, but the woodland now extends further to the west on what was once open ground. The woodland is predominantly broadleaved. Throughout the woodland there are large areas of cherry laurel (*Prunus Laurocerasus*) understory, particularly in the existing LWS. A series of ponds and streams run down a steep sided valley adjacent to the eastern boundary. Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), English oak (*Quercus robur*), sweet chestnut (*Castanea sativa*), ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and silver birch (*Betula pendula*) are of approximately equal abundance and form a high canopy. Larch (*Larix decidua*) forms the canopy in an area at the northern end of the wood. Ground cover is very poor but for ferns, male fern (*Dryopteris felixmas*) broad buckler fern (*Dryopteris dilatata*), soft shield fern (*Polystichum setiferum*) and ivy (*Hedera helix*). Bluebells are in abundance on the north facing slopes in spring and with the removal of the laurel their cover is increasing. Polypody (*Polypodium vulgare*) and wood sorrell (*Oxalis acetosella*) accompanies these ferns along the northern bank. Wych elm (*Ulmus glabra*) is frequent at the top and bottom of the slope but is not recorded in the main body of the wood. Himalayan balsam forms an understorey in Southwoods, but hand pulling with volunteers has dramatically reduced its abundance and work will continue to eradicate this invasive species from the woodland. Along the stream is abundant opposite-leaved golden saxifrage (*Chrysoplenium oppositifolium*), fern and occasional pendulous sedge (*Carex pendula*). Butcher's broom (*Ruscus aculeatus*) is present on the bank above the stream. At the western end of the site the wood continues for another half a kilometre with an elder (*Sambuca nigra*) understory. Much of the land surrounding Ninesprings is of greater than average value for wildlife in a county context. Therefore Ninesprings is an integral part of a relatively large semi-natural area, which include some Local Wildlife Sites and in an urban context is very important for wildlife. Adjacent land use is predominantly residential to the north and west, and to the south and east lie open areas of grassland/pasture land on steep slopes.

The wider Country Park provides as important natural belt around the urban area therefore



providing significant conservation value at a landscape scale. This is supported by the river and woodland serving as vital wildlife corridors for numerous species for commuting, foraging and population dispersal. The extent of many habitats within the Country Park help to buffer species populations against disturbance from the town and lack of suitable habitat due to surrounding agricultural land use.

### *Penn Hill*

Penn Hill is an area of intensively managed parkland bordered by Brunswick Street to the south and Hendford to the west. Offices and a multi-storey car park are located to the north. Creeping buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*), daisy (*Bellis perennis*), ribwort plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*), and common mouse-ear (*Cerastium fontanum*).



The site also supports many mature scattered trees, the most notable being a row of beech which run east west along the top of an embankment to the south of the site. The steep grassy slopes running down to the roadside on the southern and western boundaries support a more diverse grassland with species including common cat's ear (*Hypochaeris radicata*), cut-leaved crane's bill (*Geranium dissectum*), bird's foot trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*). The old allotment site has been transformed into a small orchard and hay meadow, which

supports a good population of blackening waxcaps and the community wildlife garden has transformed an area of brambles into an area suitable for rich biodiversity including fruit trees, a pond, hedgerows and wildflower meadows.

### *Summerhouse Hill*

The major habitat of Summerhouse Hill is lowland acid unimproved pasture, which is one of the habitats included in South Somerset's Local Biodiversity Action Plan. There are also areas of gorse scrub on the higher slopes, ancient semi-natural broadleaved woodland, and native hedgerows along the roadside. Visits made by Terry Franklin in 1998 showed the site to be important for waxcaps (*Hygrocybe spp.*) a genus of fungi associated with unimproved grasslands. These often brightly coloured fungi are thought, like the habitat they depend on, to have declined greatly in recent years

### *Wyndham Hill*



Wyndham Hill is made up of the grazed field and its associated trees and hedges, the woodland on the banks of the disused railway line and the Riverside area.

Major habitats include; Semi-improved grassland, native hedgerows, scrub and woodland on old railway cutting, native woodland along the river bank. Vegetation includes perennial rye-grass (*Lolium perenne*), Cock's foot (*Dactylis glomerata*), creeping buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*), bulbous buttercup (*Ranuncula vullodud*) and meadow buttercup (*Ranunculus acris*). A Badger sett exists within a blackthorn copse.

The native hedgerows along the boundaries of the grassland area are an important wildlife habitat and are a breeding area and refuge for birds, mammals and invertebrates.

The semi improved grassland now hosts a variety of calcareous grassland species including bird foot trefoil and ladies bedstraw.

The areas of scrub and woodland along the old railway cuttings are of high value to wildlife as they form a breeding site and refuge for wildlife especially birds and mammals. The woodland on the slopes has a dense canopy of English oak (*Quercus robur*), ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), aspen (*Populus tremula*), alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) and field maple (*Acer campestre*) with an understory of hazel (*Corylus avellana*) blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) and hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*). The understory varies in density throughout, though is mostly dense on the edges and extends to scrub where large trees are absent. The ground flora within the darker parts of the wood is sparse though fairly diverse. Within the lighter parts and the edges the ground is moderately dense and consists of similar species, including abundant sweet violet (*Viola odorata*) and frequent lords and ladies (*Arum maculatum*), herb robert (*Geranium robertianum*) lesser celandine (*Ranunculus ficaria*). Red campion (*Silene dioica*) and hart's tongue fern (*Phyllitis scolopendrium*) with ivy (*Hedera helix*) cover the floor in parts. The more open woodland on the level ground has similar species though the ground flora is more dense and includes tall herbs such as stinging nettle (*Urtica dioica*) and patches of bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), primrose (*Primula vulgaris*) and ramsons (*Allium ursinum*).



The Riverside plants include hemlock water dropwort (*Oenanthe crocata*) anglica (*Angelica sylvestris*) and two examples of monk's hood (*Aconitum anglicum*). Himalayan balsam is abundant on the river banks and efforts are made to halt its progress onto the tops of the banks.

#### *Riverside Walk*

Riverside Walk is the strip of land lying between the River Yeo and the railway. Connecting Birchfield (Sunningdale recreation ground) and Lyde Road key site in the north to the footpath leading to Pittards in the south, it forms an integral part of an important wildlife corridor. Boundaries consist of the riverbank to the southeast and a wire fence running along the railway line to the North West. Surrounding land is predominantly semi-improved grassland over the river, with the sewage works, rough grassland and meadow on the other side of the railway. Botanical survey work carried out in June and July 2002 confirms the high value of the site and some areas are of LWS status. The site supports a diverse mix of natural habitats including native woodland, a section of river with naturally formed sandy banks, and reedbed. Most of the site supports native broadleaved woodland, and the more mature areas form a margin along the riverbank.



The remainder of the site has been planted under various native tree species including oak, ash and alder (*Alnus glutinosa*), with the exception of an established stand of poplar (*Populus spp.*) located to the extreme south of the site. The riverbank supports native trees including alder, crack willow (*Salix fragilis*), white willow (*Salix alba*) and ash, beneath which ground flora is relatively sparse with ivy, lesser celandine and lords and ladies. Certain areas have been quite heavily invaded by stinging nettle. The wetter reedbed area is typically dominated by common reed (*Phragmites communis*). Reedbeds are a UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Priority Habitat. It is part of the natural succession from open water to woodland and without management, the length of time that reed will dominate is limited unless the bed is regularly inundated with fresh water. Reedbed is regionally scarce and although botanical interest is low it is an important habitat for birds (both reed warbler and sedge warbler are known to hold territories on this site) and all stages of succession support important communities of invertebrates. Restoration works are now in process in order to address the decline of this habitat over recent years due to reduced water levels.

### *Riverside Park*

The Yeovil Wildlife Recording Group (YWRG) carried out a preliminary survey of this site in 2007, prior to building work commencing. Birds and butterflies were the main priority of the survey but mammals and plants were noted, although not extensively surveyed. Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) was identified as the main source of cover on the escarpment, with some bluebells (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) and primroses (*Primula vulgaris*) also present. Rosebay Willowherb (*Chamaenerion angustifolium*) and Common Comfrey (*Symphytum officinale*) are present in the water meadow. As is Ragwort (*Jacobaea vulgaris*), which is threatening to dominate the grassland if not managed. The riverbank supports the usual Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) and Crack Willow (*Salix fragilis*) as well as the invasive and non-native Himalayan Balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) and a few mature Oak (*Quercus robur*) stand in the northern corner. Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and Sallow (*Salix caprea*) dominate the escarpment. The most notable birds that were seen during the survey of 2007 were a sedge warbler (*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*) and a common whitethroat (*Sylvia communis*). These birds are very habitat specific, so the presence of these birds is important when planning the long term habitat management of this end of the country park. Reeds and scrub are favoured by these species respectively.



## 7.0 Community Involvement

### 7.1 Volunteers

The rangers provide several volunteer opportunities at Yeovil Country Park. There are two weekly practical conservation task days held each week on a Monday, and Thursday with the addition of an ad-hoc Wednesday session, depending on current projects.

The Monday volunteer session is a short two-hour afternoon session that is designed for people with physical disabilities, mental health issues or special educational needs. Often participants are joined by support workers, but volunteers can come independently, depending on their ability. The tasks carried out during this session are lighter and low risk and can include activities such as path maintenance, weeding and litter picking. This volunteer task day is fully supported and supervised by the rangers. Cambian College bring their more capable students to self-led sessions on a Monday morning, carrying out simple maintenance tasks such as litter picking or path scraping.

The Wednesday volunteering sessions are less frequent as they are arranged around project work and availability of the volunteers. This session is attended by the more skilled Thursday volunteers



and usually consists of 4 – 6 volunteers. The sessions can be entirely led by the volunteers once they are given the tools and objectives of the task.

Thursday volunteering sessions are the main practical task day, and the group was established in 2006. The group has a maximum of 15 volunteers, many of whom have been volunteering at the country park for over 10 years. The Thursday volunteer team work alongside the rangers to carry out a variety of tasks from scrub clearance to invasive species control, path maintenance to tree planting. The Thursday group carry out practical habitat management and site

maintenance works across the country park throughout the year so enthusiasm, physical fitness and a sense of humour are required!

The country park also benefits from a network of litter pickers that visit the site nearly daily to help keep the park clean and tidy for visitors. These volunteers are often unregistered and often unknown to the rangers as they take it upon themselves to litter pick as and when they want.

All volunteers are registered with Somerset Council, to cover them for insurance purposes and so that the rangers have any important medical details and next of kin contacts, should an accident

occur. The recruitment of volunteers is carried out informally, with a telephone discussion or email as the first contact with the rangers. Most people decide after the first session if they want to continue volunteering. If for any reason, the rangers do not feel the person is suitable for the role or that task, that will be discussed personally with the volunteer and if appropriate a different role will be offered. This situation rarely occurs.

## 7.2 Friends of Yeovil Country Park

The Friends of Yeovil Country Park are a registered Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO; 1185579) and were originally set up as a constituted group in 2012. In 2019 the group became a registered charity to further strengthen their cause and enable access to a wider range of grants to support the work of the rangers at Yeovil Country Park.

The objective of the Friends is to “to promote public education and welfare by supporting and assisting in furthering the charitable activities of the CIO, and in furtherance thereof but not otherwise the CIO shall seek to protect the environmental amenity of Yeovil Country Park for future generations.”



The Friends work alongside the rangers, community heritage officer and countryside manager to obtain grant funding that enables the delivery of projects at the country park. Examples of past funded projects include tree planting at Wyndham Hill, rebuilding of the boardwalk at Riverside, Park Yoga, educational and community focused sessions as part of a wider National Lottery Heritage Fund project and creation of the Ninesprings Café & Rangers Centre.

The Friends also help to deliver the larger events at Yeovil Country Park, including the Halloween Trail, Well Dressing and the Spring Trail. The Friends fund any materials needed for these events and the takings go back to the Friends for future events and projects at the country park.

### **7.3 South Somerset Countryside Steering Group (SSCSG)**

This group was established before any of the Friends group and consists of stakeholders and members who have an interest in the country parks and local nature reserves in South Somerset. The South Somerset Countryside Steering Group guide the management of the District Council operated countryside sites, supporting the countryside team to manage the land in line with strategic priorities, public need and wildlife benefits, ensuring sites are sustainable for the future.

The SSCSG meet twice a year to discuss the main site issues, review the service plan and provide feedback & guidance on the management of the country parks and local nature reserves.

All of the site Friends Groups are represented, as well as Yeovil Town Council, Somerset Geology Group, Yeovil & District Wildlife recording Group, the National Trust, Somerset Council Executive Members and ward members.

### **7.4 Park Watch**

As Yeovil Country Park is an urban edge country park, open and accessible all day every day, it is subject to vandalism and anti-social behaviour issues. The Park Watch group was established in 2010 by the ranger team, to act as neighbourhood watch group for the country park. The Park Watch scheme encourages visitors to report anti-social behaviour directly to the Police on 101. Quarterly meetings with the Police and residents, ensures that issues are discussed and raised with potential solutions discussed and implemented. This maintains a good working relationship between the ranger team and the Police, which helps to minimise issues around the park.

### **7.5 Appropriate provision for the community**

Yeovil Country Park is accessible to a large population, being within walking or cycling distances of over 45,000 people. It is a popular site and used for a variety of leisure & recreational uses including dog walking, family walks, running, cycling, other fitness training, wildlife watching, photography and organised group activities.

Dog walkers make up the largest percent of site users and most are from Yeovil and the surrounding villages. Riverside and Ninesprings are the most popular areas for dog walking. Dog bins are provided across the site and notices on gates at entranceways lets dog walkers know of any restrictions due to wildlife or livestock presence.

Most families visit Ninesprings as it has the most facilities with public toilets, a café and traditional play area. The Ninesprings Café is also the hub for wider park information and is the best place for first time visitors to find out more about the country park. The woodlands themselves are popular with families as the children love to discover the hidden Valley Gardens and enjoy splashing in the ford. There is also a children's trail 'Ranger Rik' that encourages further exploration of Ninesprings.

The shared path that follows the old railway line from Ninesprings to Wyndham Hill is popular with families as a safe off-road route to practice cycling skills, but is equally used daily by commuters as it links the Pen Mill train station with Leonardo's, the biggest employer in South Somerset.

Wildlife enthusiasts are drawn to Ninesprings to look for the flash of a Kingfisher darting across the lake or for a glimpse of the elusive water voles in Dodham Brook. Riverside is a quieter area of site

with marbled white butterflies, wasp spiders and a variety of bird species to see, depending on the time of year. The river is a draw for wildlife watching and a chance to glimpse the elusive otter.

