

NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE RIVERWALK AND NATURE RESERVES MANAGEMENT WORKING GROUP AT WITHAM TOWN COUNCIL HELD 19TH APRIL 2017 AT 3:00PM IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER.

PRESENT:- Councillors J.C. Goodman, P. Horner.

B Fleet (Chairman), J Palombi, B Wilmer,

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

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs J. Lloyd and D. Smith due to previous engagements.

Apologies were noted for Councillor Mrs J. Williams who was not notified of the meeting due to a mistake in the membership list, which was corrected after the meeting was held.

2. NOTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD 18TH JANUARY 2017

The notes of the meeting held 18th January 2017 were taken as read.

3. INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

4. QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

There were four members of the public present.

A question was raised to the working group from the public gallery regarding benches on the River Walk by a member of the public. It was stated that additional seating would be of benefit to the elderly and infirm who cannot walk longer distances between benches and the working group was requested to give consideration to additional seating being placed in the area. It was noted that a revised Commemorative Bench Scheme would be placed on the next agenda of the Environment Committee.

5. OPEN SPACES SUPERVISORS REPORT

C. Frost delivered his report to members of the group, updating members that work was now underway to cut and mark two new walks on the Whetmead Nature Reserve as the associated materials had now been procured. C. Frost notified members that the cutting of the paths was earmarked to begin in May when weather conditions would be improved, and that the pathways would be laid out with colour coded way-marking posts.

C. Frost notified members that new benches were now being constructed for James Cooke Wood (*Ref Min. 5 18-01-2017*).

6. DEPUTY TOWN CLERK'S REPORT

The Deputy Clerk's report was received and noted as **Annex A**.

7. WHETMEAD BOUNDARY WITH A12

The Deputy Clerk updated Members that following approval by the Environment Committee on 20th March 2017 of expenditure on warning signage for the boundary of the nature reserve with the A12, signs were now being procured and would be installed before the next meeting.

Members discussed the potential for serious changes to Whetmead in the future with a proposed widening of the A12 dual-carriage way to three lanes in both directions. It was noted that several trial surveys had been completed on Whetmead by Highways officials and that the widening would be highly likely to make a significant impact to Whetmead particularly with a potential loss of trees to the site.

It was **AGREED** that the situation would be monitored closely by Witham Town Council as a consultee of the proposed highways works.

8. CLOSED CHURCHYARD POND PROPOSALS

A report was received following proposals of creating a pond in the Closed Churchyard. The Area Dean of Witham stated that permission would be required from the Parochial Church Council in order to make any changes to the Churchyard, and as the cemetery is consecrated ground with many burials, a detailed scheme would need to be provided.

Members **AGREED** to proceed with creating a proposal for a pond at the Churchyard and that the Council's records on burials would be examined by the Chairman, Deputy Clerk and Open Spaces Supervisor.

9. WITHAM TREE GROUP TREE WHIPS

The Chairman referred to the Whetmead Nature Reserve management plan stating that there is a potential to plant new tree whips in Whetmead by excavating tree pits to allow the new plantings to take hold.

It was noted that the first five years of the tree's lifespan is when it is at its most vulnerable, and that tree guards may need to be provided for any new planting.

10. LOCAL NATURE RESERVE DESIGNATION FOR RIVER WALK AREAS

A report was received and noted as **Annex B**. Members discussed the possibility of designating certain areas of the Riverwalk as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) and considered the balance of work involved with the benefits of establishing a new LNR.

It was noted that as part of the Braintree District Local Plan, areas bordering the Riverwalk had been earmarked as potential development sites and that the clear boundaries of the Riverwalk should be established in order to ensure that any potential future development did not encroach onto the Riverwalk. It was considered by Members that the designation of the Riverwalk as an LNR would be a mitigating factor against further development of the area when planning permission is sought.

It was **AGREED** that the Essex Wildlife Trust be contacted by the Deputy Clerk to seek advice on compiling a management plan as part of the overall requirements for establishing a new LNR and that research be conducted into the boundaries of the Riverwalk for a report to be included on the next agenda.

11. PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION

Members discussed the continuation of the previously held photography competition and **AGREED** that the event should continue to run as a wider "Witham Town Council Annual Photography Competition" with photographic submissions encouraged of all subject matters relating to Witham, where previous competitions had been focussed on aspects of nature.

It was **AGREED** that the Deputy Town Clerk would re-establish and publicise the competition.

12. TOWN TRAIL

J. Palombi updated Members on the Town Trail following its recent launch attended by the Town Mayor, Councillor P. Horner. It was noted that language translations were now being completed and were due to go live for the Town Trail and that there was scope to publicise it further through advertising leaflets in local tourist hotspots and through "The Voice" quarterly newsletter.

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

It was noted that a damaged Brick Wall was still in a state of disrepair on the border of the River Walk with Chipping Hill. Members were notified that the Policy & Resources Committee had now passed a resolution for the reconstruction of the brick wall.

The Group's current membership list was noted as having several members who had not been in attendance for some time. It was agreed that Members would be contacted to ascertain if they wished to remain a part of the working group.

14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was noted for **5th July 2017** at 3:00PM.

There being no further business, the Chairman closed the meeting at 4:15PM.

JS 21.04.2017



Deputy Clerk's Report - Outside Spaces

- A back log of Risk Assessments for all outside spaces have now been completed with general and remedial works identified for each site. This list of works will be agreed with the Town Clerk and brought to the next meeting of the Riverwalk & Nature Reserves Management Group on 5th July for report and consideration by the group.
- Renewal of footpaths leading to Whetmead has been delayed in order to procure additional material to repair potholes at James Cooke Wood as well.
- The Culvert located at the north end of Whetmead discharging into the river black water is continuing to be monitored as occasional offensive odours seem to be emanating from this area.
- Following discussion on further promoting the Commemorative Tree Scheme, an advert was published in "The Voice" resulting in an additional 5 enquiries which have now paid.
- Following the acceptance of a quote by the Environment Committee, permission is now being sought from Braintree District Council as the freeholders of the River Walk to begin the reinstatement of the duck pond banks with a permanent solution.
- Quotes were obtained for new signage at Whetmead but all three quotes exceeded the budgetary capabilities of the Town Council when taking into account other projects and potential expenditure. Further options to build signage in house using raw materials will be researched into for report back to the next meeting.



River Walk Back Channel Nature Reserve.

Background Papers:

Discussions were held at the River Walk & Nature Reserves Management Group on 19/10/2016 and 18/01/2017 on classifying the entirety, or selected parts of the River Walk as a Local Nature Reserve.

Summary:

Witham Town Council has the power to designate an area as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. The land must be in control of Witham Town Council, either through ownership, a lease, or an agreement with the owners. The ownership of The River Walk is currently held by Braintree District Council.

Guidance states that a site should be selected for its wildlife or geological interest and such areas are generally open green space, but LNR's can also be designated for brownfield sites, commons and other accessible greens. To declare a site as an LNR, a declaration must be submitted to Natural England which has been signed by the Town Council under its common seal. The declaration must be submitted with both a map showing the area and boundaries of the LNR and a management plan which details the following:

- How long the site will remain a protected LNR (21 years is the recommended minimum)
- Ownership of the land
- Any agreements or partnerships
- Why the LNR site was chosen
- Aims and objectives
- Biodiversity management and environmental education
- Community participation, access and visitor management
- Costs and funding arrangement

A public notice period is then initiated and announcement of the new LNR should be placed into the local paper. The declaration and maps must be open for inspection during the consultation period. Upon the designation of the LNR, it can then be formally opened. The LNR should be publically accessible where practical and visitors would not disturb wildlife. Visitor access can also be restricted unless the public have a statutory access right. The LNR may also be regulated by byelaws.

RECOMMENDATION:

The working group should consider the balance between the work involved in establishing an LNR and the benefit to the public and designated site. If the group wishes to proceed, a draft map and management plan should be considered.

JS/08/02/2017