



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

OPEN SPACES MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE

AGENDA

WEDNESDAY 4TH DECEMBER 2024, 2.00PM

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

CO-OPTEES:	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 3rd September 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) BLACKWATER RESTORATION PLAN

To receive information from the recent workshop on the Pant and Blackwater River Restoration Plan project. Workshop presentation slides circulated separately.

9) SECTION 106 FUNDING AND OPEN SPACES

To receive information on completed and future Section 106 funded open spaces projects (attached at pages 8 to 9).

10) DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

To note that the next meeting of the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee will be held on Wednesday 5th March 2025.



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MINUTES

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

Date: **3rd September 2024**

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

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Cllr Hewitt, Cllr Heath, Cllr Ramage and J Goodman.

2. **INTERESTS**

No interests were declared.

3. **MINUTES**

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

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

There were no questions.

5. **CONSIDERATION OF WRITTEN REPRESENTATIONS**

No written representations were received.

6. **CLERK'S REPORT**

The Clerk's report was received by Members. Members were pleased to note that there is evidence of water voles in the back channel and glow worms on the River Walk. Members were further informed that there was an increase in the number counted from last year, rising from 12 to 20.

The Deputy Town Clerk further clarified that the River Walk path to be resurfaced in Pattison Close is the single footpath¹ and that the fire on the River Walk on 16th August was caused by teenagers.

Members **AGREED** to receive the report.

7. **OPERATION MANAGER'S REPORT**

The Operations Manager provided a verbal update.

The team are up-to-date with their open spaces schedule, although it has been the worst summer in 10 years for vandalism which has taken up a lot of time.

There have also been three events on the River Walk; the Easter Trail, the Teddy Bears Picnic and the Music Festival which have been a success.

At James Cooke Wood there are plans to get a chipper in the near future to process some of the brush piles which will then be used to scatter over the footpaths.

At Whetmead, one of the nature trail posts had been vandalised twice and thrown in the river each time. On the second occasion, the panel was broken requiring the purchase of a new one. This has now been received and will be replaced once the schools have returned after the summer holidays.²

At the allotments, there are currently 8 plots that need clearing which will be done in the next couple of weeks.

At the closed churchyard, a tree survey is being conducted by an external contractor on 9th September.

At the station, the summer bedding plants have been topped up to maintain the display.

Finally, following a report from a resident, the team removed an invasive Himalayan Balsam plant, which had been spotted on the River Walk.

Members **AGREED** to receive the report.

¹ Contractor is currently due to start work on the Pattison Close path during the week commencing 23rd September 2024.

² Nature post reinstalled on Whetmead on 11th September 2024

8. STINGING NETTLES ON THE RIVER WALK

There are regular negative comments on social media about the nettles and the inability to see the river, therefore when Essex Wildlife Trust visited the River Walk earlier this year, advice was taken on the best approach to nettle management.

Members agreed that the advice from EWT should be followed and that a balance is important. It was felt that this should be reviewed periodically. The Deputy Town Clerk clarified that the nettle clearing sites suggested had been chosen in consultation with the Operations Manager. These are mainly areas where the river bank is shallow, in front of benches to improve the view and where there is an expanse of land between the path and the river. The need to install fencing along the river edge in certain locations will be considered when assessing each area.

Members **AGREED** to receive the report and that the Operations Team should proceed with cutting back the stinging nettles in the suggested areas in due course.

9. REVIEW OF THE RIVER WALK MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Deputy Town Clerk advised of some minor amendments to the plan to reflect changes in circumstances and that a biodiversity study by Essex Ecology is planned for 2025.

Further minor changes to wording were suggested by Members as well as a sentence on the nettle beds to reflect the decision made in the meeting.

Members were interested in having a bat survey undertaken and that consideration be given to bird boxes in sheltered areas that would avoid vandalism.

Members **RECOMMENDED** the revisions be made and the revised River Walk Management Plan be approved by the Environment Committee.

10. DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR JAMES COOKE WOOD

Members considered the draft management plan and the Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that all trees at risk of falling would be made safe, even in the wet woodland.

Members liked the idea of bat and owl boxes in the wood and were interested in having a bat survey undertaken.

Members **RECOMMENDED** that the adoption of the management plan be approved by the Environment Committee.