Ninesprings is the most popular area of the country park for visiting community groups such as scouts and brownies. They often arrange their own activities on site or use the existing permanent orienteering course. The Community Heritage Officer also offers guided activities and sessions for such groups.

A circular all ability trail is provided around the lake area and an Accessibility Trail leaflet provides further information about the paths that are accessible for mobility vehicles and buggies further up into the woods at Ninesprings.

In addition to adult members, the ranger team accepts a limited number of work experience placements from local schools and college industry placements from Bridgwater College or Kingston Maurward College each year. School placements are short term, usually for one or two weeks, whereas college placements tend to be for a day or two over a year to ensure the required hours are obtained for the students to fulfil their course. Such youth placements can be very valuable to both parties but need careful management and liaison with the student provider.



*Photo: Park Yoga at Yeovil Country Park*

## 8.0 Marketing & Communication

### 8.1 Marketing & promotion

Yeovil Country Park is well known locally, with many older residents referring to it simply as Ninesprings or Ninesprings Country Park, as Ninesprings was the first area to be opened for public access.

The country park has developed over the last 20 years from an area known locally to walk your dog and have a picnic to one of the main visitor attractions of the town of Yeovil. Improvements to the path network, regular maintenance of the landscape and habitats, increased knowledge through the creation of site literature and information panels and the addition of Ninesprings Café in 2014 has improved the visitor experience of the country park and Yeovil Country Park is now firmly a visitor destination in South Somerset.

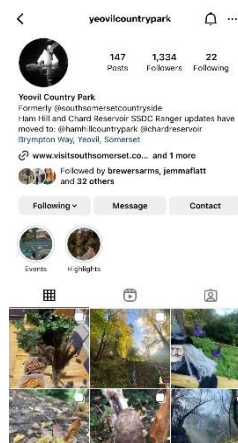
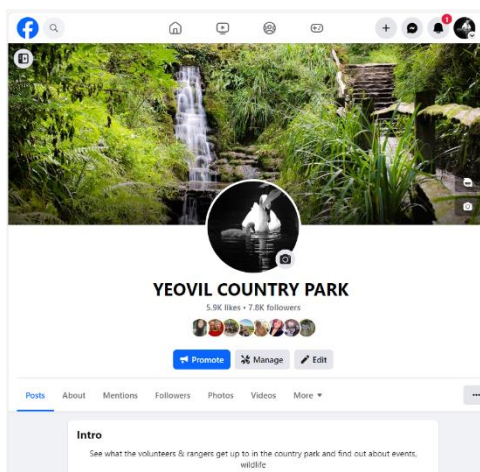
For regular visitors to the park the importance of site posters cannot be underestimated. Conveying important information about site works, wildlife sightings and forthcoming events posters are updated regularly throughout the country park, with noticeboards situated at every key entrance.

The Tourist Information Centre at Cartgate roundabout on the TIC is managed by a small SC Tourism Team who always signpost visitors to stop at Yeovil Country Park on their way to or from a destination. South Somerset is a popular stop off point for tourists travelling between London and Devon & Cornwall so many are just day visitors to South Somerset.

The country park does not have a marketing budget and so word of mouth and an online presence are highly relied upon to promote the country park as a destination.

### 8.2 Website and social media

Social media has played an important role in engaging with visitors over the last 10 years. The Yeovil Country Park Facebook page was initially set up by a regular volunteer and has now grown to over 7300 followers. An Instagram account was added in 2018 with over 1200 followers. This is by far the best way in which the rangers engage with visitors. A weekly ranger's blog updates visitors on the work of the rangers and volunteers, as well as wildlife highlights. Social media is also used to convey important information about safety and forthcoming events.



In 2021 a new website for South Somerset was launched; [visitsouthsomerset.com](https://visitsouthsomerset.com). This new platform now hosts pages for the three main strategic countryside sites in South Somerset; Ham Hill, Yeovil Country Park and Chard Reservoir. General visitor information for each site can be found on these pages, as well as information about volunteering, educational or group visits, current news, and events. The web pages also host a booking system for the countryside events so that payment can be made, and places secured online. You can view the website here:

<https://www.visitsouthsomerset.com/listings/countryside-nature-and-wildlife/yeovil-country-park.htm>

### **8.3 Education**

From 2015 – 2019 as part of the Heritage Fund project, a Community Ranger was employed full time at Yeovil Country Park, and their main duties were to deliver the activity plan of the grant. The Community Ranger delivered public events, community group sessions and curriculum focused sessions. When the grant funding for this post ended, the Leisure & Recreation Manager made a business case to create a similar position working across heritage and countryside that would be self-funded. This led to the creation of the Community Heritage Officer role. This role is part funded for three years by Yeovil Town Council from 2021/22 – 2023/24 and therefore a large proportion of the CHO's work will take place at Yeovil Country Park.

### **8.4 Interpretation**

Interpretation at Yeovil Country Park was updated in 2019 as part of the V3 project. New map panels were installed at each main entrance, along with information panels at main points of interest, such as the Ninesprings lake, 'Butterfly Junction' at the bottom of Wyndham Hill, the Valley Gardens of Ninesprings and on the outside of Ninesprings Café. A tactile map was created with the RNIB outside of Ninesprings Café to allow people with visual impairments the ability to navigate their way around Ninesprings.

A collection of themed trails and leaflets were devised, funded through the V3 project. Seven trails and leaflets were created in total:

Explore Yeovil Country Park – a general site guide with general information and a map of the whole site

Easy Access Trails – a guide to accessibility in the country park

Ranger Rik – a children's nature themed trail through Ninesprings

Art in the park – a trail exploring all the artwork that has been installed in the country park over the years

Journey through time – a trail to discover the history and heritage of the county park

Wonderful Wildlife – helping you to discover the best places to watch wildlife

30 things to do – free children's activities to do whilst you are out an about in the country park.



A trail guide to Geology and Landscape in and around Yeovil was written by local geologist Hugh Prudden in 2002 and takes in buildings in the town centre as well as landscape features in the country park.



Photo: Jody Thomas creating mural

Art in the park explores the various art sculptures around the country park which have been added to over the years. As part of the V3 project in 2017, a mural was painted on the railway sidings wall in Ninesprings to portray the heritage of the country park. Bristol Artist Jody Thomas was commissioned to carry out the mural and it received fantastic feedback from visitors. Unfortunately, the moss has now started to cover over and fade the artwork. Other artwork in the country park includes wooden sculptures created by Josef Mesar that were also commissioned as part of the V3 project. These sculptures vary from animals to mythical depictions of a green man and a fairy of the woods.

## 8.5 Events and activities

Each year the rangers deliver a programme of public events. The events programme is designed in November each year, with most events starting from February half term. The events can be bookable and payable or they can be free drop in events. Events that have been delivered in the past include bat walks, pond dipping, create your own fairy door, fungi forays and hedge laying courses. The income derived from payable events goes back into the budget of the country park.

Although most events are themed around nature and the environment, two of the most popular seasonal events at the country park are the Spring Trail and the Halloween Trail. These trail events are for one day only as there is a lot of decoration of the woodlands in Ninesprings and if left unattended would likely be vandalised or stolen. The Friends of Yeovil Country Park are pivotal in delivering these events. The Friends provide the rangers with budget to buy or create new props each year and they receive the donations from people taking part in the trails. The Friends act as the

start point of the trails while the staff and other volunteers marshal the routes. Both trails end with a small prize of sweets or chocolate.



*Photo: Halloween Trail*



*Photo: Well Dressing*

Another popular event at the country park is Well Dressing. This event is held approximately every two-three years and uses the leftover flowers from Yeovil in Bloom to decorate the springs and streams in the Valley Gardens of Ninesprings.

The rangers also facilitate external organisations to hold their events at Ham Hill, ensuring all the correct permits, insurances and risk assessments are in place.

The country park has been very popular for running races over the years and has hosted a variety including Ninesprings 9k, Ninesprings by Night (5k and 10K), and children's cross-country races. The country park used to be host for the Yeovil Montacute Parkrun during the winter when the fields at Montacute House became too waterlogged. Since 2021 Parkrun has moved location outside of Yeovil. The annual Santa Dash and Yeovil Half Marathon continue to use the country park on their courses.

The country park is also used regularly for other fitness activities. Squats and Tots use Ninesprings twice a week to deliver mums and babies exercise classes and for in the summer from May to September, the country park hosts Park Yoga, a free weekly yoga class supported by the Friends. The country park doesn't yet have an activity permit system in place for commercial activities and this is something that will be progressed in the future.

Most events are held in Ninesprings due to the accessibility of facilities and parking in this area.

## 9.0 Aims and Objectives

The following five aims reflect the focus and direction for the management and development of Yeovil Country Park over the next five years:

***Aim 1: Conserve and enhance the biodiversity, landscape, cultural and heritage value of the country park***

***Aim 2: Ensure Yeovil Country Park delivers as a recreational facility for the public***

***Aim 3: Provide more opportunities and support for a wider range of people to become involved***

***Aim 4: Increase awareness, understanding and knowledge***

***Aim 5: Achieve future financial sustainability***

### ***9.1 Aim 1: Conserve and enhance the biodiversity, landscape, cultural and heritage value of the Country Park***

#### **1. Conserve rare or endangered species and habitats.**

Yeovil Country Park has an extensive species list that was compiled by the Yeovil & District Wildlife Recording Group. This survey combined with more recent wildlife surveys and observations from staff and volunteers has highlighted some key species that need monitoring and protecting including water vole, otter, kingfisher, wasp spider and harvest mouse.

Some of these species require specialist habitat management to enhance or conserve their habitat. For example, water vole burrows need to be protected from bankside erosion where possible and disturbance from people or dogs. Wasp spiders and harvest mice have similar habitat requirements where they require dense tussocky grass to build their webs and nests.

Water voles are surveyed annually using the People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) methodology and logged as part of the National Water Vole Monitoring Programme (NWVMP).

Orchids are a rare sight at Yeovil Country Park but in 2021 both common spotted and pyramidal were recorded in the Ninesprings Meadows. Records from 2015-2017 also show common spotted and southern marsh orchids were recorded on Penn Hill. The presence of such species will continue to be recorded and monitored.

There are 10 species of bats recorded at Yeovil Country Park. Regular transects may increase this number and help inform important foraging and potential roost sites to be managed or protected.

The team are keen to expand their wildlife surveying and recording but this will involve recruiting volunteers to help.

It is important to manage habitats for a wide variety of wildlife and it is important that a programme of ecological monitoring is implemented annually to monitor the effectiveness of habitat management works that take place through the winter.

## **2. Manage the Local Wildlife Site to its optimum state**

Much of the Country Park's land is designated as Local Wildlife Site (LWS). The ranger team aim to conserve these habitats as good examples of Somerset habitats, supporting species usually found within them. The team utilise where appropriate up to date ecological evidence to inform habitat management undertaken, seeking advice from experts where necessary.

Watercourses will be monitored and kept free of pollution and close relations will be maintained with the EA to ensure any suspect incidents are reported and investigated. The rangers will work with the YRCT to ensure the waterways are managed effectively.

The woodlands, which are currently heavily infected with invasive non-natives, will be managed back to a naturally regenerating state, and away from single, even-aged species stands e.g. laurel stands in the Valley Gardens & sycamore in Southwoods.

The LWS was last monitored in 2018 by SERC with a full report available on request. Riverside, Wyndham and Ninesprings were all monitored as part of this survey. Some areas (Ninesprings meadows, some small areas at Riverside & the grassland on Wyndham Hill) did not meet LWS criteria so the boundaries of the LWS have been altered to reflect that. Some areas have been added to the LWS designation.

## **3. Control of invasive species**

Under the noxious weeds act the ranger team will exercise both manual and chemical control (where necessary) over any noxious or invasive species in the country park.

Ragwort is not a significant problem and will be pulled by hand, with the help of volunteers, on the grazing units. Weeds requiring chemical control include Japanese knotweed on Riverside Walk and in the Valley Gardens of Ninesprings.

Himalayan balsam has established in the Southwoods area of Ninesprings and along the riparian habitats. Priority will be given to eradication in Southwoods and control to prevent dominance in the riparian areas. Control of Himalayan balsam will be carried out by manual pulling or mechanical means (brushcutting). Chemical use has been trialled in the past but has shown to be less effective & more costly than by-hand methods. The rangers will work with the Yeovil Rivers Community Trust (YRCT) to manage Himalayan Balsam along Dodham Brook.

Giant Hogweed is present at Riverside and will need to be treated with chemicals to ensure public safety.

Mapping of invasive species will help to target treatment and monitor progress. However, control efforts are likely only to be effective if coordinated with neighbouring landowners and the ranger team will continue to notify them of their obligation to control invasive species.

## **4. Where appropriate mitigate the impact from public access on sensitive species and habitats**

A dog exclusion zone exists around the lake area including Dodham brook and the Ninesprings play area in order to protect wildfowl and water vole populations.

There is still a minor problem of feeding ducks' bread instead of seed on site, which causes health problems for the waterfowl, water quality issues and increase in rats.

Clear signage where appropriate, use of social media and education at events will help to address these issues and promote more responsible use of the park and its resources.

Riparian vegetation will be managed to limit the disturbance to sensitive species such as otters and water voles.

## **5. Carry out appropriate woodland management**

A significant amount of Yeovil Country Park's land is wooded, and it ranges from new planting areas at only 2 years old, 30-year-old stands and much older semi-ancient woodlands. Management will seek to introduce structural heterogeneity which will directly benefit biodiversity through increased niche provision.

Traditional management practices such as coppicing, creation of rides and glades and scalloped edges will lead to the development of sustainable, naturally regenerating woodland. Timber that is removed will either be left where it falls or stacked into log piles to provide essential deadwood habitat or sold as unseasoned firewood.

The largest stands of woodland exist in Southwoods and the Valley Gardens of Ninesprings; here invasive non-natives like laurel will be removed, sycamore will be thinned, and hazel coppice extended and continued as a practice.

In new planting areas strimming will take place twice a year to ensure the saplings can establish and when appropriate the areas will be thinned and tree guards removed.

## **6. Identify and manage new tree planting schemes**

Tree planting will continue as a practice within Yeovil Country Park where appropriate to assist the development of native, sustainable woodlands that offer a high degree of biodiversity value. Low growing species such as hazel will be planted as a field layer and taller canopy trees planted where appropriate soil and light conditions exist.

