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MINUTES

Meeting of: **Environment Committee**

Date: **22nd July 2024**

Place: **Town Hall, 61 Newland Street, Witham.**

Present: Councillors: J. Martin (Chairman)
B. Fleet
T. Hewitt
R. Ramage
B. Taylor

Also in attendance: Cllr P. Barlow
J. Robertson
A. Waight (Witham Tree Group)
H. Andrews (Deputy Town Clerk)
G. Kennedy (Committee Clerk)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Adelaja, J.M. Coleman, J.C. Coleman and Sloma.

RESOLVED That the apologies be received and approved.

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Environment Committee held 15th April 2024 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3. INTERESTS

Councillor Fleet declared an interest in Minute 4 – Witham Tree Group as a member of that organisation.

It was agreed that the item on Witham Tree Group should be taken next.

4. WITHAM TREE GROUP

Councillor Fleet had declared an interest.

(a) Report to the Town Council

The Chairman welcomed Allan Waight from the Tree Group to the Meeting and a report from Witham Tree Group covering their activities for the 2023 – 2024 season was received.

Mr Waight added that he had recently seen on a District Council update about volunteers planting trees in Hatfield Peverel but there had never been any publicity about the Witham Tree Group who had planted hundreds of trees in partnership with its Council. He said that he would be meeting with Councillor Schwier next Wednesday to discuss the Tree Group activities.

He said that there was currently a problem with muntjac deers which shred the bark so added protection would be needed on younger trees. Another problem was inappropriate mowers being used to cut grass which are damaging posts and cages around trees. There should be no mowing close to trees to allow wild flowers to grow and cited an area where a pyramid orchid was growing in such circumstances.

RESOLVED That letters be sent to Braintree District Council and Eastlight regarding the need to use appropriate sized mowers so that areas around trees can be left to allow wild flowers to grow and that cages and posts are not damaged.

RESOLVED That the report be received.

(b) Tree Group Minutes

The Tree Group minutes for the meetings held in April, June and July 2024 were received.

RESOLVED That the minutes be received and noted.

The Chairman thanked Mr Waight for his report.

5. QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

No member of the press or public was present.

6. CLERK'S REPORT

The Clerk's Report on matters arising was received. She explained that the Town Council owns three bus shelters that need replacing, one by the Forest Road 'pond' and two at the station. She hoped that financial assistance could be obtained to replace them.

She understood that Braintree District Council had now obtained all the licences from Essex County Council so that the long awaited Town Centre improvements could potentially commence in September 2024.

She said that Braintree District Council would be undertaking further planting in the park and an interpretation board installed to complete its improvements.

RESOLVED That the Report be received and noted.

7. COMMITTEE INCOME AND EXPENDITURE REPORT

The income and expenditure reports for the year ended 31st March 2024, with exception report, and the period 1st April 2024 to 30th May 2024 were received.

RESOLVED That the income and expenditure reports and the exception report be received and noted.

8. OPEN SPACES MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE

The Minutes from the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee Meeting held on 4th June 2024 were received.

Councillor Fleet as Chairman of the Sub-Committee, said that they had been very fortunate to have Darren Tansley, from Essex Wildlife Trust, as a guest who had spoken about debris in rivers and explained that it was not only beneficial to the ecology but had no adverse impact on flooding.

RESOLVED That the Minutes from the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee be received and noted.

9. SECTION 106 STEERING GROUP

The Minutes from the Section 106 Steering Group Meeting held on 18th April 2024 were received.

In answer to a question, it was understood that Braintree District Council was confident that there was sufficient funding to install a bridge across the River Brain and it would be going out to tender in the autumn.

The Deputy Town Clerk said that the skate park improvements was proceeding along with a mini-skate park for younger children.

RESOLVED That the Minutes from the Section 106 Steering Group Meeting be received and information noted.

10. HIRE OF OPEN SPACES POLICY

The Hire of Open Spaces Policy was received and reviewed.

RESOLVED That the Hire of Open Spaces Policy be agreed and reviewed next year.

11. COMMEMORATIVE ITEMS ON WITHAM TOWN COUNCIL OPEN SPACES POLICY

Members were asked to receive and review the Commemorative Items on Witham Town Council Open Spaces Policy.

The Deputy Town Clerk explained that requests had been received from the public to put flowers on commemorative benches to mark significant dates. It was considered that any items should be removed after two weeks.

RESOLVED That the Commemorative Items on Witham Town Council Open Spaces Policy be amended accordingly.

12. SNOW CLEARANCE POLICY

Members were asked to receive and review the Snow Clearance Policy.

RESOLVED That the Snow Clearance Policy be received and agreed.

13. BIODIVERSITY POLICY

Members were asked to receive and review the Biodiversity Policy which was introduced last year and adopted by the Policy and Resources Committee. Additions had now been made.

RESOLVED That the additions be agreed and the amended Biodiversity Policy be approved.

14. ALLOTMENT MANAGEMENT REPORT

An allotment management report was received.

The Deputy Town Clerk explained that it was necessary to give a year's notice to increase the allotment rent. Both the Cut Throat Lane and Wright Grove sites were the same price.

RESOLVED That the report be received and the rent per square metre be increased by 3p to 51p in 2026/2027.

RESOLVED That Councillor Fleet be appointed to the Appeals Panel.

15. ALLOTMENT SITE MANAGEMENT

(a) Members were asked to receive and consider the allotment management report.

Members noted that hens were allowed to be kept on the allotments but not bee hives. The Deputy Town Clerk said that one of the allotment holders was allergic to bee stings. She said that allotments were inspected regularly and the eviction process has been sped up. Members realised that there was a very long waiting list for allotments.

RESOLVED That the report be received and noted.

(b) Members were asked to receive and review the Allotment Site Management Policy.

RESOLVED That the amended Allotment Site Management Policy be agreed.

16. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED That under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the press and public be excluded from the Meeting for the consideration of the remaining items of business on the grounds they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information falling with Schedule 12A (S3) of the Local Government Act 1972.

17. SECTION 106 AGREEMENT – RIVER WALK PATHS

A report and quotations were received regarding repairs to the River Walk path near Pattison Close and an update on paths by Moat Farm Chase and Saxon Drive.

Members considered the quotations and agreed that it would be more cost effective to have a complete reconstruction of the footpath and it was agreed to appoint Foster Contracting as best value.

RESOLVED That the report be received and the contract to reconstruct the footpath near Pattison Close be awarded to Foster Contracting at a cost of £11,811.25.

There being no further business the Chairman closed the Meeting at 8.27 p.m.

Councillor J. Martin
Chairman

HA/GK/26.7.2024