



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

MINUTES

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

Date: **30th May 2023**

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

Member of the Public John Goodman

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from J Palombi.

2. **APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN**

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

3. **APPOINTMENT OF VICE- CHAIRMAN**

It was **AGREED** that Cllr Susan Ager 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 the new line markings on the River Walk were now complete and awaiting an official audit by the Town Council. It was noted that some members of the public felt that the cycle markings on the path approaching both sides of River View Bridge by Gimsons were misleading as cycling is not permitted over the bridge.

The Deputy Town Clerk advised Members that enquiries are still ongoing with Braintree District Council regarding responsibility for the land by Lidl and Churchills. This will be on the agenda for the next meeting,

Members **AGREED** to receive the report.

9. **OPERATION MANAGER'S REPORT**

The Operations Manager provided a verbal update. Grass cutting was being carried out as per the River Walk management schedule and parts of the river had been cleared of debris ready for the Duck Race in July. A new culvert fence and noticeboard had been installed by the Duck Pond and 3 new trees had been planted on the River Walk. Additionally, the team had installed the new Listening Bench on Guithavon Green to replace the vandalised version.

At James Cooke Wood, the team have been removing dead and diseased trees over the winter period, as recommended by the Forestry Commission report. This work has allowed light to penetrate the canopy, improved overall tree health and successfully created greater bio-diversity on the forest floor. Members were informed that a couple of schools were known to use the wood as well as regular dog walkers.

At Whetmead, the team are keeping the paths clear and carrying out any remedial work. In addition, the parking bays have been clearly marked and the new North Steps have just been completed.

At the Closed Churchyard, the team have undertaken general maintenance. The Members were informed that ivy was gradually being cleared from previously covered graves and that the wildflower plugs had been planted and were so far doing well.

Routine maintenance was continuing at the allotments and summer station planting was expected to begin in the next fortnight.

Members **RECOMMENDED** that an event be held to mark the 30-year anniversary of the creation of James Cooke Wood either in the autumn or next year.

It was noted by Members that the pathway from Tithe Close to Powers Hall End was broken up and covered in weeds. It was believed that this was the responsibility of Essex Highways but it was **AGREED** that this would be looked into.

10. A12 WIDENING SCHEME AND WHETMEAD

The Deputy Town Clerk updated Members on the land offered and accepted as a replacement to that taken by the A12 widening scheme.

Members were informed that the Statement of Common Ground was likely to be signed that evening and that the current proposal was for work to begin in 2024 through to 2027. Members were advised that Whetmead will be closed to the public during most of this work. Members **RECOMMENDED** putting a plan in place to mark the re-opening of the nature reserve, following completion of the work.

Concern was raised about public footpath closures throughout the duration of work, and how these might be advertised. Members were assured that there would be regular forums ongoing throughout work to raise concerns of this nature.

Members **AGREED** to receive the information.

11. RIVER WATER POLLUTION

Members discussed potential pollution levels in the River Brain and Blackwater and that, given the current national scandal surrounding river pollution, it might be advisable to investigate the situation in our own rivers. Members were informed that the Environment Agency undertake regular monitoring and it was **AGREED** that they would be contacted in the first instance for information.

12. TREE MANAGEMENT ON THE RIVER WALK

Members were concerned that several Willow trees had been felled as part of the Tree Management Programme and that, given the relatively short life of Willows, and the number of mature trees in our stock, it was likely that more would be felled in the next few years. Consequently, it was **RECOMMENDED** that the planting of young Willow trees be included in the River Walk Maintenance Schedule next winter.

13. WHETMEAD SECTION 106 IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

Members **AGREED** to receive the information and further **AGREED** to feedback on the nature posts by the end of June.

14. DUCK POND ENHANCEMENTS

Following the success of Tiptree's pond enhancements, Members would like to consider introducing reeds into Witham's Duck Pond to improve biodiversity.

It was **AGREED** that this would be investigated further and recommended to Environment Committee for consideration.

15. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Members commented on the weeds on Newland Street, especially by the bus stop and were informed that this was the responsibility of Braintree District Council.

Members were concerned about rats in the River Brain by the Gauging Station but were informed that Braintree District Council regularly monitored the pond area location for vermin.

16. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Sub-Committee would be Tuesday 5th September 2023.

Meeting concluded at 3.05pm.

HA/SP/30.5.23

Signed by Chairman.....