Species chosen will also be in-keeping with the landscape character with ornamental specimens used in the traditional Valley Gardens to add botanical interest.

Management will be carried out to maximise the success rate of planting schemes and opportunities for involving the community will be sought where possible.

Yellow rattle will be used as an alternative to strimming in areas where trees have been planted in grasslands.

## **7. Manage the park as a core element of a wider ecological network**

The size of the park and the range of habitats it contains means that the site has the potential to serve as an important core area within an ecological network. With increasing emphasis being placed on the benefits of a landscape scale approach to conservation, Yeovil Country Park is in an ideal position

(steppingstone) with which to make connections to other semi-natural habitats and wildlife resources in the area to increase the overall landscape biodiversity value.

Continued representation on the Local Nature Partnership, led by Somerset Wildlife Trust will be key in ensuring that Yeovil Country Park acts as a biodiversity hotspot in a wider Nature Recovery Network.

### **8. Manage the Valley Gardens of Ninesprings**

The Valley Gardens are the most visited area of the park and require a significant amount of management intervention. Rangers and volunteers have carried out laurel clearance over the past seventeen years, focusing on a bank at a time and re-planting after clearance works. This schedule will continue to ensure that the Valley Gardens includes a mixture of native and ornamental plants, shrubs and trees that are in keeping with the site's character.

Slope stabilisation is being improved where laurel has been removed through subsequent root establishment by the ground flora. Areas of hazel coppice, important as wildlife corridors and habitat for species including butterflies & small mammals will be maintained and extended where appropriate.

The site is criss-crossed by many narrow stone clad pathways, these need maintenance and leaves removing throughout the autumn and winter months. The springs themselves need clearing of leaf litter to ensure unobstructed flow, combined with the paved paths around them. This should be carried out four times per annum, particularly in advance of school holidays or large events.

### **9. Manage the Memorial Arboretum**

The memorial arboretum at Ninesprings was created in the 1990's and has been at full capacity for several years. In the last five years, many of the ornamental species that were planted have now died and had to be removed for safety reasons. Where families are no longer in the area or there are no contact details, the space will be made available for a new memorial planting.

The tree stock will be monitored as part of the annual tree safety surveys and the area is mown & trimmed regularly by the Environmental Services team as part of the Routine Maintenance Agreement for the Country Park.

Most enquiries refer to missing plaques or their replacement and the team will continue to organise this. A database of all memorials has been compiled that will help deal more efficiently with enquiries from families.

### **10. Management of Ninesprings meadows**

The meadows on the lower slopes of Ninesprings used to be railway sidings and were once a vast blanket of bramble. Over the last 30 years, the council have worked to reduce the bramble and nutrient content on site to create a meadow area that is rich in invertebrates and small mammals. The meadow has been cut in sections on rotation in July and September but as the hay is not used as animal feed, this cut will be reduced to one cut per annum in September in line with Plantlife's 'Good Meadow Guide' for managing wildflower meadows, as this allows the flowers to set seed. An early spring cut may also be required, depending on the growth over the previous autumn & winter.

As part of the V3 project, 3 areas were enriched with wildflower seeds after the dense turf was removed in the hope that the seeds would spread out to the surrounding meadows. There is very

little evidence that this has yet occurred, probably because the grass, nettle and dock growth surround the meadows is too vigorous. There are some patches of yellow rattle in the west of the meadows, additional yellow rattle spread throughout the meadows will help to reduce the dominant grass species, allowing the more sensitive flowering plants to gain a foothold.

Green hay could also be used to increase plant diversity if sourced from a suitable site of similar soil composition. Plug plants could also be used to help improve biodiversity

In the last two years, both pyramidal and common spotted orchids have been recorded in the meadows & their presence will continue to be monitored and recorded.

A large oak in the far west of the meadows is succumbing to fungal decay and is heavily leaning towards the grass. To allow the oak to fall naturally an area underneath the oak has been fenced off to prevent public access and allow the oak to decay naturally.

### **11. Management of Ninesprings lake & pond**

The Ninesprings lake and pond are an incredible habitat for a wide range of species including invertebrates, wildfowl, kingfisher, heron, little grebe, water vole and foraging bats.

The lake is strictly a no dogs zone to protect the wildlife & clearly signed gates at each end make this clear to visitors.

In 2008 the lake edge was shored up with pre-planted coir rolls, to help reduce erosion and increase the biodiversity of the lake. Various macrophyte species have since established into the lake area, providing important nesting sites for moorhens and little grebes, as well as providing refuge for aquatic invertebrates.

The island in the middle of the lake was cleared of fallen willows in 2022 and is now in a manageable state. Some fallen trees were left as nesting habitat around the edge of the lake but many were removed to aid the flow of water. The island itself is floristically poor, with nettles dominating. This could be improved with regular strimming of the nettles outside of nesting season & planting of appropriate species. Edge planting could also improve the habitat and cover for nesting birds.

The smaller pond adjacent to the lake is a fantastic habitat for frogs and toads during the spring with 98 individuals counted at the last count. Aquatic weeds grow in the pond and must be managed to avoid choking up the pond.

The fenced area adjacent to the pond was created in 2005 after the pond was desilted & the silt was spread over this area. It is now left unmanaged, except for the tree stock that will be managed in line with the tree policy.

The lake does suffer from large amounts of silt, with the water being relatively shallow. The cost of desilting the lake and the environmental impact it would have on the habitat has meant that this has been ruled out as an option for the foreseeable future.

### **12. Manage Foundry House stream**

The stream at Foundry House has matured, with aquatic and emergent vegetation such as foals watercress (*Apium nodiflorum*), lesser water parsnip (*Berula erecta*) and yellow flag iris (*Iris*

*psuedacorus*) now established. This has enhanced the aesthetic and biodiversity quality of the area between Ninesprings and Summerhouse Hill. Water snails, stickleback fish and demoiselles are an example of the species that have moved in as a result.

Two annual vegetation cuts within the stream are needed to ensure it does not become choked and overgrown. The surrounding grass continues to be managed as a small wildflower meadow, with early rotavation and a late summer cut and remove required to maintain this habitat.

### **13. Manage Penn Hill**

Although a relatively small compartment of Yeovil Country Park, Penn Hill has a variety of management needs, from formal grassland at the bottom of the hill to orchards and a wildlife garden on the top. It is also designated as a historic parkland environment.

#### Lower Penn Hill

The lower grassland of Penn Hill is species poor and has been mown extensively as part of the Routine Maintenance Contract with Environmental Services. This grassland would benefit from the addition of species that are good for pollinators but have a tolerance to being regularly mown, such as daisies and clovers. This formal grassland is often used for outdoor performances from the adjacent Octagon Theatre and is enjoyed by people working in town as a respite from the office to enjoy their lunch. The grassland between the line of mature trees and Brunswick street, as well as the banks down to the pavement, could be left unmown & added to with bulbs and plug plants to increase floristic diversity. Scrub on the banks needs to be managed to improve sightlines and ensure it does not become dominant.

Some areas that are not used for recreation (picnics and theatres) could be left long to maintain insect rich grasslands. These grasslands would benefit from the addition of yellow rattle to improve biodiversity and reduce the vigorous grasses to allow more delicate grasses and flowers to grow, further improving the grassland.

A ham stone bench sits within a small shrub bed to commemorate the turn of the millennium. This area is often used for wedding photos from the adjacent registry office and therefore must be maintained to a good standard.

Scrub and small trees need to be managed around the back of Maltravers Car park and on the path to the top of the hill to ensure they do not become dense, as they once harboured a lot of drug activity. Keeping this area clear also improves security for those using the car park. Bulbs, wildflowers and hazel could be added here which will be improve the biodiversity and aesthetics of this area.

Redundant shrub beds along the eastern edge of Maltravers House were cleared of willow, sycamore and laurel in 2015 and replanted with field maple, hazel and other small native trees. Wild clematis has since taken over and this needs to be controlled. The replanting scheme needs to extend along the whole of the bank. Bulbs and other woodland species could be planted to provide ground cover.

Penn Hill is a good location for memorial plantings as the lower slopes support stand alone parkland trees, which maintain its historic character.

The top of Penn Hill has two distinct compartments: The Community Wildlife Garden and the orchard meadow.

#### The Community Wildlife Garden

The wildlife garden was created in 2010 with a grant from Wessex Water which allowed the rangers to clear the bramble, plant trees & wildflowers, build a new pond, create a circular path and erect bird boxes.

Since the Covid 19 pandemic in 2020, this area has become neglected due to the lack of volunteer support because of government restrictions; nettles and weeds have taken over, the pond is overgrown and leaking, the paths have become overgrown and the bug hotel collapsed. In 2022, a kickstart-funded trainee assistant ranger together with a casual ranger, prepared an application on behalf of the Friends to Wessex Water for a grant to carry out improvement works to this area. The Friends were awarded £750 to carry out works such as rebuilding the bug hotel, planting in the grassland and around the pond, making repairs to the pond liner and erecting more wildlife boxes.

#### Orchard & allotment meadow

The orchard on top of Penn Hill was planted in 2004 to create a community resource and wildlife interest. The trees haven't taken well and are still struggling to become established mature trees. This was possibly caused by too much vigorous grass growth during the early stages of planting and damage caused by strimmers to the lower trunks. Several of the apple trees have been replaced over the years & they will need to be monitored & replaced, if necessary, in the future.

The meadows are surrounded by a hedge on all sides which is laid every 7-10 years. The meadows themselves are cut and removed annually in September as part of the Routine Maintenance Contract with SSDC Environmental Services, as well as a circular path mown throughout the year.

#### Gardens adjacent to Penn House

The gardens on the leeward side of the hill are within a conservation area and used to be the formal gardens of Penn House. The house is now divided into flats and the former gardens now form part of the Penn Hill compartment.

The redundant rose bed in the centre was transformed in 2014 with the help of Headway, a community support group for people with brain injuries. This space is now referred to as the Headway Garden. The space was planted up with herbs, wildflowers, grasses and small shrubs to create a small sensory garden. The Monday volunteer group mostly attend to this garden, weeding the beds and keeping the path clear of moss & weeds. The space was neglected in 2020-2022 due to the government restrictions as a response to the Covid 19 pandemic, when volunteers were unable to work. The area has been tidied up by the rangers and volunteers since, but many of the herbs have died. This area needs additional planting to restore it.

The shrub beds along Penn Hill Road have been cut back & replanted with native shrub tree stock such as hazel and holly. Additional bulb or woodland flower plug plants would increase the floristic diversity in this area.

The entranceway onto St Nicholas Close needs attention as a small scrubby area has increased in size with the centre of it being used as a den. The scrub needs removing to increase sightlines and improve personal security.

Along the boundary with Penn Hill Road, a large badger sett under the yew trees has caused the supporting hamstone wall to collapse in two places. The countryside team have been working alongside licensed ecologists and the property services team to resolve this issue with minimal effect to the badgers. An artificial sett was completed in 2022 and this work needs to now move to the next stage of a possible licence to exclude the badgers from their original sett so that works can take place.

#### **14. Management of grasslands at Wyndham and Summerhouse Hill**

Wyndham Hill and Summerhouse Hill are predominantly semi-improved pastures. Summerhouse Hill has got a more varied sward height and better floristic diversity than Wyndham Hill. In order to improve the sward diversity and biodiversity on Wyndham Hill plug plants including yellow rattle could be introduced to the grassland. The steep thin soils around the burial site are the most floristically diverse of these grasslands, with calcareous species such as lady's bedstraw and birdsfoot trefoil recorded.

Both grasslands are managed by cattle grazing with a local tenant farmer. The grassland at Wyndham Hill is managed under a Countryside Stewardship agreement and has stocking densities & grazing periods dictated.

The current tenant farmer has been grazing land at Yeovil Country Park for over 20 years but will not sign a grazing agreement licence. It is likely that they will retire in the next 5 years, at which point the grazing rights will go out to tender with a firmer grazing agreement in place.

The tenant farmer also tops thistles on both compartments to prevent their spread.

#### **15. Management of Reedbed at Riverside**

The floodplain at Riverside supports a small reedbed adjacent to the central woodland area. Reedbeds support a high & specialised biodiversity, from invertebrates to birds and small mammals. Reedbeds are a successional habitat, in that if they are not managed, they will eventually form wet woodlands with willow dominating.

Reedbeds in the whole need to be kept wet and the 'thatch' that builds up when old growth decays, needs to be periodically removed, to keep the reedbed wet. Willow easily gains a foothold in reedbed habitats, and its growth must also be managed to avoid establishment and the succession into a wet woodland. However, the most diverse reedbed will contain a mix of all these stages of habitat succession and where possible open pools, submerged reeds, dry reeds & some willow scrub should be retained.

A small pond at the back of the reedbed can get choked with grasses weed and bramble. This needs maintenance to ensure it also does not eventually dry up. The pond would also benefit from macrophyte planting around its edges, to improve the floristic diversity & habitat for invertebrates, reptiles, and amphibians.

The reedbed at Riverside is traversed with a boardwalk but the boardwalk started to decay & the ground got wetter at the end of the boardwalk, this led to people walking across the reedbed to avoid getting wet & muddy. This was detrimental to the reedbed and meant that scrub started to build up. In 2018 with V3 project funding, the reedbed was replanted with a local school and with funding through the Friends of Yeovil Country Park, a new boardwalk was created, using recycled plastic. This has allowed the reedbed to recover & people are keeping to the designated walkway.

A small drainage ditch sits at the western edge of the reedbeds near to the railway line. The diversion of the ditch with the ability to change the flow of the water, would mean that water levels of the reedbed could be controlled, allowing a more diverse reedbed habitat to form.

#### **16. Management of flood plain meadow at Riverside**

The floodplain meadow at the bottom of Wyndham Park in the far east of the country park is a dense tussocky grassland, filled with invertebrates. The grassland supports high numbers of wasp spiders and harvest mice nests have also been found. Areas of teasel support good numbers of seed eating birds in the winter, such as goldfinch, reed bunting, stonechat and redwing.

The meadows are often inundated with water in the winter as they are adjacent to the river Yeo. The river Yeo has a highly fluctuating water table. In times of heavy rainfall, the level of the river can increase by 2m in just a few hours.

This grassland remains relatively unmanaged. Invasive species need to be controlled. Cut & removals are avoided here as it is the dense tussocky nature of this grassland that allows it to support the species it does.

