



Town Hall | 61 Newland Street | Witham | Essex | CM8 2FE

OPEN SPACES MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE

AGENDA

TUESDAY 3RD SEPTEMBER 2024, 2:00PM

MEMBERS:	Councillors	B.	Fleet (Chairman)	OFFICERS:	H. Andrews
		P.	Barlow		S. Dyer
		P.	Heath		S. Puckey
		T.	Hewitt		
		R.	Ramage		

CO-OPTEEES:	S.	Black	-	(Witham & Countryside Society)
	J.	Casement	-	(Witham Wombles)
	J.	Goodman (Vice)	-	(Local interests)
	J.	Palombi	-	(CPRE)
	P.	Shuttleworth	-	(Local Wildlife Interests)

1) APOLOGIES

To receive apologies for absence.

2) INTERESTS

To receive any declarations of interest.

3) MINUTES

To receive the minutes of the meeting of the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee held on 4th June 2024 attached at pages 3 to 6.

4) QUESTIONS & STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

An opportunity for members of the press and public present to comment upon any item on the agenda or raise new concerns.

5) CONSIDERATION OF WRITTEN REPRESENTATIONS

To consider any written representations received by the Council.

6) CLERK'S REPORT

To receive the Clerk's Report attached at page 7.

7) OPERATIONS MANAGER'S REPORT

To receive the Operations Manager's verbal report on recent open spaces activities and to answer any questions put by members.

8) STINGING NETTLES ON THE RIVER WALK

To receive a report attached at pages 8 to 9.

9) REVIEW OF THE RIVER WALK MANAGEMENT PLAN

To carry out a review of the River Walk Management Plan to ensure that all desired outcomes are being received and decisions being taken in accordance with these plans - circulated separately.

10) DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR JAMES COOKE WOOD

To receive the revised draft management plan for James Cooke Wood for recommendation to Environment Committee - circulated separately.

11) WITHAM'S RIVERS

To receive a report attached at pages 10 to 12.

12) DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

To note that the next meeting of the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee will be held on Tuesday 3rd December 2024 at 2pm.



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 witham.gov.uk

MINUTES

Meeting of: **Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee**

Date: **4th June 2024**

Present:	Councillors	B	Fleet	(Chairman)
	Co-optees	S.	Black	(Witham and Countryside Society)
		J.	Palombi	(CPRE)
		P.	Shuttleworth	(Local Wildlife Interests)
		J.	Goodman	(Local Interests)
	Officers	H.	Andrews	(Deputy Town Clerk)
		S.	Dyer	(Operations Manager)
		S.	Puckey	(Open Spaces Administrative Assistant)

Darren Tansley from Essex Wildlife Trust was present as an invited guest.

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Cllr Hewitt, Cllr Barlow, Cllr Heath and J Casement. Cllr Ramage was absent.

2. **APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN**

It was **AGREED** that Cllr Barry Fleet be appointed Chairman.

3. **APPOINTMENT OF VICE- CHAIRMAN**

It was **AGREED** that John Goodman be appointed Vice-Chairman.

4. **INTERESTS**

No interests were declared.

5. **MINUTES**

The minutes were **AGREED** and subsequently signed by the Chairman.

6. **QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC**

There were no questions.

7. **CONSIDERATION OF WRITTEN REPRESENTATIONS**

No written representations were received.

8. **CLERK'S REPORT**

The Clerk's report was received by Members. Members were further informed that there was a delay on the A12 widening scheme due to an appeal but the recently installed nature trail would not be affected by the works. Members were further advised that the re-routing of the gas line is not expected to impact Whetmead.

The Deputy Town Clerk assured Members that despite being unsuccessful in a recent grant application, the floating island suggestion for the duck pond would not be forgotten and is on the Potential Open Spaces Improvement Document for Section 106 spending although it has not yet received a formal resolution from the Council to go ahead with this project.

Members **AGREED** to receive the report.

9. **OPERATION MANAGER'S REPORT**

The Operations Manager provided a verbal update.

