



Town Hall | 61 Newland Street | Witham | CM8 2FE
01376 520627
witham.gov.uk

MINUTES

Meeting of: **Environment Committee**
Date: **Tuesday, 26th April 2022**
Place: **Town Hall, 61 Newland Street, Witham.**

Present: Councillors

J.	Goodman	(Chairman)
J.	Bayford	
S.	Hicks	
A.	Kilmartin	
C.	Lager	
M.	Lager	
S.	Rajeev	
M.	Weeks	

Also in attendance: Cllr

S.	Ager	
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Witham Tree Group:

M.	Austin	
B.	Fleet	
A.	Waight	

H.	Andrews	(Deputy Town Clerk)
G.	Kennedy	(Committee Clerk)

43. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Atwill who was travelling abroad and Livermore who was unwell.

RESOLVED That the apologies be received and accepted.

44. MINUTES

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Environment Committee held 31st January 2022 be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

45. INTERESTS

No interests were declared.

46. QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

Councillor Ager referred to Minute 54 – Re-wilding Project. She suggested two areas for re-wilding, one on the River Walk by Armond Road and the other in James Cooke Wood.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Ager for her comments and agreed that whilst they could be considered, it was District Council land that was required to be identified.

47. CLERK'S REPORT

The Clerk's Report on matters arising was received.

It was noted that the ditch behind Ebenezer Close would require to be reinstated as it had been filled in by illegal fly tipping of garden waste which had caused problems with surface water.

RESOLVED That the report be received and information noted.

48. COMMITTEE INCOME, EXPENDITURE & BUDGET REPORT

The committee income and expenditure report for the period 1st April 2021 – 31st March 2022 was received.

RESOLVED that the income and expenditure report for the period 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022 be received and noted.

49. WITHAM TREE GROUP

(a) Report to the Town Council

The Chairman welcomed Mark Austin, Barry Fleet and Allan Waight from the Witham Tree to the Meeting.

Mr Fleet referred to their report which covered their activities for the seasons 2020 – 2021 and 2021 – 2022. He considered it an appropriate moment to look back and spoke about the accelerated planting over the past two years. Their great concern was that developers planted trees on new estates which invariably had no aftercare and consequently died. They would have five years to replant those trees which died so replant in year four. He considered that the system was flawed as there was a lack of enforcement. He referred to the Lidl site where all the trees had been recently removed regardless of whether they were living and all were replaced presumably again with no aftercare. Mr Fleet asked the Town Council to recognise this problem and apply pressure to Braintree District Council to ensure monitoring and prevent developers avoiding their responsibility.

He said that there was still a lot more work to be done with planting along Spa Road. They had been approached by the Templars Residents Association regarding planting around the playground to provide shade.

Members agreed that there was a unique partnership with the Town Council and the Tree Group and thanked all those who had contributed their expertise and energy. It was considered that there would be scope to lobby the District Council to extend developers' obligations regarding trees to

ten years and could form part of the Local Plan documentation and should be discussed by the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group.

In answer to a question it was explained that the Tree Group plant between November and March, April is routine maintenance and in the summer months every Thursday morning, for two and a half hours, six team members water trees which have been planted in the past two years. This means that they have a very low failure. They also plant whips with help of local volunteers but these are not watered.

A suggestion had been made that local developers could pay the Tree Group to water recently planted trees and they were asked to consider if this was viable.

RESOLVED That the report be received and the Town Council's thanks to the Tree Group be recorded.

(b) Tree Group Minutes

The Tree Group Minutes for the meetings held 22nd February and 22nd March 2022 were received.

The Tree Group were informed that at the earlier Planning and Transport Committee Meeting it had been agreed to seek the assistance of the Tree Group to identify trees at Gimsons which could be subject to a Tree Preservation Order.

It was also agreed that the question of the Town Council ordering goods for the Tree Group and therefore not being subject to VAT should be revisited.

Mr Fleet said that the wooden signage for each end of the Memorial Park was waiting to be installed but the Interpretation Board was still to be designed. He added that the District Council's comment that it would not be possible to plant trees in Newland Street because of underground utilities was untrue as techniques including planting boxes could be used.

RESOLVED That the Minutes be received and the information noted.

50. OPEN SPACES MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE

The Minutes of the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee Meeting held 31st January 2022 were received.

RESOLVED That the Minutes be received and noted.

51. CLIMATE AUDIT PANEL

The Minutes from the Climate Audit Panel Meeting held 7th March 2022 were received.

Members agreed that an energy performance certificate should be obtained for the Town Hall.

RESOLVED That the an energy performance certificate be obtained for the Town Hall.

RESOLVED That the Minutes be received and noted.

52. HIGHWAYS DEVOLUTION SCHEME

(a) Update

The Deputy Town Clerk gave an update of the scheme. She explained that only a fraction of the funding had been used on the 26 jobs, machinery and training. She said that she was awaiting information as to whether the scheme would continue and be extended to allow additional work to be undertaken.

Members considered that public footpaths should be included in the scheme so that everyone could use them.

RESOLVED That Councillors Goodman and M. Lager meet with Essex County Councillors Louis and Playle to discuss these issues before seeking a meeting with the Cabinet Member.

Councillor Ager then left the Meeting.

(b) Licence

A report was received regarding the Maldon Road/Blue Mills fingerpost licence.

RESOLVED That the report be received and noted.

53. RIVERWALK PATHS

(a) Members were asked to consider walking the paths of the River Walk to get a better understanding of which paths needed remedial attention.

All Members present agreed that they wished to take part and that a hard copy of the surveyor's report would be provided.

RESOLVED That a date for the walk be arranged and hard copies of the report sent to those Members present.

(b) The Deputy Town Clerk explained that she had contacted Essex County Council and been advised that as parts of the paths on the River Walk are registered as Cycleway Network 16, there would be no benefit in registering them as Public Rights of Way.

Members remembered that the Evangelical bridge had been replaced by Essex County Council as it was a Public Rights of Way and therefore had a duty to maintain in a safe condition.

The Deputy Town Clerk undertook to share the correspondence with Members.

RESOLVED That the information be received and noted.

54. RE-WILDING PROJECT

Information about Braintree District Council's re-wilding project was received and Members asked to consider suitable areas.

Members discussed where it would be appropriate to re-wild and decided the field off Ness Walk would be appropriate.

RESOLVED That the field off Ness Walk be proposed to Braintree District Council as appropriate land for re-wilding.

55. POND CONSERVATION

Information was received from the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, regarding pond conservation projects.

Members agreed that this matter should be referred to the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee and noted that publicity was requested.

RESOLVED That the matter be referred to the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee.

RESOLVED That details of the scheme be shared through the Voice and Social Media.

56. BUS SHELTERS

An email was received from Essex County Councillor D. Louis regarding the redundant bus shelters on Gershwin Boulevard.

Members were disappointed that after being assured that the redundant bus shelters could be used elsewhere, it would appear not to be the case as they had been installed by the developer as part of the Section 106 agreement.

The Deputy Town Clerk explained that she understood that once development had finished and the road adopted, the bus shelters became the property of Essex County Council.

RESOLVED That Essex County Council be asked to reconsider its stance as it was understood that once the road was adopted the bus shelter became its property.

RESOLVED That contact be made with the District Council's Planning Authority to establish ownership of the bus shelters which were provided by the developer under the Section 106 agreement.

There being no further business the Chairman closed the Meeting at 9.05 p.m.

Councillor J. Goodman
Chairman
HA/GK/29.4.2022