



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

OPEN SPACES MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE

AGENDA

TUESDAY 1ST FEBRUARY 2022, 2:00PM, COUNCIL CHAMBER

MEMBERS:

K. Atwill
J. Goodman
S. Hicks
C. Lager
T. Pleasance

OFFICERS:

H. Andrews
S. Dyer

CO-OPTEEES:

S. Black	-	(Witham & Countryside Society)
S. Brailey	-	(Witham Tree Group)
J. Casement	-	(Witham Wombles)
A. Chick	-	(Witham Rotary Club)
B. Fleet	-	(Tree Warden)
N. Heenan	-	(Environment Agency)
J. Palombi	-	(CPRE)
L. Ralph	-	(Environment Agency)
P. Shuttleworth	-	(Local Wildlife Interests)
A. Watts	-	(Wild about Witham)

1) APOLOGIES

To receive apologies for absence

2) MINUTES

To receive the minutes of the meeting of the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee held on 2nd November 2021 ([attached at pages 3 – 4](#))

3) CLERK'S REPORT

To receive the Clerk's Report ([attached at page 5](#))

4) OPERATIONS MANAGER'S REPORT

To receive the Operations Manager's verbal report on recent open spaces activities and to answer any questions put by members.

5) ANY OTHER BUSINESS

To raise enquiries or any other agenda items to be handled by the next meeting of the committee.

6) DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

To note that the next meeting of the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee will be arranged in due course.



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01376 520627
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MINUTES

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

Date: **Tuesday 2nd November 2021**

Present:	Councillors	S	Hicks	(Chairman)
		J	Goodman	
		S	Black	(Witham & Countryside)
		S	Brailey	(Witham Tree Group)
		B	Fleet	(Tree Warden)
		J	Palombi	(CPRE)
		P	Shuttleworth	(Local Wildlife Interests)
		H	Andrews	(Assistant Town Clerk)
		S	Dyer	(Operations Manager)

11. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllr T Pleasance, Cllr K Atwill and late apologies were received from Cllr C Lager and J Casement.

12. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of 11th August 2021 were agreed and subsequently signed by the Chairman.

It was noted that Braintree District Council's Landscape Officer had been in contact with the manager of Lidl recently regarding the replanting of trees on the site that had failed.

13. CLERK'S REPORT

The Clerk advised the group that she had recently received the report back from the surveyor who had conducted the investigations into the ground water issues at Ebenezer Close section of the River Walk. The report has not yet been fully reviewed but it is likely that it will be referred to a future Full Town Council meeting due to potential cost implications.

It was noted that a meeting had taken place with National Highways regarding the A12 widening and the implications this will have to Whetmead Nature Reserve. Members discussed the potential impact that this would have on the environment and would like to be kept informed of the

development of the project outside of Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee meetings. It was **AGREED** that information arising that can be shared about the A12 widening project would be passed on to the group when received.

14. OPERATIONS MANAGER'S REPORT

The Operations Manager confirmed that the team was up-to-date with all aspects of the River Walk. There would probably be one or two more grass cuts before the end of the season, and there is a hedge left to cut. He advised that Whetmead Nature Reserve was also up-to-date.

He confirmed that work will continue during the winter period in James Cooke Wood with necessary tree maintenance and thinning of trees. Members discussed that there continued to be no pedestrian pathway access to the site.

It was noted that recent improvement work had been carried out by the Operations Team in the Closed Churchyard including the planting of a trial wildflower section.

Highways Devolution work had also been carried out by the team, a new commemorative bench had recently been installed near Chipping Hill and a successful Halloween trail event had taken place on the River Walk.

15. CONSIDERATION OF WRITTEN REPRESENTATIONS

- (a) Members discussed the correspondence regarding installing lighting on the River Walk and it was agreed that this would be detrimental to nocturnal wildlife, could encourage anti-social behaviour making it more dangerous and the financial logistics would make it unfeasible. The group were advised that the original design concept for the River Walk was that it is countryside running through a town, and is unique to Essex. Members agreed that to install lighting would also undermine this concept. It was agreed to reply to the resident providing the reasons why this would not be pursued, and it was **SUGGESTED** that an article could be included in a future edition of Witham's Voice giving further information about the history of the River Walk and why further lighting would not be installed.
- (b) Members supported the suggestion of planting of bee-friendly plants, Phacelia. It was **SUGGESTED** that this could be incorporated into the wildflower trial planting in the Closed Churchyard and extended to future trial planting at Whetmead and possibly James Cooke Wood.

The group went on to discuss the unofficial grass pathway that pedestrians are using on the River Walk while the main path is closed near Helen Court due to the Bellway development. It was noted that the grass has now been destroyed due to the volume of pedestrians walking on it and it was **SUGGESTED** that this section of the River Walk should be shut to the public to prevent further damage.

16. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business to be handled by the next meeting of the sub-committee

17. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee will be held on Tuesday 1st February 2022.

Meeting concluded at 2.50pm



ITEM NO: 3

Officer Report: Clerk's Report

Issue:

- The section of the River Walk by Helen Court that residents are continuing to use as a cut-through while the formal public footpath is closed because of the Gimsons development continues to be an issue. Following the last Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee meeting of 2nd November 2021, the suggestion was made to close the area to the public. This was discussed at Full Town Council on 15th November 2021 where Members agreed to initially lay bark chippings to improve the ground conditions. Bark chippings were laid on 30th November 2021 but by 10th December 2021 the ground conditions had deteriorated again becoming hazardous and a resident reported that they had fallen over while walking along the route. At Full Town Council on 14th December 2021 the decision was taken to close the gaps in the hedge to prevent pedestrians using the cut through. Fencing with appropriate signage was installed on 16th December 2021 but this has been repeatedly vandalised since and members of the public are continuing to walk across the grass and mud rather than use the official diversion. The problem was again discussed at Full Town Council on 17th January 2021 and it was agreed to leave the area in its current state to allow pedestrians through if they wish as the formal public footpath is due to reopen by the end of February 2022.
- Witham Town Council received bulbs and tree whips from Braintree District Council as part of their community planting scheme. The bulbs have since been planted in the Closed Churchyard in the area in which wildflower planting is being trialled. The tree whips were planted on Whetmead but unfortunately were vandalised and removed the day after planting.

Advice:

To receive and note