

Witton Dene Local Nature Reserve (LNR)

What is special?

Witton Dene is a steep-sided wooded dene close to the village of Witton Gilbert. It is an oasis for wildlife within a mosaic of arable land and built-up areas. The steep sides have probably prevented it from being cleared for pasture and as a result trees have survived for hundreds of years. Some of the mature beech trees which form part of the field boundaries have been there since 1828. There are also lots of old holly trees. Did you know that the higher leaves aren't as prickly because they are out of reach of hungry animals and do not need as much protection.

A circular walk enables you to take in most of the Dene. The lower path follows the course of the Dene Burn southwards. An upper path branches uphill near the pond and rejoins the lower path just before the metal bridge over the stream. The southern end of the site runs adjacent to what was once a leper hospital, and is now a farm house, and to the Churchyard of St Michael and All Angels. Parts of this church date from the twelfth century.

Although Witton Dene is a small site it has plenty to offer. It has a really impressive bird population with more than 40 different species recorded. Whatever time of day you visit you're sure to hear them; from the sweet melody of song birds to the hoots of an owl. Some, like the grey wagtail, are winter visitors while the swift, swallow and housemartin swoop in during the summer months. Birds of prey can be seen all year and include barn owl, tawny owl, kestrel and sparrowhawk.

[more info...](#)

Contact the Countryside Service

telephone: 0191 372 9100

email: countryside@durham.gov.uk

www.durham.gov.uk/countryside



Area: 5.4 acres (2.2 hectares)

Grid Reference: NZ 234 454

Map: Ordnance Survey Explorer 308

Directions:

Approx 3 miles northwest of Durham City centre.

From the A691 at Witton Gilbert, turn onto the B6312 (Front Street) then south onto Coach Lane. Go over the road bridge. The site access is ahead approximately 150 metres

Nearest postcode for GPS purposes DH7 6SU

Parking:

There are two parking areas on the main access road, one half-way and one at the end by the church lych-gate. No disabled parking bays

Public Transport:

Service numbers 13, 14, 15, 15a, x25 (Go North East) and 754 (Arriva) to Front Street

Dogs:

Allowed under control and on a lead during bird nesting season (March to August). Please clean up after your dog

Designation:

Local Wildlife Site, Ancient Woodland

Suitable for:

Walkers, wheelchair users (in parts)

Habitats:

Grassland, scrub, woodland, running water, ponds



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Several species of birds, including pheasant, pied wagtail and willow warbler, nest on the ground while chiff-chaff, reed bunting and yellowhammer nest low in the hedgerow. All of these birds are vulnerable to being disturbed by dogs and people; so please keep your dogs under close control and keep to the paths during the breeding season.

The meadow to the north of the site is maturing and in June, July and August you should see campion, ladies bedstraw, poppy, ox-eye daisy and the tiny blue speedwell. Look out for primroses and wild daffodils in spring, and later for carpets of bluebells and foxgloves. Look out for signs of field mice and shrew and in spring for migrating frogs heading to the wetlands to spawn.

This site is run in partnership with the Friends of Witton Dene, a community group who formed to restore and enhance the site. The group have carried out most of the practical work on site, created information panels and sourced funding.

The Chair of the Friends group can be contacted on 0191 371 8098.

Accessibility statement

The circular route has typically undulating woodland paths. The lower path is flatter and approximately 1.4 metres wide, although sections in the hillside are much narrower. The upper path is narrower in parts. Both paths are unsurfaced and can be muddy. An old fallen tree blocks the upper path but it can be climbed over. There are a number of slopes and steps throughout the site and only those that are particularly steep are marked on the map. A surfaced path leads to the pond dipping platform and the meadow. This path is 1.2 metres wide with a hard unsealed surface.



