

NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE RIVERWALK AND NATURE RESERVES MANAGEMENT WORKING GROUP AT WITHAM TOWN COUNCIL HELD 5TH JULY 2017 AT 3:00PM IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER.

PRESENT:- Councillors J.C. Goodman, P. Horner, Mrs J.M Money, P.M Ryland, Mrs J Williams.

B Fleet (Chairman), B Wilmer, A. Chick, D Smith.

Staff: J. Sheehy - Deputy Town Clerk
C. Frost - Open Spaces Supervisor

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor T.A Pleasance and J. Palombi due to previous engagements.

2. NOTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD 19TH APRIL 2017

The notes of the meeting held 19th April 2017 were taken as read.

3. INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

4. QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

There were two members of the public present who did not wish to speak.

5. OPEN SPACES SUPERVISORS REPORT

C. Frost delivered his report to members of the group on work that has recently taken place on the Council's nature reserves. It was stated that three new benches had now been installed in James Cook Wood and that there was scope for additional benches if thought necessary. The Open Spaces team had also recently conducted work on Whetmead Nature Reserve, removing ageing fishing platforms along the river edge.

It was noted by Members that following a resolution made at the Environment Committee, warning notices had now been placed along the boundary of the A12, but that several of the newly installed notices had been uprooted and removed in an act of vandalism. It was noted that tree whips in the nearby area had also been vandalised some months earlier and that policing anti-social behaviour at Whetmead was challenging. It was suggested and **AGREED** by members that the warning sign posts should be concreted into the ground to decrease the likelihood of their removal.

C. Frost also updated members regarding a beech tree on the River Walk which had fell in recent weeks after prolonged fire damage caused over a number of years. It was stated that the tree had fell into the river and the Environment Agency had been called out who removed limbs that were encroaching on the flow of the river water. It was noted that the Environment Agency were scheduled to return in October to remove the remaining portion of the tree.

6. DEPUTY TOWN CLERK'S REPORT

The Deputy Clerk notified members that a query had been opened with Highways England over the boundary of Whetmead Nature Reserve and the A12, but that no further response had been received since clarifying the extent of the Town Council's land ownership.

It was noted by Members that work was yet to begin on the renovation of the River Walk duck pond. The Deputy Clerk stated that the contractor was now preparing a scheme of work and risk assessment to be sent for approval by the District Council as the landowners of the River Walk in the hope that approval would be made quickly and the work undertaken by the autumn period.

7. MISCANTHUS GRASS PLANTING

Members considered a proposal by Councillor P.M Ryland to trial the planting and establishment of Miscanthus Grass on Whetmead Nature Reserve. It was thought prudent by members to seek advice and guidance from the Essex Wildlife Trust and subject to their advice, trial a small area of growth as it was not known how suited the plant would be to Whetmead.

It was **AGREED** that the Deputy Town Clerk would seek advice from the Essex Wildlife Trust about the planting of Miscanthus Grass.

8. CLOSED CHURCHYARD POND PROPOSALS

Members were notified that the burial records for the Closed Churchyard had now been checked as an area for the establishment of a nature pond had been agreed. Members considered the detail of the initial proposal to be submitted to the Parochial Church Council and stated that the pond would serve as a nature garden and bog area with minimal excavation and a shallow body of water with suitable planting.

It was **AGREED** that the proposal would be submitted to the Parochial Church Council for consideration and for a report to be received at the next meeting.

9. LOCAL NATURE RESERVE DESIGNATION FOR RIVER WALK AREAS

Members considered areas of the River Walk for inclusion into the incorporation of a new Local Nature Reserve and drew attention to the northern end of the River Walk by Ebenezer Close. It was thought that wild areas to the North of the River Walk should be included with the 'back channel' area for the establishment of a new LNR.

It was **AGREED** that a final outline map of areas to be included would be completed for submission to the District Council to request the establishment of a new LNR.

10. WHERE DOES WATER GO? PROJECT

Members received details regarding the "Where Does Water Go?" project organised by Essex County Council. The voluntary scheme allows town and parish councils to create maps of local water courses and educate landowners of riparian duties. It was considered beneficial to support the scheme and appeal for volunteers, and it was **AGREED** that details of the project would be circulated to the Friends of the River Walk and the Witham Countryside Society.

11. PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION

Members noted that the Town Council photography competition had been relaunched for 2017 with judging to take place in the autumn time using the same judging scheme as previous years and that further promotion and publicity of the competition would take place to entice entrants to take part.

12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

B. Wilmer stated that there had been sightings of water voles which was encouraging and that a nightingale had been heard. It was stated that a patch of grass off Maldon Road which had been left to grow wild was doing very well and was being monitored for wildflower growth.

Attention was drawn to a sign at Bridge Street that required continual cleaning due to birds nesting above it. It was **AGREED** that minor pruning to the branches would deter the birds from sitting above the sign.

Members discussed the state of a post and rail fence at James Cooke Wood which was slowly rotting and was thought to no longer serve a purpose. It was considered the fence was originally erected to protect the young trees but as the wood has matured, there was no longer any reason to maintain the fence. It was **AGREED** that the fencing could be replaced with hedging in due course.

13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was noted for **18th October 2017** at 3:00PM.

There being no further business, the Chairman closed the meeting at 4:13PM.

JS 07.07.2017