A path is mown around the grassland so that people can access a circular walk. At present the path also cuts across the middle of the grassland but this disconnects the site and will be removed in 2023 Routine Maintenance Agreement (RMC)

#### **17. Conserve Veteran Trees**

Veteran trees provide significant biodiversity benefits through the provision of specialist niches such as woodpecker holes, rot holes and split features. These are often used by roosting species such as bats and birds.

The importance of veteran trees during their stages of decay are also incredibly important, providing habitat for fungi, moss, and invertebrates.

At present, veteran trees are not mapped but this could be added to the XMAP GIS system, to show which trees are important when it comes to visitor safety management. A management strategy for each tree could be devised with regards to safety and managed decay.

#### **18. Manage deadwood in woodlands**

Deadwood is an important component of woodland ecosystems and a continual input of both standing and fallen wood is necessary to provide the specialist niche conditions associated with recently formed deadwood.

Previously, in many areas, arisings from tree work (brash) would have been burned. The purchase of a wood chipper in 2008 has ensured that brash is now 'chipped', which is far better for the park's

woodlands, both environmentally and sustainably. Deadwood supports a range of specialist invertebrate and fungi species thereby contributing to ecological processes vital to the functioning of woodland systems. Log habitat piles or woodchip piles will be produced following woodland management works which will also provide important hibernacula and refugia for many species including reptiles.

#### **19. Retain scrub in appropriate areas to contribute to habitat diversity**

Scrub habitat represents a successional transitory stage between lower level herb dominated habitats such as grassland and stable woodland.

To retain the managed, cultural landscapes and habitats within the park, scrub encroachment should be controlled. However, it does provide a significant degree of habitat value with species such as willow, bramble and gorse providing foraging and nesting opportunities. Structural, age and species diversity helps support a range of birds and invertebrates and management should therefore seek to retain scrub where currently present both in thickets and as isolated patches Cutting on rotation will help prevent scrub becoming leggy, maintaining its value. Habitat mapping will help coordinate and prioritise the management work.

#### **20. Maintain condition of river within practical constraints**

The River Yeo forms an important link through sections of the park acting both as a key wildlife corridor and providing aesthetic interest for those visiting Riverside.

In areas, significant amounts of deadwood lie within the channel and litter has caught up in places detracting visually from the river. Annual litter picks help to keep the lake and brook clear of litter. Due to the rural nature downstream of the Yeovil Country Park, the Environment Agency are not concerned with fallen trees in the river, as they provide good habitat for invertebrates and fish. However, storm events have washed away the weir gates at the bottom of Wyndham Hill previously & any significant sudden drop in the river levels needs to be reported to the EA.

The rangers have undertaken training in working in and on water and so now have the ability to carry out important surveys of river and riparian species such as otter and water vole present in both the Yeo and Dodham Brook.

At Riverside, natural fluvial processes of the Yeo cause erosion of the riverbanks. These processes should be left unmanaged and footpaths moved as necessary. However the river bank comes within 10m of the railway line and railway bridge footings. These areas must be monitored for erosion and the EA or Network rail notified if there are any significant erosion events that may affect the stability of the rail network. In some cases EA approval may need to be sought to stabilise the river bank where public access is also threatened, in the narrow sections of the footpath.

#### **21. Reduce use of chemicals where possible**

The use of chemicals at Yeovil Country Park is already limited, with rangers using them for tackling invasive and not native species such as Japanese knotweed and Giant Hogweed.

However, historically chemicals have been used as part of the Routine Maintenance Contract to treat grass encroachment onto surfaced paths. For example, in the meadows and at Riverside.

A different approach is needed and it is our intention to only treat surfaced disabled access paths in the meadows and to remove herbicide treatment of the paths at Riverside, in a new Routine Maintenance Contract for the site.

The rangers will continue to only use chemicals for spot treatment where necessary.

## **22. Ensure the land is managed in accordance with the Countryside Stewardship agreement**

In 2021, land at Summerhouse Hill and Wyndham Hill was entered into a Countryside Stewardship Agreement with DEFRA for 5 years, to manage the grassland for biodiversity. Annual revenue payments are received for managing the grassland with appropriate grazing and managing hedgerows for wildlife.

Capital payments are received for laying hedgerows, planting new hedgerows and adding sheep netting to an existing fence line.

## **23. Manage Dodham Brook in conjunction with the Yeovil Rivers Community Trust**

In 2021 the Yeovil Rivers Community Trust, a registered charity working to conserve and improve waterways in Yeovil, applied for a Green Recovery Challenge Fund Grant (GRCF) to improve the culverted channel of Dodham Brook between the weir at Ninesprings and the confluence with the river Yeo near Wyndham Hill. The Dodham Brook project is a joint venture, managed by the YRCT with Somerset Council's agreement & input. The YRCT have been working alongside the countryside team to develop and deliver the project. The project comprises construction of in-channel features to create a sinuous flow and provide additional habitat for fish and invertebrates which will in turn aid the existing water vole and otter populations. The project will also improve the aesthetic value of this stretch of the brook with planting of macrophytes in the new features. The project has a completion deadline of June 2023.

After the Dodham Brook project is completed, the YRCT will deal with ongoing maintenance of this section of Dodham Brook under a licence agreement with the council.



*Photo: Artists impression of how the features will look in Dodham Brook*

## **9.2 Aim 2: Ensure Yeovil Country Park delivers as a recreational facility for the public**

### **24. Enable visitors to discover Yeovil Country Park**

The Country Park is close to Yeovil town centre and is easily accessible by car, cycle and on foot. A number of brown Highway tourism signs around the town direct visitors to the site.

At each main entrance to the country park, large 'Yeovil Country Park' signs are displayed with map panels to help visitors orientate themselves. Black fingerposts along the edge of the country park, provided by Yeovil Town Council, help visitors to discover the various compartments of the country park and finger posts and way markers in Ninesprings help visitors to navigate the myriad of paths in this popular area.

The 'Explore Yeovil Country Park' leaflet has been produced as a general visitor information and navigation leaflet, with a full map of the country park included. This is available from Ninesprings Café, Cartgate TIC and Yeovil Library. It is also downloadable from the Visit South Somerset website. The leaflet could be distributed to more external locations including the two railway stations in Yeovil and Ham Hill Country Park.

Ninesprings Café is a focal point for visitors to Yeovil Country Park. Permanent interpretation in and around the building help visitors to understand the story and importance of the country park, as well as allowing them to orientate themselves. Ninesprings Café also holds all of the trail leaflets for the country park and is where visitors are encouraged to report problems or speak to a ranger.

A display cabinet at the back of the café, allows for further interpretation & information to be displayed, including art work or heritage items from the SSHC, that are relevant to the country park.

### **25. Maintain paths in a good state of repair**

The type and quality of paths varies hugely across the site and maintenance depends on the surface and its dressing.

All surfaced paths need leaf blowing regularly throughout the autumn months. Some of the paths need manual clearance with shovels and brooms in the autumn/winter, particularly Lovers Lane that links Hendford Hill with Dorchester Road.

Stone block work paths in the valley gardens also need regular leaf clearance, using leaf blowers and brushes. Some paths within the Valley Gardens require bankside stabilising and some erosion work using boards as necessary. Some other paths simply need filling with woodchip or scalping.

Animals such as badgers and rabbits can dig holes in the paths and this will need to be monitored and filled in where they occur to reduce trip hazards.

The roots from prominent trees along the shared path at Ninesprings have pushed up through the tarmac, causing the surface to crack and become uneven. Sections along this path have been repaired in the past, but the problem is ongoing and will need further resurfacing in 2023-24. Tarmac will only be used as a surface dressing along routes that are designed to be accessible for wheelchairs. The cost of maintain tarmac paths and it's im-permeability means that it is generally not suitable for use in the country park.

Path edges will be strimmed to ensure vegetation doesn't narrow the paths and volunteers will help the ranger team to clear back encroaching vegetation on the path surface. The edges of the disability path leading up to the BBQ area in Ninesprings will be chemically treated to ensure the path remains accessible. Elsewhere the use of chemical control will be prohibited.

Some paths are mown and strimmed as part of the Routine Maintenance Contract with Environmental Services.

## **26. Keep the site free of rubbish**

The ranger team will carry out twice weekly litter picks and bin emptying runs, increasing these in the busy summer months to match demand.

A two-minute litter pick station was donated by CPRE in 2020 and this is stationed daily outside Ninesprings Café to encourage visitors to help keep the country park clean.

There are several volunteer litter pickers across site and litter pickers are provided free of charge to anyone that wishes to take part in litter picking across the country park.

The rangers are often approached by groups who want to organise community litter pick days e.g. Florence's street cleaning mission and these groups are encouraged & supported by the rangers through the provision of litter pickers, bins bags & rubbish collection.

## **27. Ensure the site is safe for visitors**

The country park includes a number of stone seats, benches, litter bins, dog bins, wooden bridges, boardwalks, pond dip platform and stone built BBQs plinths. All structures are mapped on the GIS XMAP system and are inspected annually for signs of damage or decay. The condition of the structure is recorded and a schedule for repair or replacement is programmed into the rangers work programme.

A jet washing programme will help to maintain site furniture and non-slip strips will be maintained on bridge & pond dip platform surfaces that are deemed to be a high 'slip risk'.

Wooden art sculptures are also monitored on this annual schedule. Most sculptures were installed in 2016 and are in a good state of repair. An annual coating of Danish oil will help improve their longevity.

To ensure the health and safety of tree stock within the country park, rangers carry out an annual basic tree inspection. Only tree stock that would fall onto an area with public access or buildings is surveyed (five metres from any path). Trees located centrally in woodlands with no paths are not surveyed. Any tree displaying signs of damage or disease is given a severity of between 1-5 and the rangers carry out most work themselves with occasional arborist employed to carry out aerial tree works. Ash dieback (*Chalara fraxinea*) has been confirmed on-site and is managed through recommendations set out by the Forestry Commission. Appropriate action in accordance with the recommendations and the appropriate guidance from experts will be taken as necessary. The team continues to invite the public to report any issues with the park's tree stock and will respond promptly to these. All tree safety surveys are recorded on XMAP, which is now GPS enabled so allows for more accurate location recording where there is good mobile network coverage.

All natural play areas are checked weekly by the rangers and recorded on XMAP. They are then checked annually by a ROSPA trained locality officer with any defects reported immediately to the ranger team. Any items that are broken or need replacing are marked off with red & white tape and remove/replaced/made safe at the earliest convenience.

Safety is also about personal safety and anti-social behaviour in the country park. As the country park is open to the public all day every day, ASB can arise, even during the day. The on-site ranger presence and Ninesprings Café do help to give visitors a sense of personal security. The rangers also ensure sightlines are improved by cutting back vegetation to discourage people from 'hiding' in bushes. The rangers have always maintained a good relationship with the local Police beat team and PCSO's, this has been maintained through the Park Watch scheme that was established in the country park in 2010. This scheme has been somewhat abandoned since the start of Covid and will be relaunched in 2023. The Park Watch scheme is designed to act like a neighbourhood watch scheme for the country park, encouraging visitors & adjacent residents to report ASB incidents to the Police & rangers so that they can work together to combat problems and find solutions. The rangers themselves also report any incidents to the Police & Somerset Council & maintain a log of all issues.

## **28. Encourage responsible dog ownership**

Yeovil Country Park remains a popular destination for dog walking and dog walkers are the most regular visitors to the site.

Dog bins are provided at key points across the site and will be replaced as necessary or re-sited depending on use and need.

Dogs are welcome throughout the country park, but they are not allowed in the Ninesprings play area and there is a no dog zone around the lake to protect the wildlife. The no dog zone is fenced, gated and signed, however breaches of this prohibition do occur. The no dog zone is enforceable under the Public Spaces Protection Order for the site but usually a gentle reminder is all that is needed to enforce this.

Dogs do continue to cause conflict on site with other users, either through fouling, dogs not under control or aggression towards other dogs or visitors. The rangers maintain good relationships with many of the regular dog walkers who help the rangers to educate others in responsible dog ownership & behaviour at the country park. Occasionally situations arise that need more enforcement or a strategy to reduce the conflict. Support from Somerset Council locality officers, enforcement and the communications team work with the rangers to find a solution.

## **29. Promote and maintain access for all**

In 2018, a new All Ability Trails leaflet was produced as part of the V3 project. This trail guide highlights the accessibility of the existing path network for different users, including those with wheelchairs, buggies or those that can only walk on flat level surfaces. This leaflet is available at local tourism outlets, at Ninesprings Café and on the VSS website.

The provision of a Trumper mobility vehicle available for hire would contribute to improved accessibility at the country park but this would be dependent on external funding & an outlet to hire the vehicle from. Discussions were had with Shop Mobility in Yeovil in 2018, but they were unable to proceed at that time. This needs to be investigated again as funding allows.

Accessibility is not just about physical access at the country park, but also about making events and activities more accessible for a wider range of people. The rangers do this through the various volunteering opportunities, with the Monday volunteering group open to those with SEN or physical disabilities. In 2022 the rangers also delivered a bat walk for those with SEN or mental health needs and it was well received. The rangers also work to get funding for events and activities so that they can be offered for free so that cost isn't a barrier to participation.

Rangers and café staff have received Dementia Friendly training in the past & with the change in staff over the last two years, this could be repeated, with other relevant training courses attended.

### **30. Successfully manage different user groups**

As an open access recreational site there is the risk of conflict issues between the many different user groups within the park. A key example involves pedestrians and cyclists along the shared path that links the compartments. "Share the space" signs have been updated and erected to manage this potential conflict.

Social media and an on-site ranger team will help to educate visitors through awareness and discussion contribute to a balanced and managed use of the park.

### **31. Promote healthy living schemes in the country park and use of the wider countryside**

There exist a number of successful schemes for promoting physical activity within Yeovil Country Park.

The Blackburn Fitness Trail was established in 2007 and is a self-guided trail that follows the idea of a trim trail around the valley gardens in Ninesprings, using existing site furniture to carry out exercises, such as tricep dips using a bench. This leaflet is nearly out of print and will need updating & rebranding if it is to be continued.

The permanent orienteering course was extended in 2018 to cover the whole country park and is very popular with scout groups.

Run England, 3-2-1 running trails were erected at Ninesprings and Riverside Walk in late 2013, marking 3km running routes. This route needs further promotion.

The country park has always been used for formal and informal health & fitness activities, from the annual running races of Ninesprings 9k, Ninesprings at Night and weekly winter parkruns to schools cross country and aquathlons with the neighbouring Goldenstones Leisure Centre. Yeovil Country Park still forms part of the Yeovil Half Marathon course and the Yeovil Town Road Running Club also host their annual Santa Dash in Ninesprings. Parkrun is no longer hosted by the country park as it has moved to a new venue but Park Yoga is held weekly in the country park from May to September with funding through sponsorship & donations providing this class for free.

