



Witham

town council

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

AGENDA

Meeting of: **Environment Committee**

Date: **Monday 26th January 2026** Time: **7.30 p.m.**

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

Members are hereby summoned to attend the above Meeting to transact the following business. Members are respectfully reminded that each item on the Agenda should be carefully examined. If you have any interest, it must be duly declared.

To be present: Councillors:

J.	Martin	(Chairman)	J.	Goodman
J.M.	Coleman	(Vice Chairman)	L.	Headley
E.	Adelaja		J.	Robertson
J.C.	Coleman		A.	Sloma
B.	Fleet		B.	Taylor

Nikki Smith
Town Clerk

1. APOLOGIES

To receive and approve apologies for absence.

2. MINUTES

To receive the Minutes of the Meeting of the Environment Committee held 13th October 2025 (previously circulated).

3. INTERESTS

To receive any declarations of interests that Members may wish to give notice of on matters pertaining to any item on this Agenda.

4. QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

An opportunity to enable members of the press and public present to comment.

Order Note: A maximum of 30 minutes is designated for public participation time with no individual speaker exceeding three minutes unless otherwise granted an extension by the Chairman under Standing Order 3(F) & 3(G)

5. CLERK'S REPORT

To receive the Clerk's Report on matters arising attached at page 4.

6. COMMITTEE INCOME AND EXPENDITURE

To receive the income and expenditure report for the period 1st April 2025 to 31st December 2025 attached at page 5.

7. OPEN SPACES MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE

To receive the Minutes from the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee meeting held on 3rd December 2025 attached at page 6.

8. SECTION 106 STEERING GROUP

To receive the Minutes from the Section 106 Steering Group meeting held on 29th October 2026 attached at page 8.

9. WITHAM TREE GROUP

To receive Witham Tree Group minutes held in October 2025, November 2025 and January 2026 attached at page 11.

10. ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

To review and approve the Environmental Policy attached at page 16.

11. RIVER WALK BIODIVERSITY REPORT

To receive a report attached at page 19.

12. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

At this point, the Chair will move the following resolution: Under the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960 S.1(2) and in accordance with Standing Order 3(d), the press and public should be excluded from the remainder of the meeting due to the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.

13. ALLOTMENT CAR PARK

To receive a report attached at page 20.

14. SECTION 106 REPORT

To receive a report attached at page 22.

Officer Report: Clerk's Report

To note:

- The recommended works on all River Walk pedestrian bridges for resurfacing and repairs to parapet posts and half joints is scheduled to commence at the start of the Easter school holidays on 30th March 2026, weather dependant.
- The removal and replacement of the bus shelters by the railway station is scheduled to take place on 5th/6th February 2026.
- The Section 106 River Walk nature sculpture project is progressing and the installation is currently scheduled for April 2026, although this can be subject to change.

Advice:

To receive and note.

Summary of Receipts and Payments

Item 6

Cost Centre 3 (Between 01/04/2025 and 31/12/2025)

Environment

Code	Title	Receipts			Payments			Net Position
		Budgeted	Actual	Variance	Budgeted	Actual	Variance	+/- Under/over spend
57	Dog & Bench Sponsorship Scheme	1,650.00	3,810.00	2,160.00				2,160.00 (130%)
58	Operations - Salaries & NI & LGPS				200,308.00	141,008.59	59,299.41	59,299.41 (29%)
59	Equipment Supplies & Maintenance				8,400.00	4,339.23	4,060.77	4,060.77 (48%)
60	Dog & Bench Schemes				1,200.00	3,230.06	-2,030.06	-2,030.06 (-169%)
61	Lighting Maintenance & Utility				17,000.00	4,543.81	12,456.19	12,456.19 (73%)
62	Tree Planting				3,000.00	2,829.30	170.70	170.70 (5%)
63	Tree Maintenance				5,000.00	4,550.00	450.00	450.00 (9%)
64	Toilet Block - Town Park				13,000.00	9,476.72	3,523.28	3,523.28 (27%)
65	Dog Bin Maintenance				600.00		600.00	600.00 (100%)
66	Litter Bins				1,000.00		1,000.00	1,000.00 (100%)
67	Open Spaces General				2,500.00	1,918.17	581.83	581.83 (23%)
68	River Walk Signage				2,000.00	1,791.70	208.30	208.30 (10%)
69	James Cooke Wood				2,000.00		2,000.00	2,000.00 (100%)
70	River Walk				7,000.00	2,556.70	4,443.30	4,443.30 (63%)
71	Whetmead LNR				2,000.00	1,163.12	836.88	836.88 (41%)
72	Witham in Bloom				14,000.00	13,012.05	987.95	987.95 (7%)
73	Fleet				6,500.00	3,125.24	3,374.76	3,374.76 (51%)
74	Waste Disposal				1,000.00		1,000.00	1,000.00 (100%)
122	S106 Receipts		7,453.22	7,453.22				7,453.22 (N/A)
123	S106 Expenditure					14,579.85	-14,579.85	-14,579.85 (N/A)
SUB TOTAL		1,650.00	11,263.22	9,613.22	286,508.00	208,124.54	78,383.46	87,996.68 (30%)