It is grass cutting season but due to the prolonged rainfall and new mower, the team are having to catch up with their schedule of work. There has been some light hedge cutting, as required, and some trees on the River Walk between Maldon Road and Newland Street have had their crowns raised. A fence has been erected around the recently created bee haven, 2 new benches have been installed close to Luard Way and Armond Road, the sleeper bench close to Ebenezer Close has been replaced while the Witham in Bloom bench has been relocated to the corner of Armond Road and Guithavon Valley. In addition, the War Memorial artwork at the water station has been painted in anti-graffiti varnish, a part of the knee-rail fencing on Chipping Hill has been replaced following a car accident and the beacon has been installed ready for the D-Day event.

At James Cooke Wood, the team have been conducting regular maintenance, at Whetmead etching boards have been installed and paths maintained while at the allotments there has been the usual plot clearing and upkeep.

At the Closed Churchyard, the management plan has been followed with particular attention to strimming the war graves in readiness for the D-day anniversary.

Summer planting at Witham station is expected to begin next week.

The Operations Manager advised Members that the reeds in the backchannel would be cleared in the near future and that the area around the memorial Elm tree at James Cooke Wood would also be cleared. Members were also informed that the recently repaired river bank at Whetmead would be inspected as there have been reports of vandalism.

Members **AGREED** to receive the report.

10. MANAGEING DEBRIS IN RIVERS

Darren Tansley from Essex Wildlife Trust (EWT) advised Members that it is beneficial to the ecology of the river to have natural debris as it supports the invertebrate species that need a connection with water and air, like Damselflies and Dragonflies. In addition, woody debris in rivers is essential for small fish who use this environment to avoid predators, keep cool in summer, even more important with rising river temperatures caused by climate change, and feed on the insects there. Fish live in trees! is a slogan used by EWT.

While Mr Tansley acknowledged that negative perceptions are prevalent with regards to natural river debris, he reassured members that there was no impact on flooding. In reality the river turbulence hollows out the river bed below the area so that capacity is restored within a few months and even before that, the impact is negligible as the debris is permeable. The water levels are the same either side of the debris and there is no evidence that the debris causes the river to back up. There is a perception gap between potential and actual risks, which is a tricky concept to convey to the public. The only issue that can occur is that tree debris can trap litter which can be aesthetically unpleasant.

Mr Tansley informed members that the white frothy scum that sometimes collects around river debris is likely to be caused by road run-off or plumbing misconnections that enter the river

Members **AGREED** to receive the report.

11. WATER QUALITY OF WITHAM'S RIVERS

It was noted that the nitrates and phosphates remain high. Members were advised that much of this is likely to be caused by fertilisers which are washed off when it rains. Many farmers are trying to judge when to apply nitrogen to their soil to reduce this impact. Members were further informed that Regenerative Farming would help but it is in its infancy in the UK. This would eventually reduce the need for fertilisers but the change is complex and expensive and cannot happen overnight.

Members **AGREED** to receive the report.

12. BLACKWATER RESTORATION PLAN

Members hoped that a representative would be able to attend the second workshop in the autumn.

Members **AGREED** to receive the report.

13. HABITAT HERO

A new idea was put forward to champion a species for a year e.g. The Swift whereby the lifecycle, challenges, habitat can be conveyed over 12 months.

It was also suggested that the Habitat Hero concept could tie in with restarting Witham Open Gardens, promoting unpaved front gardens and that schools could potentially be invited to be part of any Habitat Hero activities.

Members **AGREED** to receive the report.

14. DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR JAMES COOKE WOOD

Members would like to see a record maintained of all documented species in the wood as a benchmark. It was recognised that this would be a big undertaking and that maybe a section of the wood could be monitored. It was **AGREED** to take this forward.

Members were informed that there were no current plans for a direct footpath to James Cooke Wood.

Members **AGREED** to receive the report.

15. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee would be held on Tuesday 3rd September 2024 at the later time of 2pm.

Meeting concluded at 2.59pm.

SP/06.6.24

Signed by Chairman.....