Pheasant



Frogs



Primrose



Oxeye Daisy



Chiffchaffs



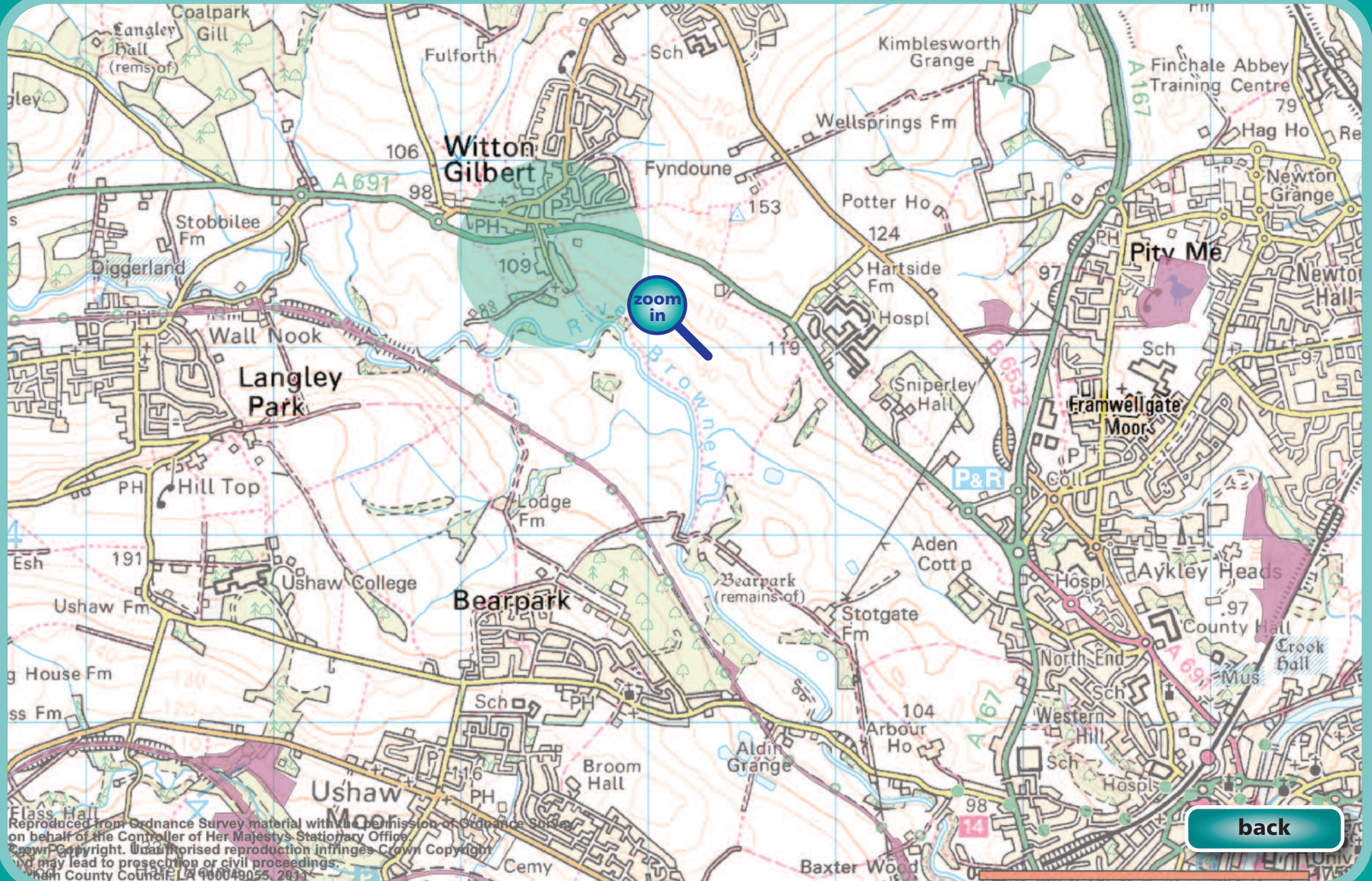
Grey Wagtail



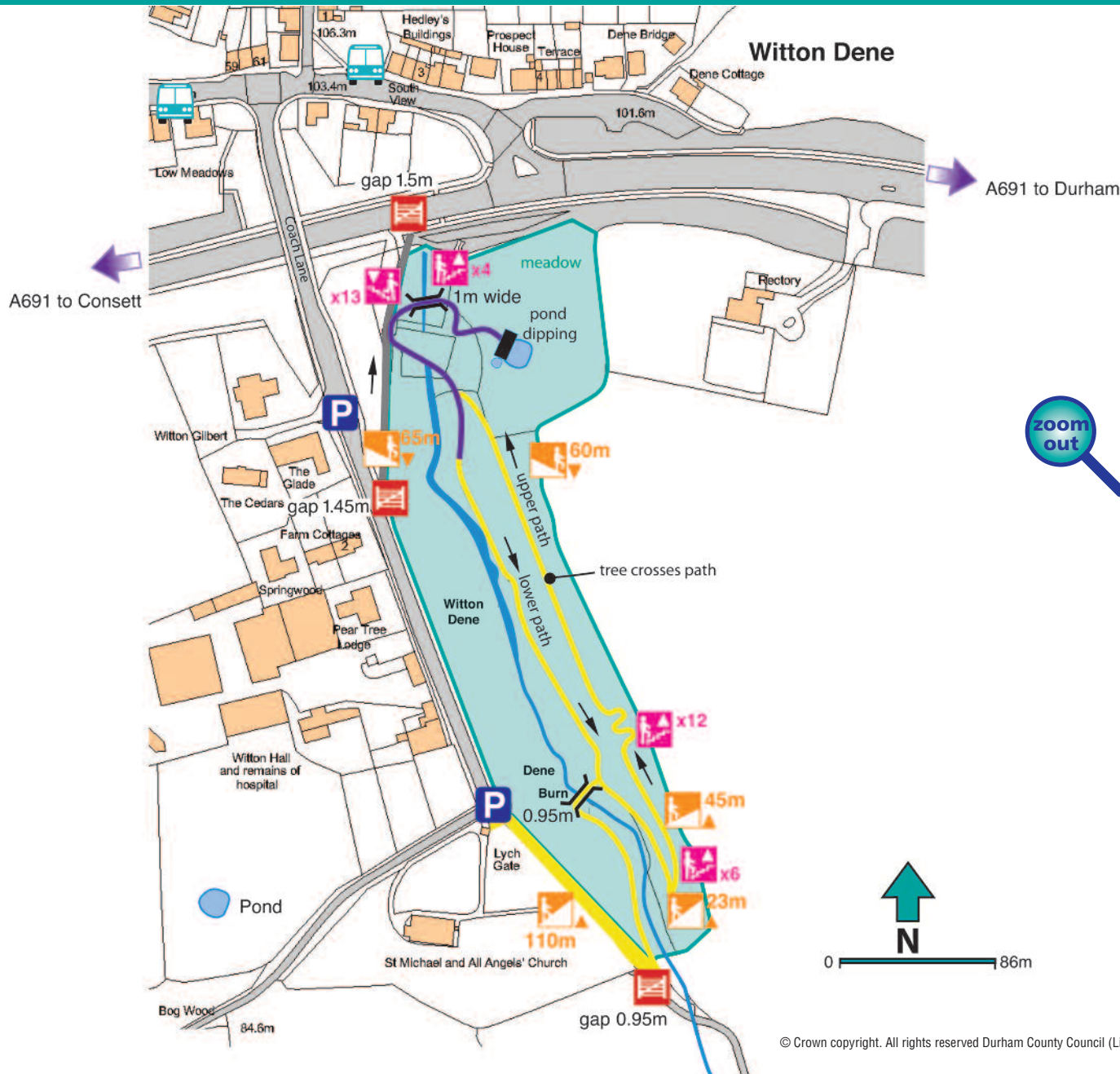
Poppy

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KEY

- Gate
- Steep Slope Up 1:10-1:10
- Medium Slope Up 1:20-1:10
- Medium Slope Down 1:20-1:10
- Steps Up
- Steps Down
- Parking
- Bus Stop
- Hard Sealed Surface/
Easy Access Route
- Bare Earth
- Hard Unsealed Surface
- Direction of Travel
- Bridge

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