



Witham

town council

Town Hall | 61 Newland Street | Witham | CM8 2FE
01376 520627
witham.gov.uk

MINUTES

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

Date: **4th December 2024**

Present: Councillors B Fleet (Chairman)
P Heath

Co-optees S. Black (Witham and Countryside Society)
J. Goodman (Local Interests)
P. Shuttleworth (Local Wildlife Interests)

Officers H. Andrews (Deputy Town Clerk)
S. Dyer (Operations Manager)
S. Puckey (Open Spaces Administrative Assistant)

28. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllr Hewitt, Cllr Barlow, Cllr Ramage, J Casement, and J Palombi

29. INTERESTS

No interests were declared.

30. MINUTES

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

31. QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

There were no questions.

32. CONSIDERATION OF WRITTEN REPRESENTATIONS

No written representations were received.

33. CLERK'S REPORT

The Clerk's report was received by Members. Members noted that they had received positive feedback on the path repairs at Pattison Close with regards to the quality of the work and the friendliness and patience of the contractors themselves.

The Deputy Town Clerk further clarified which trees had needed felling in the Closed Churchyard and confirmed that the revised management plan was on track to be completed in early 2025.

It was noted that there had been some bank erosion by Pattison Close where the River Brain bends. Following Storm Bert, some brambles had become dislodged which exposed the river bank and had partially washed some of it away, leaving a dangerous overhang. Members were informed that the area had been fenced off from the public and that professional advice was being sought from Darren Tansley at Essex Wildlife Trust and Green-Tech, the company who had provided cement bags for the erosion at Whetmead earlier in the year.

Members were advised that there was no update on commencement of the A12 widening scheme at present.

Members **AGREED** to receive the report.

34. OPERATION MANAGER'S REPORT

The Operations Manager provided a verbal update.

On the River Walk, the team are up to date with their schedule apart from the cutting of some hedgerows, which had stalled due to the soft ground. The completion of cutting the meadow areas was also on hold awaiting repairs on the Sherpa mower. The team also hoped to fit in another grass cut on the River Walk before Christmas, subject to the weather. The Team had installed two new commemorative benches, one near Lidl facing down the path and one close to the picnic benches on Guithavon Road and relocated two bins. The Operations Manager further advised that a fence had to be installed by the river close to Pattison Close, to protect the river bank and residents, where erosion which had left a half meter overhang.

At James Cooke Wood, work is ongoing with brash being chipped and deposited on to the paths. The Operations Manager further clarified that the hedge by the roadside had been cut by local contractors on our behalf.

At Whetmead, there had been some vandalism to three of the etching posts, one of which had to be replaced and reset.

The Closed Churchyard is up to date.

Around the town, the Christmas tree had been installed (twice due to Storm Bert), winter bedding plants had been put in the stone planters around the town centre by the Operations Team and at the station, and empty allotment plots had been cleared ready for new tenants.

The Operations Team had also been busy with Remembrance Parade and the Christmas Market.

Members further discussed the ongoing issues with vandalism and how difficult it is to address. The Deputy Town Clerk advised that the Street Warden and Special Constables patrol the town regularly and that CCTV is installed in some areas.

The Deputy Town Clerk agreed to find out why the Environment Agency had been on the River Walk close to Luard Way this week.¹

Members **AGREED** to receive the report.

35. BLACKWATER RESTORATION PLAN

The presentation slides were shared with the meeting and Cllr Fleet provided a verbal summary of the workshop held on 13th November which looked at the key problems on the River Blackwater and how the river's health might be restored.

The key issues which the plan is looking to address include disconnection from flood plains, resulting in sediment deposits and subsequently vegetation growth in the river, weirs, which prevent fish swimming up stream and allow material to build up, and the river losing its original sinuosity, resulting in a faster flow.

The next workshop is due to be held in March, during which a plan will be presented for consultation. Members noted that while the River Blackwater only touches Witham at Whetmead, some lessons might be learnt which could be valuable for the River Brain.

Members **AGREED** to receive the report.

36. SECTION 106 FUNDING AND OPEN SPACES

The Deputy Town Clerk summarised the projects completed to date and outlined the projects currently being considered. Concern was raised about the potential for vandalism for any public art and that the design and location would need to be carefully considered.

Members **AGREED** to receive the report.

37. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee would be held on Wednesday 5th March 2025 at 2pm.

Meeting concluded at 2.51pm.

SP/09.12.24

Signed by Chairman.....

¹ Environment Agency confirmed that they were carrying out in-channel annual maintenance.