Clerk's Report: Open Spaces Management Sub-committee

To note:

- The People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) water vole survey was carried out during June by the Operations Manager supported by Darren Tansley (Essex Wildlife Trust) which confirmed that water voles are still present on the River Walk. The survey took place on the Back Channel area of the river
- Members of staff took part in the annual glow worm survey on 24th July 2024 which is conducted each year on the River Walk. 20 glow worms were recorded during the evening. Bats were also monitored as part of the walk and three species were detected during the walk from Bridge Street to Armond Road – Common Pipistrelle, Soprano Pipistrelle and Noctule.
- During August one of the etching posts on the new nature trail on Whetmead Nature Reserve was vandalised and was not able to be repaired by the Open Spaces Team. A new part has been ordered and will be reinstalled shortly.
- On Friday 16th August at 11pm the Fire Service was called to extinguish a fire on the River Walk by the footbridge near Helen Court. There was evidence of regular gatherings in this area and a mobile cctv camera has now been installed nearby.
- The River Walk footpath at Pattision Close should shortly be resurfaced once approval of Section 106 funding is received from Braintree District Council.
- A visual tree survey is due to be carried on all the trees in the Closed Churchyard on 9th September 2024 and it is hoped that a tree survey of the River Walk will be carried out during the autumn/winter 2024/25 period.
- A further review is taking place regarding ongoing ground water issues near to Ebenezer Close. Work carried out early 2024 resolved the issue for only a short period and this now needs to be reassessed.

Advice:

To receive and note.

Officer Report: River Walk stinging nettles

Issue:

In addition to regular negative comments regarding the River Walk made on social media, the following written considerations have recently been received -

- 13.06.2024 In response to the recent Witham Voice issue 89.
The river walk is a great area and I walk it most days. I feel the vast amount of stinging nettles overtakes at certain areas. I appreciate we need these weeds for invertebrates and other wildlife to flourish. But the river walk could be so much nicer with the nettles being managed, and thought given to add some colour, wildflowers etc. The nettles are needed but maybe not is such a vast scale.
- 24.06.2024 Good morning
My wife and I went for an evening stroll along the so called river walk from Pattison Close towards Lidl, you cannot see the river for nettles why can the council cut them back so the people of Witham can enjoy the river walk. Please do not tell me it's because of wild life because there is plenty of wild life the other side of the river. People are calling it the nettle walk instead of the once lovely river walk, Please bring it back to the lovely place to enjoy as it once was. Thank you for your time.

Advice from Essex Wildlife Trust –

“While stinging nettles so provide obvious benefits for some species, like any mono-culture you can end up with so many that nothing else really thrives. They also tend to leave a lot of bare soil when they die off because they shade out everything else and this could lead to run off over winter. So I don't think you would do any harm if you cut some areas back more heavily than others as you have so much along the river walk. Clearing it all would be detrimental but there can be a balanced approach”. **Darren Tansley, Wilder Rivers & Protected Species Manager, Essex Wildlife Trust.**

Suggested areas to open up the stinging nettles –

- In front of both commemorative benches facing the river near Chipping Hill/Saxon Drive
- An area near Moats Farm Chase bridge/Earlsmead spinney
- A section near the Guithavon Road etching bridge
- In front of commemorative bench facing the river near the Back Channel
- A section near Maidment Crescent/Luard Way so as to provide a view of the river alongside the nearby footpath/cycleway.

Sections of nettles that are opened up, depending on the height of the river bank, to have knee railing installed to prevent access to river or to consider suitable low level shrubs.

Impact Assessment

The Town Council has a statutory duty to consider the effects of its decisions on biodiversity, and crime and disorder in the area. As the Council has also formed a Climate Change Working Group, this should also be considered –

- (a) Biodiversity – Increase biodiversity as removing the stinging nettles will encourage other plants to thrive.
- (b) Crime and disorder – No impact.
- (c) Climate – No impact.

Advice:

- To consider and approve areas to remove stinging nettles on the River Walk.

