



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

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

Date: **14th August 2019**

Present:

Councillors	J.C.	Goodman	(Chairman)
Miss	C.	Jay	
	S.E.	Hicks	
Mrs	S.C.	Lager	
	S	Brailey	(Witham Tree Group)
	J	Casement	(Witham Wombles)
	A	Chick	(Witham Rotary Club)
	B	Fleet	(Tree Warden)
	N	Lodge	(Environment Agency)
	J	Palombi	(CPRE)
	L	Ralph	(Environment Agency)
	P	Shuttleworth	(Local Wildlife interests)
	D	Smith	(Local Wildlife interests)
	B	Wilmer	(Witham & Countryside Society)
Mrs	H	Andrews	(Assistant Proper Officer)
	S	Dyer	(Operations Manager)

13. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor R Ramage who was unwell, Councillor T Pleasance who was attending a funeral, and Mr A Watts who was unable to attend.

14. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations received.

15. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD 19TH JUNE 2019

Minutes from the previous meeting were taken as received and agreed.

16. QUESTIONS & STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

No members of the public present.

17. CONSIDERATIONS OF WRITTEN REPRESENTATIONS

No written representations had been received.

18. OPERATIONS MANAGER'S REPORT

A verbal report was given by the Operations Manager. He advised that the team were mainly on schedule apart from some hedge cutting but this was due to weather and recent annual leave. He confirmed that a fourth member of the team had been taken on and was due to start in October. Training of the team was going well with Katrina passing her bush cutting course and with further training booked for October. The Operations Manager advised that he was booked for a Streetworks road safety course in September which will assist with work arising from the Highways Devolution pilot project.

He advised that major work is due to be carried out on the large Willow tree on the River Walk by Luard Way in the next two weeks as there is a large split on the stem creating a potential safety risk.

The Operations Manager advised that he had received complaints from members of the public regarding an area of the River Walk near Maldon Road by Helen Court. This was previously left as a wildflower area but concerns had been received that this was an eyesore. There was a discussion regarding whether Giant Hogweed or Cow Parsley was actually growing in the area so it was agreed that interested members would meet at the location with the Operations Manager to view and discuss at a mutually agreed time.

He also confirmed that delivery had been taken of the new ex-demo brush mower which was proving to be money well spent.

A discussion also took place about the trees on the River Walk. There had been several trees that had come down recently that the team had cleared and a few more due to be dealt with. Trees on the River Walk, some of which are very elderly, had never been properly managed and tentative enquiries were made regarding whether willow whips could be planted.

It was **AGREED** that the Operations Manager and interested members would arrange to meet at the Helen Court area of the River Walk to view the discussed location.

19. CLERK'S REPORT

A report was received. Members were advised that the additional tree survey would be held in abeyance following consideration by the previous Environment Committee meeting. There is extensive remedial work due to take place on the River Walk in the next two years which has been budgeted for so an additional tree survey will be held off until completed. It was also discussed that the new Management Plan should take into account the management of trees.

20. ENVIRONMENT AGENCY REPORT

Representatives, Natasha Lodge and Laurence Ralph, from the Environment Agency were welcomed to the meeting. They provided members with a factsheet (copy attached) showing their anticipated work for 2019/2020. They advised that they carry out work clearing the river downstream where there is the greatest flood risk so will be working from Bridge Street down to the River Blackwater. They advised that they can adjust their timeframe for work in accordance

for any local work being done and are happy to liaise with the Town Council and members of the group.

Discussion took place regarding excessive aquatic weeds in the river by the Moat Farm section of the River Walk. The EA confirmed that they would not be dealing with that section as it would not be an area with the greatest flood risk. Their work would be downstream and would involve moving water away from the town and buildings. They deal more with fallen trees blocking waterways rather than just aquatic weeds, although they will remove these if they were in a section of river being worked on. Excess aquatic weeds in a section of river that they are not planning to work on would fall to the landowner. It would therefore be the responsibility of Witham Town Council as manager of the River Walk.

The EA advised that work will be carried out after the growing season and before Winter. Their work is usually carried out once a year but will be dependent on weather conditions and will address high rainfall alerts.

Concerns were raised from Members regarding whether their work would impact on important species that can be found along the River Walk. There is a Fisheries & Biodiversity team who check for species but they would welcome feedback from Members with local information. Details to clarify when work was being done to be sent to the Assistant Proper Officer.

It was **AGREED** that clarification of the Environment Agency work schedule to be sent to Assistant Proper Officer and members to liaise with them regarding important species along the River Walk. ¹

21. PLANTING MISCANTHUS GRASS AT WHETMEAD

The suggestion to plant Miscanthus grass as an attraction to hares on Whetmead Nature Reserve was discussed. Members agreed that there were a lot of different types of Miscanthus grass but it was not suitable for Whetmead. It is an invasive species and Whetmead was not a suitable environment for hares.

It was **AGREED** not to proceed with planting Miscanthus grass on Whetmead.

22. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

A query was raised regarding planting trees on the recreation ground near the cemetery. The area gets very wet and the planting of trees may help this. It was confirmed that this is Braintree District Council land but Witham Tree Group have considered the area and advised that it has long term potential.

David Smith confirmed that he had taken part in the annual Glow Worm survey on the River Walk from Armond Road through to Guithavon Road. This information will need to go into the revised Management Plan currently being worked on. Discussion took place that it is understood there are further Glow Worms on a path in Highfields Road along the railway line. This pathway is always overgrown and has never been cleared so potential Glow Worms there cannot be assessed. This is possibly an area that may come under the Highways Devolution Pilot work if it is a Public Right of Way.

It was **AGREED** to assess the pathway to see if it falls within the Highways Devolution pilot. ²

¹ The Environment Agency have advised that the excavator section work is due to be carried out in early October and the handbrushing sections in late October/early November. More accurate dates will be notified nearer the time.

² The pathway is not shown as a Public Right of Way and therefore not part of the Highways Devolution work.

It was also discussed how important it is that wildlife surveys carried out should be included in the new River Walk Management Plan.

23. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The time and date of the next meeting was confirmed as **Wednesday 9th October 2019 at 3.00pm.**

There being no further business, the Chairman closed the meeting at 3.50pm

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Councillor J Goodman
Chairman

HA/15.08.2019