Other commercial activities such as Squats and Tots are also held in the country park, with income gained through expenditure in the café. However it is likely that the countryside service will enforce a permit system for commercial activities on site in the future, with an annual fee payable for the rights to use our sites.

Tracker packs that were developed during the V3 project will be available for hire from the Ninesprings Café for families to use to explore the country park in other ways, such as bug hunting.

The fortunate location of Yeovil Country Park on the fringe of the town means it serves as a gateway through which to explore the rights of way across more rural areas. Giving people the confidence to explore these areas is seen as a key opportunity that the service wishes to seize.

### **32. Maintain all boundaries in a safe and attractive fashion**

All fences have been in-situ for over 10 years now and as a result some posts and rails are in need of replacement. The internal valley gardens fencing has been updated with bigger sweet chestnut cleft, but is prone to vandalism.

Other boundary features in the country park include hedgerows. Many have been laid over the last 5 years and some are now getting to the state of needing to be re-laid. Public training days are organised annually to lay the hedge in the centre of the meadow at Ninesprings. Traditional floating hedge laying will be employed to maximise biodiversity value.

In all eventualities the rangers will strive to use wooden fences and natural boundaries like hedgerows, so that the connectivity for wildlife along with nesting and foraging habitat is improved.

### **33. Manage and reduce erosion across the site**

The main problems with erosion have occurred alongside the watercourses, particularly alongside Riverside Walk, where it is having an impact on the footpath. Soft engineering solutions were originally sought but they were not appropriate for the height of the bank and so steel, rock-filled gabions were used as an alternative.

The valley gardens of Ninesprings have steep sides and require annual attention to prevent minor landslips. The use of willow check dams in rills should be investigated as a method to prevent formation of gulleys. The clearance of laurel will allow a ground flora to develop, the roots providing greater substrate stabilisation. Additionally the steep bank between Wyndham Hill and the cycleway may need work in the future to prevent erosion of the bank onto the cycle path. This continues to be monitored.

### **34. Apply for Green Flag award annually**

The Green Flag Award, administered by Keep Britain Tidy is the recognised national benchmark award for greenspaces in the UK. Yeovil Country Park has been awarded the Green Flag Award since 2005.

An annual assessment is carried out by experienced and qualified judges with backgrounds in nature conservation or open space management and comprises a desk and field based component. Within each, the entire site is judged against eight key criteria:

- A welcoming place
- Healthy, safe and secure
- Well maintained & clean
- Environmental Management
- Biodiversity, landscape and heritage

- Community involvement
- Marketing and communication
- Management

The holistic management approach adopted by the Countryside Service is embedded in the aims that direct the work of the team. This ensures that all of the above criteria are met which has contributed to accreditation over the past 17 years. The team act upon judges recommendations to improve both the visitor experience and the country park's wildlife and conservation value. This is reflected in the specific management objectives and prescriptions of the present plan in the hope of retaining this prestigious award.

Rangers are encouraged to become Green Flag judges themselves, once they have got enough relevant experience of site management. The benefits of being a Green Flag judge include networking, skill sharing and continued professional development.

### **35. Support the Yeovil in Bloom application**

Each year the Yeovil in Bloom team from Environmental Services bring the judges to the country park for a whistle-stop tour of the country park. In 2017 the country park was awarded the London & Manchester Trophy for an outstanding environmental initiative, by Britain in Bloom. The country park was nominated for this award by the Yeovil in Bloom judges and this is testament of how important the country park is for the support of the Yeovil in Bloom application.

Britain in Bloom, in conjunction with the RHS, also have an annual 'Best Park' award. The country park was first awarded this in 2015 and is an annual application that the Friends group complete each year.

### **36. Manage the Routine Maintenance Contract (RMC) with Environmental Services**

Somerset Council's Environmental Services team carry out the annual grass maintenance at the country park. A maintenance pack for the year is formulated each March for delivery by the team throughout the year. An example copy of the 2023 agreement is in appendix x. Tasks include grass mowing, strimming, shrub bed pruning and meadow management. Close down each year includes a review of the tasks and inspection of the signed off job sheets by the team. Quarterly update meetings with senior officers ensure the annual work programme is kept on track. Future budget constraints and changes to management practices have reshaped the RMC for 2023 and the agreement will continue to be reviewed annually with budgets and best practice in mind.

### **37. Undertake annual maintenance of play area car park**

The car park is gravel surfaced and due to high levels of use requires annual maintenance attention. Scraping and levelling and the filling of potholes with gravel can only occur in the spring with the drier weather. The car park is free to use for max 2 hours and is regularly patrolled by parking attendants. This reduces the use of the car park by people working in town as parking all day prevents use by country park visitors.

The standard of the car park is not ideal, with limited passing places on entry & exit to the car park, poor surface which needs constant repairs and no designated parking bays, which leads to cars parking in inappropriate locations on busy days. The solution would be a complete overhaul of the car park (including surfacing, line marking, double yellow lines, traffic signs) and it is proposed that this is considered for a future capital bid.

### **38. Provide suitable natural play areas**

In 2009 as part of a BBC Breathing Places grant, the rangers developed a natural play space & storytelling zone in the woodland at the top of Ninesprings. This 'Woodland Play Zone' has developed into a key area for delivering events and school sessions, with both the Halloween and Spring Trail culminating at this point. The ranger team have observed high usage of the area by children and families throughout the year, enjoying the space to have picnics during their visit to the country park. The woodland play zone hosts some fairy doors, stepping stones, balance beams and a wooden glockenspiel. All features are simple handmade wooden structures that are low risk but encourage playing & stimulate imagination.

A smaller 'forest school' area has been created by the pond dip platform to enable less able groups somewhere to congregate during ranger led sessions. This area is in the vicinity of Ninesprings Café for toilet & handwashing facilities so is much more appealing for visiting schools. This area has become so popular and well used by the Community Heritage Officer that it needs expanding and all-weather shelter to be available.

In 2018 a woodland play trail was constructed by the rangers and volunteers at Riverside to encourage families from Wyndham Park to utilise this area for recreation purposes. The trail consists of stepping stones, balance beams, a standing see-saw and a willow den. This trail is still under development with more features planned for 2023.

A low-key play area would also be of benefit outside Ninesprings Café to keep children entertained whilst families use the facilities. However, this would have to be designed so as not to encroach on the amenity grassland that is used for events.

### **9.3 Aim 3: Provide more opportunities and support for a wider range of people to become involved**

#### **39. Continue to run weekly practical conservation volunteer groups**

The rangers will continue to run weekly volunteer task days every Monday and Thursday, with ad-hoc Wednesdays as required.

The Thursday volunteer session is the main practical conservation task day, and the volunteers work alongside the rangers to carry out a wide variety of practical habitat management and site maintenance tasks across the site. During this task day, the rangers often operate machinery such as chainsaws and chippers and so it is vital that anyone attending can adhere to health and safety information with less supervision. Tasks may include laurel clearance, tree planting, hedge laying, invasive species control and woodland management.

The Monday volunteer sessions are short sessions (2 hours) to carry out the lighter maintenance and management tasks in the country park, designed for people who may have physical disabilities or special educational needs. Tasks include path clearance, weeding and litter picking.

Wednesday volunteer sessions are project based and consist of a smaller team of the most skilled volunteers. This group can be given the tools to carry out a task with no ranger supervision required.

The rangers deliver tool safety talks at the start of each volunteering session and provide hot and cold refreshments for each session.

The volunteers come from a wide range of backgrounds and attend for many different reasons as identified by volunteer surveys carried out in 2018. The rangers are experienced in offering a range of tasks throughout the season to maintain motivation and interest.

In 2022, volunteers donated a total of 815 volunteer days throughout year. This gives us the equivalent of two extra full time members of staff to deliver labour intensive projects like scrub clearance and weed pulling.

#### **40. Support and assist the Friends of Yeovil Country Park**

The Friends of Yeovil Country Park are a registered charity and provide an important link between the rangers and the local community. This ensures that the management of the country park is meeting the expectations of the community that use it.

The Friends of Yeovil Country Park are a small group of volunteers acting as trustees and members in the group, to support project work and events at Yeovil Country Park. The Friends are pivotal in raising additional funding for the country park and support for events. Their charitable status means they have access to a wider number of grant funds that exclude applications from a local authority.

The Friends help to deliver the two main trail events each year by securing sponsorship of prizes and assisting with visitors at the point of entry. The donations raised from these events go to the Friends for future events and projects.

#### **41. Develop new volunteering opportunities at Yeovil Country Park**

There is the opportunity for a wider diversity of volunteering at Yeovil Country Park, beyond practical conservation tasks.

It is the intention of the ranger team to recruit new volunteers to help with wildlife monitoring in the country park, including butterflies, harvest mice nests, wasp spiders and more. This will allow a wider variety of people to become involved with the country park.

A Roaming Ranger team would be of benefit to the site, to enlist regular visitors to the country park to act as eye and ears of the rangers, guide visitors & provide information about the site. The Roaming Rangers would not act as enforcers of any site bylaws and would not be expected to confront anyone in breach of these bylaws. The additional presence of the Roaming Rangers would help to deter anti-social behaviour in the park and improve personal safety for visitors.

#### **42. Provide diverse training and development opportunities for volunteers**

Volunteers are a vital part of the wider team at Yeovil Country Park, but many will not have carried out practical habitat management or site maintenance work before. It is essential that as new volunteers join the team, they are given proper instruction of how to carry out various conservation techniques, such as coppicing and tree felling. It may be appropriate to provide in-house training days with other countryside volunteers to enable new skills to be learnt, such as dry stone walling and hedgelaying.

Many long-term volunteers are very capable of carrying out higher risk or more technical tasks, such as driving ATV's or using brushcutters. It is important that volunteers are upskilled with the appropriate training to carry out tasks to their ability, as this may help further their career, improve motivation and ultimately enable more tasks to be carried out around the country park.

Volunteers that are recruited to carry out wildlife surveys may be keen but may not possess the ecological knowledge to identify different species or to carry out the survey using the correct methodology. In-house training with the rangers can improve their identification and where appropriate specialist training days could be provided. It is essential that volunteers are recording the correct species as this will impact future habitat management on the site.

Roaming Rangers may find that they benefit from conflict resolution training, and this can be arranged with an external provider.

#### **43. Maintain South Somerset Countryside Steering Group**

The SSCSG was founded in 2006 with stakeholders that had an interest in the work at the sites managed by the SSDC Countryside Team. This included Ham Hill, Yeovil Country Park, Chard Reservoir Local Nature Reserve, Moldrams Ground LNR and Eastfield's LNR. The Steering Group is made up of interested stakeholders, representatives from each of the Friend's groups, parish and SSDC councillors. The terms of reference and membership list can be found in the appendix. The Steering Group meet twice a year to review the annual Countryside Service Plan. They receive a presentation from one of the rangers and can discuss & inform the management and progression of all of the countryside sites that the team manage.

#### **44. Apprenticeship, volunteering & work experience placements**

Yeovil Country Park has been an important place for training the next generation of rangers and land managers. From 2005 to 2015 SSDC recruited an apprentice annually to be based at Yeovil Country Park. Their training and assessments were undertaken by the qualified country park rangers, with the formal learning partnership provided by Kingston Maurward College. The apprenticeship scheme was halted in 2015 due to staffing changes and budgetary pressures. It is our intention to offer apprenticeships with Kingston Maurward College again if resources allow.

Yeovil Country Park welcomes students from local secondary schools to undertake their one- or two-week work experience in Year 10. The rangers can currently only accommodate one placement at a time, due to the logistics of supervision and travelling around the site. The rangers also support industry placements from local colleges, whereby students completing a relevant qualification in countryside management or similar need to work a set number of hours to fulfil their course requirements. These students usually attend one day per week over the course of a year.

#### **45. Promote Yeovil Country Park for Tourism**

Yeovil Country Park is an important site for local people, but it is also an important site for tourism. With its connections to the railway line and its vicinity to Yeovil town centre, the country park appeals to visitors from a wider area.

There is no budget for marketing Yeovil Country Park to a wider audience, but a strong web presence and social media pages will enable a wider diversity of visitors to know about the country park, tempting them to visit. This will support a network of wider tourism services to the area including accommodation providers, local retail and food and drink providers.

#### **46. Offer feedback opportunities from site users and the community, acting on this**

The front-line on-site rangers are the most valuable tool in gaining feedback from visitors. Daily contact and interaction with onsite users has seen the rangers gather valuable ideas and comments throughout the years that can contribute to enhanced visitor experience. Social media has also been a key mechanism for enabling feedback from visitors. Feedback includes comments about the park in general and specifically if people have attended events.

Other feedback opportunities include annual visitor surveys online, face to face in the park, or in Yeovil town centre. Feedback mechanisms at events can encourage comments about the country park in general and not just the event itself, but often feedback is verbal as the rangers are limited in their capacity to seek written evaluation about each event. Ninesprings Café also serves as a key point of contact to obtain feedback directly from site users. Comment slips will be available for feedback about the café and the country park.

#### **47. Support community groups and actively engage and work with under-represented sections of the community**

The cultural diversity within the Yeovil area should be celebrated and Yeovil Country Park provides an ideal platform for this along with the sharing of cultural knowledge and skills. The Community Heritage Officer has worked with a variety of community groups and organisations and they are now using the park either on a ranger-led activity or through the support of their own community group. The CHO should seek to offer activity sessions to a diverse range of community groups, as well as maintaining relationships with current users.

#### **48. Support the work and funding of the Community Heritage Officer**

The Community Heritage Officer works across the Heritage and Countryside Teams, part funded until April 2024 by Yeovil Town Council, which means that most of their site-based work will be carried out at Yeovil Country Park.

The CHO is a self-funded position and it may be necessary to approach the Friends of YCP for funding requests or to assist with grant applications. The rangers and countryside manager will support this work, as well as providing support for larger events or group sessions when required.

#### **49. Develop art and performance opportunities within the park**

The landscape of Ninesprings lends itself to opportunities for artistic interpretation and performance. The installation of sculpture pieces that celebrate the heritage of Yeovil Country Park across the whole site have been included on a trail map.

In the last 5 years, a relationship with the Octagon theatre has developed and since Covid 19, the desire for more outdoor performances has grown. Penn Hill has hosted two outdoor performances and it is hoped that as this space is regenerated with the proposed development of the Octagon theatre, that it will host more outdoor performances.

