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MINUTES

Meeting of: **Environment Committee**

Date: **Monday 22nd January 2024**

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

Present: Councillors S. Ager (Chairman)
J.C. Coleman (Vice Chairman)
E. Adelaja
B. Fleet
L. Headley
J. Martin
R. Ramage

Also in attendance Cllr P. Barlow
N. Smith (Town Clerk)
G. Kennedy (Committee Clerk)

18. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J.M. Coleman, Sloma and Councillor Taylor.

RESOLVED That the apologies be received and approved.

19. MINUTES

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Environment Committee held 16th October 2023 be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

20. INTERESTS

Councillor Fleet declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute 26 – Witham Tree Group, as he is a member of that organisation.

21. QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

There were no members of the press or public present.

22. CLERK'S REPORT

The Clerk's Report on matters arising was received.

RESOLVED That the Report be received and noted.

23. COMMITTEE INCOME AND EXPENDITURE REPORT

The income and expenditure report for the period 1st April 2023 to 31st December 2023 and the accompanying exception report were received.

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

24. OPEN SPACES MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE

The Minutes of the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee meeting held on 5th December 2023 be received.

RESOLVED That the Minutes be received and noted.

25. CLIMATE CHANGE WORKING GROUP

The Minutes of the Climate Change Working Group meeting held on 26th October 2023 were received.

The Chairman explained that there would be a meeting next month and she hoped Members would come with plenty of ideas.

RESOLVED That the Minutes be received and noted.

26. WITHAM TREE GROUP

Councillor Fleet had declared an interest.

The Tree Group minutes for the meetings held 17th October and 7th November 2023; and 9th January 2024 were received.

Councillor Fleet explained that there had been ongoing issues with gaining permission to plant on Braintree District Council land and he was grateful to Councillor Heath for resolving this problem. He said that volunteers run the Tree Group but if they were to see an apparently dangerous tree they would report to the Tree Officer at Braintree District Council. He added that the Tree Group was keen to plant by children's play areas to provide shade and protection from the sun. He was grateful to Aegon and Popcorn volunteers who will help plant the trees in the coming month.

RESOLVED That the Tree Group minutes be received and noted.

27. SECTION 106 WORKING GROUP

A report on current Section 106 open spaces projects was received.

Members were informed that the Section 106 Working Group regularly checks to ensure that suitable projects are agreed before the funding runs out.

RESOLVED That the report be received and noted.

28. ALLOTMENT REPORT

An allotment report was received.

A discussion then took place ranging from whether more allotment space could be found in Witham, the proposed Community Orchard and raised beds.

RESOLVED That the report be received and noted.

29. ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

Members were asked to receive and review the Environmental Policy.

Members discussed whether additional emphasis should be put on climate change.

RESOLVED That the Environmental Policy be agreed with an amendment in the objectives to include the words ... 'for example' in planning applications through the creation of a Neighbourhood Plan.

30. STATION ADOPTION

A report on station adoption was received.

The Town Clerk explained that funding was very short to keep the planters looking attractive and Greater Anglia were slow in paying invoices. Members wished to keep the railway station looking good but did not want to subsidise a business. A suggestion was made that grants could be available through the Community Rail scheme or the King's Fund.

RESOLVED That the report be received, that funding opportunities be sought, ensure that Greater Anglia settle its invoice and continue with the planting.

31. POTENTIAL OPEN SPACES IMPROVEMENTS

Members were asked to consider items to be included on the 2024 Braintree District Council Potential Open Spaces Improvements document, previously known as Open Spaces Action Plan.

Members agreed that the proposal to fish in the drainage pond off Gershwin Boulevard would be dangerous and should be removed. It was also agreed to include enhancements for the River Walk pond.

RESOLVED That the Potential Open Spaces Improvements document be received and suggested proposals for 2024 be agreed,

including that proposed fishing in the drainage pond at Gershwin Boulevard be removed and enhancements to the duck pond on the River Walk be included.

32. WITHAM IN BLOOM

A report on Witham in Bloom was received.

Members recognised the expense of providing the floral displays in Witham particularly the hanging baskets. The Town Clerk explained that sponsorship for the hanging baskets could be sought but the troughs would be able to be planted in-house. Members suggested that the King's Fund could be approached.

RESOLVED That the report be received and the winter planting of troughs and maintenance be undertaken by staff.

33. WHETMEAD NATURE RESERVE RIVER BANK EROSION

A report on river bank erosion at Whetmead Nature Reserve was received.

It was explained that the pathway was being narrowed by the erosion so remedial work was required.

RESOLVED That the report be received and virement of £2,709.50 from the River Walk Project management budget line to purchase the required products to repair the river bank be approved.

34. JAMES COOKE WOOD IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

A report on James Cooke Wood improvement project was received.

The Town Clerk explained that the board walk would be installed next month which would improve accessibility. Staff were unable to undertake all the felling required in the wood so it was suggested that a contractor be appointed to fell the required trees which would open up the canopy and increase the diversity of the woodland. The cost of 50% of the required works would be £5,000 and it was suggested that £3,000 be vired from the Litter Bin budget line as this had not been utilised.

RESOLVED That the £3,000 be vired from the Litter Bin budget line be utilised towards the felling of 50% of the required number of trees in James Cooke Wood.

Members then discussed the proposal to make improvements to the car park and entrance. It was recognised that the car park was too small to allow for the wood to be better used.

RESOLVED That the car park/entrance enhancements be approved as the next stage of the James Cooke Wood improvement project and for officers to pursue this further.

35. 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 within Schedule 12A (S3) of the Local Government Act 1972.

36. RIVER WALK DRAINAGE WORKS

A report on River Walk drainage works was received.

Three quotations were received to improve drainage on the Ebenezer Close end of the River Walk and it was agreed to accept the cheapest quote.

RESOLVED That the report be received and Hugh Pearl (Land Drainage) Ltd be appointed to carry out the proposed drainage work at a cost of £6,220.00.

There being no further business the Chairman closed the Meeting at 9.12 p.m.

Councillor S. Ager
Chairman

NS/GK/24.1.2023