11. WITHAM'S RIVERS

Susan Black and Jane Casement volunteered to work together and be part of the Citizen Science River Watch project.

Members were interested in knowing if there was any information about discharges into Witham's rivers and it was noted that water companies now have to make this information

available. Concern was raised about whether the sewage network can cope with the increase in housing in Witham.

Members **AGREED** to receive the report.

12. 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 December 2024 at 2pm.

Meeting concluded at 2.49pm.

SP/04.9.24

Signed by Chairman.....

Clerk's Report: Open Spaces Management Sub-committee

To note:

- The resurfacing of the River Walk path in Pattision Close was completed in September. The next River Walk path improvements to take place is some repair work to the paths near Moat Farm Chase and Saxon Drive that are being broken up by tree roots. The contractor to carry out the work was approved by Environment Committee on 14th October 2024, approval of using Section 106 funds for this has been received and work will then be expected to take place in Spring 2025.
- The tree survey in the closed churchyard which took place in September resulted in the removal of four dead trees to mitigate risk and thirteen trees are recommended for ivy to be severed and stripped in time for the next survey for full assessment.
- Further vandalism took place on the Whetmead nature trail in November with three panels being removed from their posts. These were all reinstalled by the Operations Team.
- Stinging nettles have been removed by the etched bridge in Guithavon Road with further areas, as previously discussed, to be cut back over the winter period.
- The James Cooke Wood Management Plan was approved and adopted by the Environment Committee on 14th October 2024. The adjustments to the River Walk Management Plan, approved at the last Open Spaces Management Sub-committee meeting were also approved at the same meeting. A new Closed Churchyard Management Plan is currently being produced and should be presented at the next Sub-Committee meeting in March 2025 for comment and approval.
- Plans are currently being made with Essex River Watch for training to take place in the near future for volunteers taking part in the River Watch survey, as previously discussed.
- There have been no significant changes in the latest river quality stats available from the Environment Agency for the areas monitored on the River Brain and Blackwater. Officers will continue to monitor these and will report back if there are any changes.

Advice:

To receive and note.

Officer Report: Section 106 Funding and Open Spaces

Since Spring 2023, Witham Town Council have carried out open space improvement projects funded by Section 106 developer contributions.

Projects completed so far –

- **Whetmead Improvements** – New steps, notice board, interpretation board, 15 nature trail etching posts and planting.
- **Bee Haven** – Bee friendly planting area at River View, including bee posts, bird boxes and signage.
- **James Cooke Wood improvements** - Installation of boardwalk and noticeboard.
- **River Walk path and cycleway improvements** – Resurfacing of single footpath from Pattison Close leading towards River View bridge.

Future projects currently being progressed –

- **River Walk path and cycleway improvements** - Approval has been received for S106 funding to repair the paths near Moats Farm Chase and Saxon Drive where the paths are being broken up by tree roots. A tree survey was carried out and a flexi-pave material will be used to repair the paths. The work will commence in Spring 2025 as the material being used requires dry conditions.

Consideration is taking place on further improvements to the paths in order of priority.

- **Further Bee Havens** – As the bee-friendly planting area at River View was well received by the public, Witham Town Council will be looking at installing similar bee havens on all sections of the River Walk in the future.
- **Public Art** - There is Section 106 funding of £24,352.42 (expiry date July 2025) available to be spent on public art in the vicinity of Morrisons Supermarket or Witham Town Centre.

There is currently a proposal being considered to install an artwork mural under the Network Rail bridges on the River Walk leading towards Asda and potentially the bridge on Armond Road. This would be similar to the well regarded mural on the River Walk gauging station. Early conversations have taken place with Network Rail and the original artist of the current mural. If the proposal were to proceed it would be a community project where local students would be included as part of the project. The proposal to extend the artwork project to include the newly enhanced skate park is also being considered.

The second project being considered using the S106 public art available is to install some wooden carved sculptures on various locations on the River Walk. These would be nature designs to include wildlife that can be found on the River Walk, e.g. otters, kingfishers, etc. Wooden carved welcome signs may also be included in this project to be installed at prominent entry points to the River Walk.



**Wood carving examples*

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 – Positive effect on biodiversity with bee-friendly planting areas.
- (b) Crime and disorder – No impact.
- (c) Climate – Positive effect on climate with bee-friendly planting areas.

Advice:

- To receive and note.

HA/26.11.2024