#### **50. Host events arranged by external organisations**

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, the appetite for outdoor activities has grown nationally. The country park has always hosted externally organised events, such as running races, but the move is now towards more social and theatre-based events. The country park will continue to support external organisations wishing to use the outdoor space (usually on the flat grass next to Ninesprings Café) within the boundaries of its event licence and with mindful planning to consider the neighbouring residents when it comes to noise and timing of events.

An application form must first be submitted by the event organisers, from which the rangers will determine if the event is appropriate for the country park. Upon agreement an event management plan template is available for external organisations to help plan their event and communicate important information to the countryside team.

Charitable events can be hosted for free but any commercial events such as running races will be subject to a charge, ranging from £50-£150 depending on the size of the event.

## **9.4 Aim 4: Increase awareness, understanding & knowledge**

### **51. Deliver an annual promotion plan**

The ranger team are already skilled at promoting the country park, and events and activities run throughout the year. Much of this work will be continued but with more emphasis on communicating to the public via digital platforms such as the website and social media.

The Visit South Somerset website offers an effective means with which to communicate information about the site, the work of the Rangers, how to get involved with the park and organised events and activities. It is also the main point of booking onto ranger-led activities such as bat walks.

The website should be kept up to date with latest news items and resources made available online to improve the visitor experience and the educational potential of the park. The site should promote volunteering and community involvement by providing clear links of how to access these opportunities. Alternative ways to advertise events will be developed ensuring as many in house skills are employed as possible. Event evaluation surveys indicate that onsite notice boards are effective means of communication with the public and locations will be reviewed to ensure maximum exposure.

There is a central communications team within the Council that can assist with social media posts, sharing and writing of press releases. Larger projects or events will be promoted through a press release.

### **52. Run a diverse annual programme of events that cater to a wider audience with many providing opportunities for informal learning**

Annually during November, event planning for the subsequent year begins. A packed schedule of children's activities and guided walks is delivered, mostly during school holidays throughout the year. Events range from free (where grant funded) to £8 per adult for expert led guided walks e.g., bat walks. The revenue gained from an increased number of events will contribute to the delivery of wider benefits to the park. The team make a concerted effort to offer a broad range of events that would appeal to all ages.

Many of the events are reliant upon volunteer leaders and community involvement and that is generally what makes them such a success. The rangers and Friends of Yeovil Country Park deliver two large, themed trail events at Halloween and Easter, both of which see attendances of over 1000 people. The delivery of these events with the Friends group are essential to be able to manage the numbers of people experienced.

Smaller self-led trail events run throughout February and May half term. Seasonal and themed events prove to be highly popular, and the ranger team will continue to build on this.

### **53. Promote opportunities and resources for formal learning**

A new education pack was written under the V3 project, which enables school groups to utilise the country park without the need for a ranger-led session, which is chargeable. Once the education pack is branded, it will need to be marketed to local schools and education providers from wider afield. It will be available as a downloadable document from the Countryside website so will be widely available to anyone who wishes to use it.

The Community Heritage Officer will help to promote YCP as a resource, whilst also using it as a base to develop curriculum-led sessions. Forest school sessions are also increasingly popular, not just with primary schools but also with groups that work with disengaged youth that are no longer in the school system. It is important that the CHO & other site staff are suitably trained in Forest School leadership so that they can offer these sessions.

The CHO has now worked with most of the primary schools in Yeovil to deliver curriculum focused activity sessions, but with the rising cost of transport, schools are reluctant to travel. The CHO will work alongside the countryside manager and Friends group to secure funding to be able to offer school visits for free.

#### **54. The ranger team to develop a stronger presence amongst the public**

The ranger team strive to maintain a presence amongst the public and users of YCP. With branded uniform, they are visible as the main points of contact for the country park. Ninesprings café acts as a base for the rangers and the public often make contact to report any issues through the café staff.

Social media continues to be a popular choice for members of the public to interact with the ranger team and weekly 'ranger blogs', wildlife sightings and other updates with photos are key to keep people interested and quick responses to comments, messages and enquiries encourages visitors to use it as a discussion forum.

#### **55. Participate in regional and national environmental education projects and schemes**

The National Trust, Woodland Trust, RSPB and other conservation bodies regularly organise and market national environmental education projects and schemes. These include the RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch and Butterfly Conservations 'Big Butterfly Count'. As these are well marketed through the reach of these national organisations and encourage participation in parks, as well as gardens, they are an easy way of encouraging members of the public to get involved in citizen science. This is proving an ever more popular activity for families to get involved with and can also add to the country park's species list if results are returned via the rangers.

## **9.5 Aim 5: Achieve future financial sustainability**

### **56. Seek corporate sponsorship opportunities**

A corporate sponsorship package has started being developed for the countryside team and this will be finalised and promoted to local businesses. There will be the opportunity to sponsor machinery, the volunteer team (PPE, refreshments, training etc), projects or areas of the country park in return for marketing & promotion of the business through on site signage, press releases and social media. There will be the opportunity for bespoke activity days for sponsoring businesses and other discounts, depending on the value of the sponsorship.

### **57. Ensure current site licences are maintained**

Yeovil Country Park currently offers an ice cream tenancy under licence. This expired in 2022 and will go out to tender in 2023, with each application scored on cost and environmental factors such as location of produce sold, green energy of van etc.

The grazing is also let on a licence and this is an annual rolling licence with a local tenant farmer. This has not gone out to tender as the value is so low and due to the urban location of the site, it is highly unlikely that another farmer would be interested.

It is anticipated that the current tenant will retire within the next five years, at which point the options for managing the land will need to be considered.

### **58. Develop activity permits**

Yeovil Country Park is well used by local commercial organisations, such as Squats & Tots, to run their business from. Currently the country park does not receive any income from these activities, except the secondary income gained from Ninesprings Café.

It is the intention to develop an activity permit scheme, whereby commercial businesses pay an annual fee to run their classes or activities on. This could extend to Forest School sessions and other outdoor leisure activities.

### **59. Promote Ninesprings Café**

The profits from Ninesprings Café go into balancing the budget for the Countryside Service and any profit remaining from the balance is taken by the council as an income towards other services. This ensures that the budgets of the countryside service are not cut and maintains the level of service for customers visiting the country parks and nature reserves.

Ninesprings Café will be promoted through social media, posters, and events. Most countryside events start and finish near the café to promote its use.

### **60. Extend range of sale items in café**

There is a range of bespoke items for sale in Ninesprings Café already – from colouring books and pencils to pin badges. This selection could be extended, space allowing, to include items like reusable coffee cups, water bottles, children's t-shirts and more.

### **61. Support Friends with grant funding applications**

The Friends of Yeovil Country Park are a registered charity, which means they can access a greater number of grant funds than the council.

The rangers will continue to work with the Friends to develop projects and funding bids that match both the aims of the country park and the aims of the Friends.

### **62. Continue to ensure YCP delivers as a destination for Yeovil Town**

Yeovil Country Park is a big draw for visitors outside of Yeovil. This is recognised by Yeovil Town Council who contribute a significant amount of funding to the maintenance of the country park annually.

The countryside team will deliver a presentation to Yeovil Town Council annually, to update members on the work and activities that have been carried out in the country park over the last year.

The countryside team will also support the development of any promotional material about the town through Tourism partner's and the town council itself.

TASK	WHO	WHEN?					Resources required (time & money per annum)	PARTNERS	RELEVANT COMPARTMENTS	COMPLETED	COMMENTS
		2	2	2	2	2					
		3	4	5	6	7					
<b><i>Aim 1: Conserve and enhance the biodiversity, landscape, cultural and heritage value of the country park</i></b>											
<b>1. Conserve rare or endangered species or habitats</b>											
Carry out annual breeding bird surveys in line with BTO woodland methodology in Ninesprings April - June	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	3 days		Ninesprings		
Carry out annual water vole survey in line with methodology of NWVMP - May	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day	YRCT	Ninesprings		
Carry out wasp spider nest surveys annually at Riverside - September	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day	Y&D Wildlife recording group	Riverside		
Carry out harvest mice nest surveys at Riverside annually - October to March	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 days	Devon Mammal Group	Riverside		
Monitor & record presence of orchids on XMAP – May – September	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day		Ninesprings & Penn Hill		
Recruit & train volunteers to help with wildlife surveying	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 days	Somerset Wildlife Trust			
Ensure staff are trained and/or licensed to carry out wildlife surveys for protected species	R & CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	£500 +3 days		All		
Establish butterfly and bee transects in each compartment of the country park – April - September	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	10 days		All		
Establish bat transects across the country park – May - September	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	3 days	Somerset Bat Group	All		
Monitor bat boxes	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day	Somerset Bat Group	All		Requires NE protected species licence
Extend the bird surveys to cover Riverside – April – June	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	3 days		Riverside		
Continue with annual otter surveys – March & April	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 days		Riverside & Wyndham		
Take part in annual frog/toad counts – February – March	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day	SWT	Ninesprings		

Provide wildlife records to SERC and Yeovil Wildlife Monitoring Group to maintain the species list for the country park	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day	Y&D Wildlife recording group			
Monitor the use of & clean out bird boxes & record on XMAP	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day	Volunteers	All		
Increase the number of bird boxes on site	R		✓	✓			3 days	Volunteers FoYCP	All		
<b>2. Manage the Local Wildlife Site to its optimum state</b>											
Manage habitats in line with best practice guidance to maximise biodiversity & ensure habitats are healthy & resilient to disease & climate change	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	100 days	Volunteers	All		
Monitor water quality in lake, river & brook & report any concerns/incidents immediately to the Environment Agency	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		YRCT	Ninesprings, Wyndham, Riverside		
Deploy barley straw boom into Ninesprings Lake & remove old one annually - February	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day £500	Kingcombe Stonbury	Ninesprings		
Ensure all staff are trained in the deployment of Dodham brook pollution boom – annual refresher organised in March	CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day				
<b>3. Control of invasive species</b>											
Pull ragwort on Wyndham and Summerhouse Hill – biannually as required May -July	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 days	Volunteers	Wyndham Hill Summerhouse Hill		
Chemical control of Japanese knotweed once annually – May - September	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day		Riverside Ninesprings		
Pull Himalayan balsam x 3 per annum – May - July	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	3 days	Volunteers YRCT	Ninesprings		
Treat Giant Hogweed where accessible annually – April – June	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 days		Riverside		
Ensure rangers are trained in the use of chemical applications	CM	✓		✓		✓	2 days				
Add Invasive species mapping layer to XMAP	CM	✓					0.5 days				
<b>4. Where appropriate mitigate the impact from public access on sensitive species and habitats</b>											
Maintain fence line with stock netting along Dodham Brook to prevent disturbance to water voles	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 days + £150		Ninesprings		
Maintain fence line with stock netting in Ninesprings at top of steps to prevent disturbance to Kingfisher nest site	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 days + £150		Ninesprings		
Erect posters regarding frogs, toads & moorhens breeding in large pond – February - July	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	0.5 days		Ninesprings		

Ensure no dogs signs are clearly displayed on gates at entrance to no dogs zone	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	0.5 days		Ninesprings		
<b>5. Carry out appropriate woodland management</b>											
Coppice hazel in appropriate areas on 7-year rotation – October – March	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 days	Volunteers	Ninesprings		
Create glades and rides in woodland plantation by thinning appropriate trees	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 days	Volunteers	Riverside		
Leave 50% of fallen wood as deadwood, ensuring paths are kept clear & wood is safely on the ground or away from high risk areas	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	3 days		All		
Remove non-native and invasive species – October – March	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5 days	Volunteers	All		
<b>6. Identify &amp; manage new tree planting schemes</b>											
Identify appropriate areas to plant trees	R & CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	0.5 days		Ninesprings Wyndham Riverside		
Source funding for large tree planting schemes	R & CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day ca £1000	FoYCP			
Prepare plating area when necessary e.g. strimming bramble/grass/bracken		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 days		Ninesprings Wyndham Riverside		
Plant trees involving community or volunteers where possible	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 days	FoYCP Volunteers	Ninesprings Wyndham Riverside		
Ensure old tree guards are removed or replaced as necessary	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day	Volunteers	Ninesprings Wyndham Riverside		
Strim around new plantings where appropriate and remove grass or other vigorous plant growth from tree guards	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day	Volunteers	Ninesprings Wyndham Riverside		
<b>7. Manage the park as a core element of a wider ecological network</b>											
Contribute to Nature Recovery Networks thorough the Local Nature Partnership	CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 days	SWT			
Identify potential connections for wildlife to wider landscape and approach relevant landowners	R&CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 days	Landowners	All		
<b>8. Manage the Valley Gardens of Ninesprings</b>											
Remove laurel from the woodlands annually – October – March	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	4 days	Volunteers	Ninesprings		
Treat laurel stumps & regrowth annually - April – September	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	4 days				

Replant with native species to increase ground flora & shrub layer and plant standards where space permits	R	✓		✓		✓	£1000 +2 days	Volunteers FoYCP			May need additional funding
Carry out coppicing in 7 year rotations	R	✓				✓	3 days	Volunteers			
Clear watercourses & path network of leaves 4 x per annum, focusing on school holidays or events	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	4 days	Volunteers			
Plant non-native ornamental species where appropriate to maintain Victorian Gardens heritage	R		✓		✓		£500 +1 day	Volunteers FoYCP			May need additional funding
<b>9. Manage the Memorial Arboretum</b>											
Monitor the tree stock in accordance with the tree safety policy	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day			Ninesprings	
Maintain database of memorial plantings	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	0.5 day				
Organise replacement trees or plaques as necessary	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	0.5 day				
Monitor the grass cutting regime as part of the RMC	R & CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day				
Deal with enquiries from the public	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day				
<b>10. Management of Ninesprings Meadows</b>											
Cut meadows & remove arisings once per annum - September	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 days + £1000	Contractors		Ninesprings	
Cut meadows in early spring if required & remove arisings– Feb - March	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day + £750	Contractors Volunteers			
Sow yellow rattle seed across meadows – September - October	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day +£200	Volunteers			
Use of locally sourced green hay to increase biodiversity -	R		✓		✓		2 days + £500	Ham Hill SWT FoYCP			
Plant plug plants to improve biodiversity	R			✓		✓	2 days +£250	Volunteers FoYCP			May need additional funding
Fence area under large oak to prevent public access	R	✓	✓				2 days +£500				
<b>11. Management of Ninesprings lake &amp; pond</b>											
Remove a third of reeds from the centre of the lake, particularly the channel that feeds into the pond annually – October & November	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day	Volunteers		Ninesprings	

