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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)

16. **APOLOGIES**

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

17. **INTERESTS**

No interests were declared.

18. **MINUTES**

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

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

There were no questions.

20. CONSIDERATION OF WRITTEN REPRESENTATIONS

No written representations were received.

21. 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.

22. 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

23. 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.

24. 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.

25. 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.

26. 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.

27. 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.....