HA/27.08.24

Officer Report: Witham's Rivers

To note:

In 2022, the River Brain and Blackwater received a Moderate rating (one below good) and a survey by Essex County Council of Essex Residents in 2023 showed that river pollution was the top environmental concern out of sixteen environmental categories.

While the Environment Agency take regular readings (see latest readings attached), Essex and Suffolk River's Trust and Essex Rivers Hub have set up Essex Rivers Watch which is a citizen science project, created to encourage Essex residents to get involved in saving their rivers.

No previous experience is needed. Volunteers collect information monthly about their local rivers through simple observation and optional water sample testing which will measure the health of the waterway. The data can be fed back quickly and will go towards targeting help where it is needed most.

The observation element simply involves measuring the depth of the river, any wildlife and signs of pollution at the selected point. Volunteers then have the additional option of testing the water by collecting a sample of water and measuring the temperature, total dissolved solids, turbidity (cloudiness), ammonia, nitrates and phosphates. The whole process takes between 10 and 20 minutes.

Those who join will receive information packs, safety advice, some equipment for the experiment and there are tutorials online to view. The River Watch team will then work with the volunteer to choose a suitable spot to measure and give them a link to allow them to upload their results.

This website provides further information <https://www.essexsuffolkriverstrust.org/projects/essexriverwatch>

Witham Town Council would like to be involved in measuring the river water quality of the rivers with information available real time and are seeking volunteers who care about our rivers to put their names forward.

Advice:

- To receive the report and seek volunteers

SP/27/8/2024

<https://environment.data.gov.uk/water-quality/view/explore>
 AN-BL03 - Appleford for River Blackwater Results

	Units	25-May 2023	29-Jun 2023	08-Aug 2023	13-Sep 2023	17-Oct 2023	23-Oct 2023	20-Nov 2023	05-Dec 2023	17-Jan 2024	Feb 2024	20-Mar 2024	18-Apr 2024	16-May 2024	20-Jun 2024	16-Jul 2024
		11:22	14:47	10:51	08:43	09:50	09:29	09:07	09:53	09:09	No data	13:52	14:54	14:40	13:34	15:45
PH		8.1	7.91	8.25	7.81	7.93	7.86	7.97	7.93	8.09		8.15	8.59	8.11	8.13	8.28
Temperature of water	C	14.9	19.4	16	17.1	11	10.6	9.4	5.9	2.9		12.4	11.8	15.6	16.8	17.6
Conductivity at 25C	us/cm	906	867	866	961	801	650	700	864	872		813	915	837	892	777
BOD -5 day ATU	mg/l	1.6	<1									1.3	2.1	1.1	1.3	<3
Ammoniacal Nitrogen as N	mg/l	<0.03	<0.03	0.03	<0.03	<0.03	<0.03	<0.03	0.14	0.14		0.031	<0.03	0.047	<0.03	<0.03
Nitrogen, Total Oxidised as N	mg/l	11	7.6	7.4	9.7	8.6	15	12	11	11		9.1	10	9.6	11	8.9
Nitrate as N	mg/l	11	7.56	7.38	9.67	8.58	15	12	10.9	10.9		9.07	9.96	9.54	11	8.85
Nitrite as N	mg/l	0.04	0.038	0.02	0.029	0.019	0.032	0.03	0.075	0.066		0.034	0.04	0.063	0.044	0.046
Ammonia un-ionised as N	mg/l	<0.00078	<0.0008	<0.00085	<0.0006	<0.0005	<0.0004	<0.0004	<0.0016	<0.0015		0.0007	<0.0006	0.0013	<0.0009	<0.00095
Alkalinity to PH 4.5 as CaCO3	mg/l	260	240	240	260	220	190	230	240	270		270	250	260	260	220
Orthophosphate, reactive as P	mg/l	0.19	0.27	0.25	0.22	0.22	0.18	0.12	0.16	0.16		0.14	0.17	0.26	0.23	0.26
Oxygen, Dissolved, % Saturation	%	102.5	79.6	85.3	74.5	88.3	87.2	91.8	89.9	91.7		101	132	96.4	95.3	97.6
Oxygen, Dissolved as O2	mg/l	10.3	7.31	8.4	7.17	9.72	9.69	10.5	11.2	12.4		10.8	14.3	9.57	9.22	9.29