Remove two thirds of aquatic weed from pond annually – October & November	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day	Volunteers			
Manage lake edge vegetation & remove tree saplings – October – March	R		✓		✓		1 day	Volunteers			
Strim nettles on island – September – March	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day				
Erect signs to advise people of spawning frogs & toads – February - March	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					
<b>12. Manage Foundry House Stream</b>											
Cut back emergent vegetation twice per annum – November and July	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 days	Volunteers	Ninesprings		
Strim bankside nettles to prevent overspill onto shared path x3 annually – April - October	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	3 days				
Rotovate & reseed small grassland area to improve biodiversity	R		✓				3 days				
Cut & remove grass annually – September – October	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 days	Volunteers			
Ensure grate that feeds water into the stream, at the Ninesprings Weir, is cleared out periodically & particularly after high water levels have dropped	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	4 days	YRCT			
<b>13. Manage Penn Hill</b>											
<u>Lower Penn Hill</u>											
Sow wildflower seed on lower slopes of Penn Hill – September	R		✓	✓			1 day + £200	Volunteers FoYCP	Penn Hill		
Allow grass to grow long on section between trees & Brunswick street. Cut & remove annually - September	R & CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 days + £300	Env Services team			Make changes to RMC
Support Yeovil Artspace to create an Art Trail linking the Octagon Theatre and Ninesprings	CM	✓	✓	✓	✓		5 days + £1000	FoYCP Yeovil Artspace Octagon Theatre			
Manage the shrub bed around the Millenium Bench – remove willows & add new shrubs – January - March	R	✓	✓	✓			2 days + £150	Env Services team			Managed as part of RMC
Reduce scrub to rear of Maltravers car park. Replant with hazel & bulbs – October - March	R		✓	✓	✓		2 days +£300	FoYCP Volunteers			
Ensure area rear of car park is kept strimmed as part of RMC – April - September	CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day	Env Services team			Managed as part of RMC

Reduce scrub & wild clematis in shrub beds. Replant with small native species, bulbs & woodland wildflowers – October - March	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5 days + £500	Volunteers FoYCP		May need additional funding	
Manage memorial tree plantings as appropriate	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day				
<u>Community Wildlife Garden</u>											
Prepare ground and replant with wildflowers and bulbs – September & October	R	✓	✓				3 days + £400	Volunteers FoYCP	Penn Hill	Wessex Water funded	
Weed paths & lay down new chippings – May - September	R	✓	✓				2 days				
Rebuild bug hotel	R	✓					0.5 days				
Repair pond liner, remove unwanted vegetation, plant macrophytes	R	✓					1 day				
Erect new wildlife boxes	R	✓					1 day				
Manage grassland with a cut & remove annually – September	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 days	Volunteers			
Strim path edges – April -September	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day				
<u>Orchard &amp; allotment meadow</u>											
Monitor apple trees & replace as necessary	R		✓		✓		1 day		Penn Hill		
Lay hedge every 7 – 10 years – November – March	R			✓	✓		3 days	Volunteers			
Cut & remove grass from meadow annually - September	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 days				Managed as part of RMC
Cut circular path around meadows 6x per year – April - September	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	3 days				Managed as part of RMC
<u>Gardens adjacent to Penn House</u>											
Replant Headway Garden with sensory shrubs and herbs – March & April	R	✓	✓	✓			2 days £300	Volunteers FoYCP	Penn Hill	May need additional funding	
Weed Headway Garden 4x per annum – April - September	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	4 days	Volunteers			

Plant bulbs & woodland flowers in shrub beds September & October	R		✓	✓				3 days £300	Volunteers FoYCP			May need additional funding	
Reduce scrub at entrance to St Nicholas Close & open up sightlines	R		✓	✓				2 days	Volunteers				
Work with property services to repair wall on Penn Hill	CM	✓	✓					2 days £4000	Ecological Consultants Property services CG Fry			May need additional funding	
<b>14. Management of grasslands at Wyndham and Summerhouse Hill</b>													
Ensure grasslands are grazed with cattle in accordance with Countryside Stewardship agreement	R & CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		1 day	Wyndham Summerhouse	Tenant farmer			
Ensure grazing agreement in place for grazing rights at Yeovil Country Park	CM						✓	1 day	Wyndham Summerhouse				
Tenant farmer to top thistles annually - July	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		1 day	Wyndham Summerhouse	Tenant farmer			
<b>15. Management of reedbed at Riverside</b>													
Cut & remove 30% of reeds on rotation, every 7 years – October - February	R		✓					2 days	Volunteers	Riverside			
Cut back 80% willow regrowth every two years – October – February	R	✓		✓		✓		1 day	Volunteers				
Divert drainage channel to increase water levels across reedbed	R	✓	✓					2 days	Volunteers				
Clear pond & cut back scrub – annually – September - November	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		1 day	Volunteers				
Plant pond with macrophytes to increase diversity	R		✓	✓				1 day + £200	Volunteers				May need additional funding
<b>16. Management of flood plain meadow at Riverside</b>													
Reduce mown paths to allow central core to connect	CM	✓						1 day		Riverside		Change RMC	
Ensure circular perimeter path is mown to aid visitors – annually as part of RMC	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		1 day					Managed as part of RMC
Remove or treat invasive species – ragwort by 50% & giant hogweed 100% - April - September	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		1 day	Volunteers				Rangers to have PA1 & 6 training
<b>17. Conserve Veteran Trees</b>													
Identify & map locations of trees on XMAP	R & CM	✓	✓					2 days		All			

Create tree management programmes for veteran trees with regards to safeguarding & managed decay	R & CM		✓	✓				2 days		All		
<b>18. Manage deadwood in woodlands</b>												
Retain standing deadwood if safe and practicable	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		1 day	Volunteers	All		
Habitat pile and leave fallen deadwood in-situ	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		1 day	Volunteers	All		
Habitat pile and leave in-situ proportion of brash following cutting	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		3 days	Volunteers	All		
Habitat pile larger timber where hibernacula provision required	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		2 days	Volunteers	All		
<b>19. Retain scrub in appropriate areas to contribute to habitat diversity</b>												
Cut gorse on Summerhouse Hill every 3-5 years on rotation to promote thicker growth – October - March	R	✓				✓		2 days	Volunteers	Summerhouse		
Strim bramble growth around new tree plantings to allow trees to establish – October - March	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		2 days		Southwoods, Ninesprings		
Strim approximately 30% of bramble on rotation under power lines annually – October - March	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		1 day		Riverside		
<b>20. Maintain condition of river within practical constraints</b>												
Carry out litter picks of Dodham Brook and the Lake area annually – May - September	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		1 day	YRCT Volunteers	Ninesprings		
Monitor erosion at Riverside – particularly around the railway bridge	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		0.5 days	EA Network Rail	Riverside		
Report significant erosion to the EA & Network Rail	CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		0.5 days	EA Network Rail	Riverside		
Monitor weir & level of water at bottom of Wyndham Hill & report any concerns	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		0.5 days	EA	Wyndham		
Arrange for bank stabilisation work to take place when applicable, in agreement with the EA	R & CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		1 day	Contractors	Riverside		
<b>21. Reduce use of chemicals where possible</b>												
Use spot treatment for invasive, non-native or injurious species only when necessary – April - September	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		5 days		All		
Reduce use of chemicals on paths	CM	✓						1 day	Environmental Services	Ninesprings Riverside		Amend RMC for 2023/24

22. Ensure the land is managed in accordance with the Countryside Stewardship agreement										
Ensure appropriate grazing regime and stocking density is adhered to by tenant farmer	R & CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			Summerhouse Wyndham	
Plant new hedges in accordance with agreement	R	✓	✓				2 days	Volunteers	Summerhouse	
Lay hedges in accordance with agreement	R	✓	✓				2 days	Volunteers	Wyndham	
23. Manage Dodham Brook in conjunction with the Yeovil Rivers Community Trust										
Meet officers from YRCT regularly throughout the Dodham Brook Project as part of the project steering group	R & CM	✓					2 days		Ninesprings	
Assist officers from YRCT with transportation & other logistical needs where required	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day		Ninesprings	
Ensure the project delivers on its outcomes as defined in the GRCF application	CM	✓					1 day		Ninesprings	
Agree a 10-year maintenance licence with YRCT from June 2023	CM	✓					1 day	SSDC Legal team	Ninesprings	

TASK	WHO	WHEN?					Resources required (time & money per annum)	PARTNERS	RELEVANT COMPARTMENTS	COMPLETED	COMMENTS
		23	24	25	26	27					
<b>Aim 2: Ensure Yeovil Country Park delivers as a recreational facility for the public</b>											
<b>24. Enable visitors to discover Yeovil Country Park</b>											
Ensure site entrances are welcoming, clear and informative. Clean annually & ensure poster displays are up to date	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	3 days		All		
Improve signage at A30/Flushing Meadow junction directing visitors to Riverside	R & CM			✓			5 days & £200	Pittards	Riverside		
Develop and maintain offsite references to Country Park e.g. town literature	CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day	Yeovil Town Council			
Promote the new interpretation centre at Ninesprings Café as a focal point for visitors	CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day	Tourism Team FoYCP			
Promote & distribute new leaflets throughout South Somerset & beyond	R & CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day	Tourism Team FoYCP			
Ensure directional information & leaflets are available on the Visit South Somerset website	CM	✓ <input type="checkbox"/>	✓ <input type="checkbox"/>	✓ <input type="checkbox"/>	✓ <input type="checkbox"/>	✓ <input type="checkbox"/>	1 day				
Ensure the Explore Yeovil Country Park leaflet is kept in stock & on display in Ninesprings Café	R & CM	✓ <input type="checkbox"/>	✓ <input type="checkbox"/>	✓ <input type="checkbox"/>	✓ <input type="checkbox"/>	✓ <input type="checkbox"/>	1 day & £2000				
Ensure that the interpretation activities and displays in Ninesprings Café are kept in working order	R	✓ <input type="checkbox"/>	✓ <input type="checkbox"/>	✓ <input type="checkbox"/>	✓ <input type="checkbox"/>	✓ <input type="checkbox"/>	3 days	Café staff			

Ensure the display in the cabinet in Ninesprings Café is updated regularly to showcase Heritage, art of wildlife items of interest relevant to the country park.	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5 days	Café staff SSHC			
<b>25. Maintain paths in a good state of repair</b>											
Regular leaf blowing in the autumn months on surfaced paths x 6 per annum	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6 days & £200	Volunteers	All		
Maintain grass paths through regular mowing	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5 days & £500	Environmental Services	All		Scheduled in the RMC
Clear lovers lane path x2 per annum - January & September	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 days	Volunteers	Ninesprings		
Clear stone paved paths in Valley Gardens x 4 per annum – April, July, October & December	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	4 days	Volunteers	Ninesprings		
Check bank stabilisation in Valley Gardens & erect borads to reduce landslips as necessary - annually	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day & £200	Volunteers	Ninesprings		
Check paths for animals holes & fill as they occur	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day		All		
Strim path edges to prevent vegetation encroachment – April – October	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5 days		All		
Ensure prominent roots are cut back & path resurfaced on shared path	R	✓				✓	4 days & £2000	Contractors Tree officer	Ninesprings		
<b>26. Keep the site free of rubbish</b>											
Twice weekly litter picks and bin emptying, three times per week in school summer holidays	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	150 days		All		
Support of volunteers carrying out litter picks	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day	Volunteers	All		
Maintain two minute litter pick station & ensure it is stationed outside Ninesprings Café daily	R & Café staff	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day		Ninesprings Café		
Support community litter pick days	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day		All		
<b>27. Ensure the site is safe for visitors</b>											
Inspect all structures – annually on XMAP	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	3 days		All		

Deliver repairs as required	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	£500		All		
Jet wash wooden bridges and pond dip platform x2 annually – November & April	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 days	Volunteers	All		
Coat wooden art sculptures in Danish oil – annually in April/May	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	£100	Volunteers	All		
Inspect trees along paths or within high risk areas & record on XMAP annually - September	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5 days		All		
Deliver tree safety works as determined by tree safety survey – October - March	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	10 days	Arboriculture contractors Volunteers	All		
Inspect natural play areas – weekly	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	21 days				
Carry out repairs to natural play areas as required	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5 days	Volunteers			
Carry out annual risk assessment reviews – March/April	CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 days	Ranger Team			
Re-launch Park Watch Scheme	R & CM	✓					2 days				
Ensure Park Watch signs are up to date and erected at relevant areas around the country park	R	✓		✓		✓	3 days				
Host two Park Watch meetings per annum at Yeovil Country Park	R & CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 days				
Maintain sightlines, particularly for CCTV or in high risk areas	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 days				
Ensure all incidents of ASB are logged with SSDC & the Police on 101.	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 days	Police			
Maintain an incident log using XMAP.	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	3 days				
Work with internal community safety team to report & prevent ASB in the country park	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	3 days	Community Safety team			

28. Encourage responsible dog ownership										
Provide dog waste bins in relevant locations across the Country Park	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day & £300 per bin		All	
Empty bins twice per week, three times during summer school holidays	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	75 days		Entire site	
Maintain close working relationship with SC enforcement & locality officers	R + CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		Locality officers Enforcement officer	Entire site	
Maintain good relationship with regular dog walkers	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			Entire Site	
Ensure No Dogs Zone is signposted at gate entrances	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day			
Deliver education campaigns about responsible dog ownership in the country park – when necessary	R & CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day	Locality officers Enforcement officer		
29. Promote and maintain access for all										
Ensure All Ability access trail is in print & available online & in local tourism outlets	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day £500			
Investigate tramper hire scheme through Countryside Mobility	CM			✓	✓		1 day	Shop Mobility Countryside Mobility FoYCP		
Continue to offer Monday volunteering sessions to those with SEN or physical health disabilities	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	52 days		All	
Deliver free public events where funding/budget allows	R & CHO	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	£250	FoYCP		
Programme in one bat walk for people with mental or physical health needs	CM & CHO	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day		Ninesprings	
Rangers & café staff to receive 'Dementia Friendly' training	CM		✓		✓		1 day	Alzheimer's Society		

