

POLICY

We will allow access to picnic sites, nature trails, footpaths and permissive paths. Access to bird hides and for special interest groups is available by permit. Historic buildings may be visited on Open Days and by arrangement.

Open days

Twenty two public open days were held during 2008 at the Blagdon Visitor Centre. These events attracted around 12,000 visitors. Below is a summary of what was on offer.

Discovery Days at the Blagdon Visitor Centre

4th May – 28th September 2-5pm

Blagdon Beam Engine and Visitor Centre

The centre is based around the magnificent Beam Engines that are housed in the imposing gothic styled pumping station. Originally these giants used steam power to pump up to 7.5 million gallons of Blagdon Lake's water each day to Bristol for treatment. In 1949 the steam era ended at Blagdon as the engines in one hall were removed and more efficient electric pumps were put in as replacements. Fortunately, the other hall was not needed and two engines were left. In later years an electric motor was installed in one allowing it run again much like it did in its heyday. The hall itself has three levels allowing visitors to see the engine in detail at every level. The boiler house behind the beam engine hall is where the large visitor centre is located. All the rooms have different themes including demonstrations and exhibitions covering every aspect of water supply. **Yesterday's Water** includes a display on how Victorian engineers set about supplying the city of Bristol with good clean water and there is even an old medieval 'trunk main' made of elm that once took water down Park Street. The **Lake Room** is all about the wildlife and nature conservation around the lake and **Today's Water** brings you the modern side of water treatment, highlighting the technology that helps the water industry today. Hands-on displays and touchscreens show how water is collected, treated and distributed to homes and factories, hospitals and schools in our area. The **Water Saving Room** provides tips and practical advice on how to use water wisely in the home and garden and the **WaterAid Room** uses an African village setting to explain the work done by the water industry charity to bring clean water and sanitation to the parts of India and Africa where it cannot be taken for granted.

Outside there are acres of well-kept grounds to explore with many picnic tables. Across the spillway in Discovery Wood there is a nature trail where kids can fill in our quiz form that tests their nature spotting skills in identifying the different trees and wildlife which are there in such abundance.

Blagdon is also famous for its trout fishing, and what were once suction tanks supplying water to the steam boilers are now used as rearing pools for the fish

before they are transferred to the lake. During the open days, visitors were able to throw handfuls of fish food and see the water 'boil' as hundreds of trout surge to the surface to be fed.

Water Saving Garden Head Office, Bedminster Down

Open on weekdays throughout the year during office hours

In 1996, to celebrate the company's 150th birthday, a special garden was created. It was built to show how it is possible to have a stunning garden without the need to use much water. This delightful garden is filled with ideas, tips and techniques for all types of garden and displays a profusion of colour all year round despite only ever having been watered through natural rainfall and collected rainwater, even in the hottest weather! How is it done? With drought-tolerant plants and simple water-saving ways which any gardener can use. A leaflet on the garden is available from the main reception.

Talks and tours

During the year we gave 70 talks and tours to groups, clubs and schools throughout our region. This represents 2825 people. These talks covered Bristol Water's work and history as well as the work done by the water industry charity WaterAid. A wide range of different groups were addressed including Probus and Rotary clubs, friendship groups, wildlife groups, gardening clubs and Scout packs. Over half of these talks were given to schools. Schools have the option of having an education officer visit the school and give a talk to the class or they can have a tour of our education facility at the Blagdon Pumping Station and Visitor Centre. This centre has an area specifically designed to cover topics like the Water Cycle, water collection and treatment as well as water saving and other environmental issues. The centre also has a museum and working Victorian Bean Engine as well as access to extensive grounds which includes a nature trail. All the topics discussed and taught are backed-up by a range educational materials which are given to all students to take with them.

All these talks and tours were free of charge. Many of the non-school groups gave a donation to WaterAid as a thank you.

Chew Lake Picnic area and Tea Shop

Chew Valley Lake has two large landscaped picnic areas which are open to the public all year round. There is also an information centre and teashop in picnic area no 1. Two nature trails covering a total of 2.7km - The Grebe and Bittern - are accessible from picnic area no 2. The Grebe is an all weather surface suitable for pushchairs and wheelchairs.

The Bittern Trail forms part of a nature walk on the eastern side of Chew Valley Lake. It passes close to the water's edge running through meadows, alder woodland and reed beds and part lies below top water level and is not passable in periods – usually in winter- when the lake is full.

To extend the period when the trail can be walked the low-lying sections were raised during 2007. The meadow and wood part were raised as a hard gravel path but to maintain the health of the reed bed section it was necessary to allow water to flow under the trail so a raised boardwalk was constructed. Nearly 200m of boardwalk was built and the trail now provides a dryer path with improved views over the reeds to the lake edge where ducks, grebes and other wildfowl can be seen. Another advantage is that walking the trail still gives the experience of being in the middle of a reed bed with a good chance of seeing reed and sedge warblers flitting about amongst the stems. These facilities are used by thousands of visitors during the year. (dogs are also permitted but must be kept on a lead. No swimming is allowed at any of Bristol Water's Lakes)

Cycle Path

At Chew Lake, BW has been working with Sustrans and BANES for some years now to create an extensive cycle path/trail. A fresh planning application will be submitted in the summer of 2009. This will provide for a path from Heron's Green all the way through Woodford, across the dam, through the picnic areas and then out to Bishop Sutton. This will mean that there will then be a path around the vast majority of the lake, with the 'circle' being completed on roads. The only area where we could not allow any path to be created was through/near the nature reserves at the southern end of the lake as it is essential these are protected from disturbance.

Woodford Lodge

Woodford Lodge restaurant and fishing lodge was also a popular destination throughout the year. A 55 seat restaurant provides a range of menus as well as catering for group bookings and weddings. During the season the lodge is also the centre for the lake's fishing activities including major events and competitions.

Cheddar Reservoir

The company allows public access for walks around the perimeter of Cheddar reservoir which covers a distance of just over 3.5 km. There are two free car parks available with access up to the path. In conjunction with Somerset County Council a gate was installed at the Axbridge entrance to give improved access for disabled people.

(Dogs are also permitted but must be kept on a lead. Some further restrictions apply when sheep are grazing. No swimming is allowed at any of Bristol Water's Lakes)

Heritage conservation

The Blagdon beam engines, housed in a listed pumping station, were maintained. One is still in working order running by electricity and is regularly run for visitors at open days and for school visits during the year.

Birdwatching

During the year we issued 460 annual and 436 daily birdwatching permits. These allow access to the reservoir enclosures and to use the access road, paths and the seven bird hides (one of these hides is accessible from the Bittern trail and does not need a permit). These permits are only available to members of recognised ornithological and naturalist societies.