Salmonid key

	PH	Temperature	BOD	Ammoniacal Nitrogen as N (Ammonia)	Nitrogen total oxidised as N (TON)*	Nitrate as N	Orthophosphates	Silver	Oxygen dissolved %
High	6.8-9	20	3	0.3			0.053		80
Good	6.8-9	23	4	0.6	≤ 11.3	≤ 11.3	0.095	Max	75
Moderate	4.7	28	6	1.1			0.221	allowable	64
Poor	4.2	30	7.5	2.5			1.111	concentration	50
Bad	< 4.2	> 30	> 7.5	> 2.5	> 11.3	> 11.3		on O.I.	< 50

AN-BRO1 - Guithavon Flume for River Brain

	Units	25-May 2023	29-Jun 2023	28-Jul 2023	04-Aug 2023	14-Sep 2023	16-Oct 2023	20-Nov 2023	06-Dec 2023	23-Jan 2024	20-Feb 2024	19-Mar 2024	19-Apr 2024	16-May 2024	27-Jun 2024	16-Jul 2024
PH		8	7.82	7.63	7.78	7.9	7.97	7.92	7.95	8.02	8.06	8.09	8.13	8.08	8	8.07
Temperature of water	C	14.1	17.6	17.4	16	16.3	10.3	10.6	5.3	7.9	9.4	11.4	10.7	14.3	18.9	17.6
Conductivity at 25C	us/cm	1070	1058	789	831	1090	1018	822	894	999	744	928	961	935	1061	540
BOD -5 day ATU	mg/l	1.3	<3								1.4	1	1.5	1.2	<3	<4
Ammoniacal Nitrogen as N	mg/l	0.061	<0.03	0.03	<0.03	<0.03	<0.03	0.051	0.049		0.05	0.035	<0.03	0.044	0.038	0.18
Nitrogen, Total Oxidised as N	mg/l	16	16	9.2	9.8	14	13	12	14	12	9.4	13	14	13	15	5.8
Nitrate as N	mg/l	15.9	16	9.16	9.77	14	13	12	14	11.9	9.37	13	14	12.9	14.8	5.71
Nitrite as N	mg/l	0.091	0.048	0.044	0.029	0.02	0.0068	0.04	0.046	0.071	0.03	0.046	0.038	0.066	0.18	0.094
Ammonia un-ionised as N	mg/l	0.0015	<0.0006	4E-04	<0.0005	<0.0006	<0.0005	0.0008	0.0006		0.0009	0.0007	<0.0005	0.0011	0.001	0.006
Alkalinity to PH 4.5 as CaCO3	mg/l	240	220	190	200	250	230	240	240	230	240	250	240	240	240	130
Orthophosphate, reactive as P	mg/l	0.4	0.51	0.47	0.47	0.7	0.45	0.26	0.27	0.33	0.21	0.3	0.46	0.51	0.53	0.47
Oxygen, Dissolved, % Saturation	%	98.4	75.2	80.6	77	85.2	93.5	92.2	91.3	94.5	94	98.1	100.1	97	94.9	78.8
Oxygen, Dissolved as O2	mg/l	10.1	7.16	7.71	7.58	8.33	10.5	10.2	11.6	11.2	10.7	10.7	11.1	9.91	8.8	7.5

Salmonid key

	PH	Temperature	BOD	Ammoniacal Nitrogen as N (Ammonia)	Nitrogen total oxidised as N (TON)*	Nitrate as N	Orthophosphates	Silver	Oxygen dissolved %
PASS	High	6.8 - 9	20	3	0.3		0.053		80
	Good	6.8 - 9	23	4	0.6	≤ 11.3	0.095	Max	75
FAIL	Moderate	4.7	28	6	1.1		0.221	allowable	64
	Poor	4.2	30	7.5	2.5		1.111	concentrati	50
	Bad	< 4.2	> 30	> 7.5	> 11.3	> 11.3		on 0.1	< 50