<b>30. Successfully manage different user groups</b>											
Ensure Share the Space signs are maintained on the shared path.	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day & £100		All	
Use social media & face to face discussions to educate visitors on shared use of the country park	R + CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	3 days			
<b>31. Promote healthy living schemes in the Country Park and use of the wider countryside</b>											
Re-brand and re-launch the Blackburn Fitness Trail Leaflet	R + CM			✓	✓			5 days £4000			Dependent on external funding
Ensure orienteering markers are in-situ & course is available for download on the VSS website – annual check	R + CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 days	Quantock Orienteers	All	
Promote 321 running trail on VSS & social media	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day			
Support external fitness events to use the country park as a location	CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day	Goldenstones Leisure Centre		
Support Park Yoga to be held in the country park annually	R + CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	17 days £1500	FoYCP Lunasana Yoga	Ninesprings	
Support commercial activities in the country park such as Squats & Tots	R + CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day		Ninesprings	
Develop permit system for commercial activities in the country park	CM			✓	✓			2 days			
Work with Ninesprings Café to offer tracker packs for hire	CM		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day	Ninesprings Cafe		
<b>32. Maintain all boundaries in a safe and attractive fashion</b>											
Carry out fence repairs where necessary	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	4 days £500	Volunteers	All	
Replace internal chestnut cleft as and when necessary	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 days £300	Volunteers	Ninesprings	
Manage hedgerows for biodiversity value and re-lay where necessary – November - March	R	✓					✓	3 days	Volunteers	Penn Hill Ninesprings Riverside Wyndham Hill	Countryside Stewardship

Arrange annual hedge laying training days – February/March	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 days	Volunteers & public	Ninesprings		
<b>33. Manage and reduce erosion across the site</b>											
Manage larger areas of erosion with rock filled gabions – as required	R		✓		✓			Contractor	Ninesprings Riverside		
Removal of laurel in valley gardens to encourage a ground flora to develop and stabilise the steep banks – October - March	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	4 days	Volunteers	Ninesprings		
Monitor soil erosion on Wyndham escarpment adjacent to cycle path	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day		Wyndham Hill		
Maintain erosion panels in Ninesprings – Valley Garden	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day		Ninesprings		
<b>34. Apply for Green Flag award annually</b>											
Apply for the Green Flag Award annually – January	CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day £500	Keep Britain Tidy			
Support the rangers to become Green Flag judges & remain active	CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5 days	Keep Britain Tidy			
Ensure the management plan is kept updated every 5 years	CM					✓	10 days	Rangers			
<b>35. Support the Yeovil In Bloom application</b>											
Support the Yeovil in Bloom team by meeting the judges for a tour around the country park - July	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day	Environmental Services, YiB team			
Apply for the Best Park award annually	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day	FoYCP			
Support the Friends of Yeovil Country Park with a site visit from the judges annually	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day	FoYCP			
<b>36. Manage the Routine Maintenance Contract (RMC) with Environmental Services</b>											
Cutting of amenity grassland areas of YCP in line with agreed maintenance plan	R + CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	£10,000	Environmental services	All		
Review RMC annually with budgets and best practice in mind	R + CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day	Environmental services			

Meet quarterly to assess progress and highlight problems	R + CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day	Environmental services			
<b>37. Undertake annual maintenance of play area car park</b>											
Fill potholes in car park	R	✓		✓		✓	£1000 2 days	Volunteers	Ninesprings		
Line marking for ice cream van to be maintained	R	✓		✓		✓	£500 1day	Contactors	Ninesprings		
Submit capital bid for car park improvements	CM		✓	✓	✓		£20,000 1day	Contactors	Ninesprings		
<b>38. Provide suitable natural play areas</b>											
Maintain natural play features in the Woodland Play Zone and Riverside Play Trail	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	£200 4 days				
Expand forest school area and install shelter for all weather use	R & CHO	✓	✓				£1000 3 days				
Add new features to the Riverside Play Trail	R	✓	✓				£300 5 days				
Inspect natural play areas weekly & record on XMAP	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	20 days				
Develop ideas for natural play features outside of Ninesprings Café	R & CM			✓	✓		5 days				

TASK	WHO	WHEN?					Resources required (time & money per annum)	PARTNERS	RELEVANT COMPARTMENTS	COMPLETED	COMMENTS
		23	24	25	26	27					
<b><i>Aim 3: Provide more opportunities and support for a wider range of people to become involved</i></b>											
<b>39. Continue to run weekly practical conservation volunteer groups</b>											
Deliver a weekly practical volunteering session every Thursday	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	£1000 52 days		All		
Deliver a weekly practical volunteering session every Monday, for those with physical disabilities or SEN	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	£500 26 days		Ninesprings & Penn Hill		
Deliver Wednesday practical tasks days as required	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	£100 25 days		All		
<b>40. Support and assist the Friends of Yeovil Country Park</b>											
Attend Friends meetings as and when they occur	R, CHO & CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	8 days	FoYCP			
Support the Friends in writing grant applications	R, CHO & CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	3 days	FoYCP			
Support the Friends with general fundraising activities	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	3 days	FoYCP			
Support the Friends to deliver projects at Yeovil Country Park	R & CHO	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	10 days	FoYCP			
Increase the profile of the Friends through social media, website and on-site promotion	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 days	FoYCP			
Assist the Friends in building their own website – providing content and advice	CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 days	FoYCP			

<b>41. Develop new volunteering opportunities at Yeovil Country Park</b>										
Recruit volunteers to help with wildlife surveys	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	3 days			
Establish Roaming Ranger scheme – recruit volunteers to scheme	R	✓	✓	✓			3 days			
<b>42. Provide diverse training and development opportunities for volunteers</b>										
Provide training for conservation techniques such as coppicing or tree felling	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5 days			
Deliver in-house training days when appropriate such as dry stone walling or hedgelaying	R	✓		✓		✓	2 days	Dry stone walling association	Ham Hill team Chard Ranger	
Provide in-house chipper training for competent volunteers	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day			
Arrange specialist training for volunteers as required and appropriate e.g. ATV, brushcutter	R & CM		✓			✓	2 days £1000	External training providers		
Provide wildlife identification & survey training opportunities for volunteers	R & CM	✓	✓			✓	2 days £250	Butterfly Conservation Bumblebee Conservation Trust Somerset Bat Group		
Provide conflict resolution training to volunteers	R & CM		✓	✓			1 day £100	External training provider		
<b>43. Maintain South Somerset Countryside Steering Group</b>										
Create annual service plan linked to corporate aims and objectives	CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 days			
Ensure membership of SSCSG is updated and reflects the groups & stakeholders involved at all sites	CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day			
Create update reports twice annually	CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 days			

Hold two meetings annually	CM & R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 days				
<b>44. Apprenticeship, volunteering &amp; work experience placements</b>											
Support Year 10 work experience placements	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5 days	Local schools			
Support college industry placements	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	40 days	KMC Bridgwater College Bicton College			
As budgets allow, reintroduce the apprenticeship scheme at YCP in conjunction with Kingston Maurward College.	CM & R			✓	✓	✓	10 days & £10,000	KMC			
<b>45. Promote Yeovil Country Park for Tourism</b>											
Develop a strong web presence on the Visit South Somerset pages	CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5 days	SSDC Tourism			
Maintain social media feeds with regular updates	R & CHO	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	15 days				
Create online links to similar organisations and partners	CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	3 days	SSDC Tourism			
Promotion of YCP from the TIC at Cartgate roundabout on the A303	CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	3 days	SSDC Tourism			
<b>46. Offer feedback opportunities from site users and the community, acting on this</b>											
Carry out biennial visitor survey	R		✓		✓		2 days	Volunteers			
Further develop presence of ranger team to offer front line service using Ninesprings Café as a point of contact between public and rangers	R + CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day	Volunteers FoYCP			
Include feedback mechanisms with all events and analyse annually in Nov	R + CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	£100				
Provide feedback slips in café for café & country park comments	R & Café staff	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	£100	Ninesprings Cafe			
<b>47. Support community groups and actively engage and work with under-represented sections of the community</b>											
Deliver and attend events that cater for different groups of people	R & CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	3 days £500	Community Council for Somerset			Yeovil Together Grant fund

Continue to deliver opportunities for underrepresented groups to be involved at YCP	R & CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	4 days £1000	Community Council for Somerset			Grant funding
<b>48. Support the work and funding of the Community Heritage Officer</b>											
Assist with funding applications to the Friends	R & CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	3 days	Rangers & manager FoYCP			
Assist with large group activities or public events	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	3 days	Rangers FoYCP			
Assist with funding grants	CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	4 days	Manager			
<b>49. Develop art and performance opportunities within the park</b>											
Work with the team at the Octagon Theatre to provide space for outdoor performances.	R + CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 days £500	Octagon Theatre	Ninesprings and Penn Hill		
Offer space to local schools and colleges for performing arts shows	R + CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		Yeovil College Secondary schools	Ninesprings and Penn Hill		
Look for opportunities to expand public art in the country park	R & CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	4 days £2000	FoYCP Yeovil Arts Space			Dependent on funding/ sponsorship
Maintain art features within the country park	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 days				
Ensure any new art features are added to 'Art in the Park' trail leaflet when re-prints are due	CM		✓			✓	2 days £500	Rocketbox			
<b>50. Host events arranged by external organisations</b>											
Support applications from external organisations	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day				
Work with events organisers to plan event & create event management plan	R & CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 days				
Assist with promotion of event	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day				
Assist with the event on the day, if agreed in advance	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day				

TASK	WHO	WHEN?					Resources required (time & money per annum)	PARTNERS	RELEVANT COMPARTMENTS	COMPLETED	COMMENTS
		23	24	25	26	27					
<b>Aim 4: Increase awareness, understanding &amp; knowledge</b>											
<b>51. Deliver an annual promotion plan</b>											
Effectively utilise notice boards for onsite communication	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	3 days				
Post regular updates and blogs on social media channels – at least once per week, and reply to messages or comments in a timely manner	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	104 days				
Keep website updated with events, news and projects	CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	12 days	SC tourism			
Arrange press releases for bigger news items	R & CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	4 days	Comms team			
<b>52. Run a diverse annual programme of events that cater to a wider audience with many providing opportunities for informal learning</b>											
Develop and deliver an activity and events programme suitable for a wide variety of ages and abilities	R, CM & CHO	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	£2000 12 days				
Deliver 2 large trails per annum; Spring Trail and Halloween Trail	R & CHO	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	£500 4 days	FoYCP	NS		
Continue to offer self-led themed trails throughout the year	R & CHO	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	£300 3 days				
Promote events through social media, website, CHO mailing list & on-site posters	R & CHO	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 days				

53. Promote opportunities and resources for formal learning												
Promote the education pack to local schools	CHO	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 days	Yeovil Schools Federation			
Make resources available online - education pack	CM	✓					✓	2 days				
Increase the use of both Riverside Walk and Park for teaching and activities	R & CHO	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					
Deliver curriculum based sessions to schools	CHO	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	20 days				
Deliver Forest School sessions to schools, pre-schools and other youth groups	CHO & R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	10 days				
Support staff that wish to undertake their Forest School training & gain their qualification	CM	✓	✓				✓	10 days £3500				
Seek grant funding to offer free activities to schools	CHO & CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	4 days	FoYCP			
54. The ranger team to develop a stronger presence amongst the public												
Maintain YCP social media pages & respond promptly to messages	R, CHO & CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	60 days	Volunteer			
Ensure that rangers wear branded uniform and actively engage with visitors to remain approachable	R + CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	All working days				
Ninesprings Café to act as a point of contact & for feedback to the rangers	Café staff	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	All working days				
55. Participate in regional and national environmental education projects and schemes												
Seek to host wildlife surveying initiatives e.g. butterfly and bee transects	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	3 days	SWT BBCT BC RSPB			
Allow regional and national wildlife charities to promote at YCP events	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5 days	SWT BBCT BC RSPB			

TASK	WHO	WHEN?					Resources required (time & money per annum)	PARTNERS	RELEVANT COMPARTMENTS	COMPLETED	COMMENTS
		23	24	25	26	27					
<b>Aim 5: Achieve future financial sustainability</b>											
<b>56. Seek corporate sponsorship opportunities</b>											
Develop corporate sponsorship package	CM	✓	✓				4 days	Communication team at SC			
Promote corporate sponsorship package to local businesses	CM		✓	✓	✓	✓	4 days				
Manage sponsorship package	CM & R		✓	✓	✓	✓	10 days				
<b>57. Ensure current site licences are maintained</b>											
Put ice cream licence out to tender	CM	✓		✓			3 days	Procurement			
Ensure tenant farmer is invoiced for grazing rights	CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day				
Ensure ice cream licence is maintained	CM & R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 days	Legal			
<b>58. Develop activity permits</b>											
Create a system of activity permits for commercial activities using the country park as a venue	CM		✓	✓			2 days				
Manage permit system	CM		✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day				
<b>59. Promote Ninesprings Cafe</b>											

Maintain online presence of Ninesprings Café on VSS website	CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 days	Tourism team			
Promote & share posts on social media	CM & R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	10 days	Ninesprings Café staff			
Deliver events that start and finish at Ninesprings Cafe	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	4 days				
<b>60. Extend range of sale items in cafe</b>											
Develop range of bespoke items for sale in Ninesprings Cafe	CM & R			✓	✓	✓	10 days £5000	External designer			May be dependent on café extension
Promote items for sale on website and on social media	CM & R			✓	✓	✓	10 days	Tourism			
Sell items through the website	CM				✓	✓	5 days	VSS administrators			
Create additional display space within café for items to sell	CM & R				✓	✓	5 days	Property services			
<b>61. Support Friends with grant funding applications</b>											
Develop appropriate projects or activities for the country park	R, CM & CHO	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5 days	FoYCP			
Assist Friends with the application process	R, CM & CHO	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5 days	FoYCP			
Assist Friends with record keeping for the grant claim	R & CHO	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5 days	FoYCP			
Deliver the activities under the grant purposes to time and within budget	R, CM & CHO	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	10 days	FoYCP			
<b>62. Continue to ensure YCP delivers as a destination for Yeovil Town</b>											
Contribute to promotional material as required by YTC or tourism partners	CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	3 days	FoYCP			
Deliver an annual presentation to YTC - April	CM, CHO & R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 day				

## **11.0 The future of Yeovil Country Park**

From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023, South Somerset District Council will cease to exist as local authority and will be replaced with one unitary council for Somerset, as part of a local government reorganisation.

Under the new Somerset Council, Yeovil Country Park and its managing ranger team will remain with the Countryside Service sitting within a new Climate and Place Directorate and as part of the Environment, Climate and Sustainability service. Somerset Council's commitment to the natural environment, ecological emergency and heritage is clear from the high level structure that places climate and cultural services at its core.