Summary

NET TOTAL	1,650.00	11,263.22	9,613.22	286,508.00	208,124.54	78,383.46	87,996.68
V.A.T.					10,604.76		
GROSS TOTAL		11,263.22			218,729.30		



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MINUTES

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

Date: **3rd December 2025**

Present:	Councillors	J	Goodman	(Vice-Chairman)
		P	Heath	
	Co-optees	S.	Black	(Witham and Countryside Society)
		P.	Shuttleworth	(Local wildlife Interests)
	Officers	H.	Andrews	(Deputy Town Clerk)
		S.	Dyer	(Operations Manager)
		S.	Puckey	(Open Spaces Administrative Assistant)

23. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllr B Fleet, J Casement and J Palombi. Cllr Ramage and Cllr J M Coleman were absent.

24. INTERESTS

No interests were declared.

25. MINUTES

The minutes were **AGREED** and subsequently signed by the Vice-Chairman.

26. QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

There were no members of the public present

27. CLERK'S REPORT

The Clerk's report was received by Members. The Deputy Town Clerk further advised that the photo post had been used already and the photographs were available to view on the website.

Members **AGREED** to receive the report.

28. OPERATION MANAGER'S REPORT

The Operations Manager provided a verbal update and reported that the Operations Team were up-to-date with their work across open spaces. Notable actions this quarter included a successful community cut and rake day at Mill Lane Meadow, the installation of new bait bins at the pond and a new photography post at Whetmead.

The Operations Manager further advised that a fallen tree in the river, close to the Kingfisher nesting site, will be investigated for potential removal and that the erosion in the same area is a long-term problem requiring professional advice. It was also clarified that the bee hotels were intended for solitary bees and that the bee haven on Glebelands was opposite a CCTV camera to deter vandalism.

It was noted that there had been no complaints about motorised bikes on Whetmead this year but the idea of a V-gate, between Whetmead and the concrete bridge, would be considered if the problem returned.

Members **AGREED** to receive the report.

29. REVIEW OF THE RIVER WALK MANAGEMENT PLAN

Members were still happy with the Management Plan but suggested including the freehold acquisition date and potentially referencing the cut and collect at Mill Lane Meadow.

The Deputy Town Clerk clarified that the management plans were available on the council's website and, following discussion, it was agreed that the documents would be made available in the Information Centre and a notice on the council's noticeboards would signpost residents to the documents.

Members **AGREED** to receive the report.

30. RIVER WALK BIODIVERSITY

Members welcomed the activities within the report and were keen to get more children involved in the monitoring activities.

Members **AGREED** to receive the report.

Meeting concluded at 2.45pm.

SP/3.12.25

Signed by Chairman.....

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE SECTION 106 STEERING GROUP AT WITHAM TOWN COUNCIL HELD 29TH OCTOBER 2025 AT 2PM IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER

Members Present: Councillors L Barlow, P Barlow, J.C. Coleman, L Headley, and R Playle

Officers: N Smith (Town Clerk) and H Andrews (Deputy Town Clerk)

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

It was **AGREED** that Councillor Jack Coleman be elected as Chairman of the Section 106 Steering Group.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

It was **AGREED** that Councillor Phil Barlow be elected as Vice Chairman of the Section 106 Steering Group.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Fleet, Heath and Taylor.

4. INTERESTS

Councillor Playle declared a non-pecuniary interest as his father is the Chairman of Witham Allotment Association. Councillor Coleman, while discussing minute 8, declared a non-pecuniary interest as a member of the Royal British Legion.

5. MINUTES

The minutes of the Section 106 Steering Group meeting held on 13th January 2025 were agreed and subsequently signed by the Chairman.

6. CLERK'S REPORT

An update was given on recently completed and current Section 106 projects. Members were unhappy with the time taken for Braintree District Council to reimburse funds for completed projects. They raised concerns regarding the large public art project for £120k and requested that funds could be paid to Witham Town Council in advance of payment or if Braintree District Council could make the payment direct. It was **AGREED** that Officers would raise these concerns.

Following a member of public attending the Full Town Council meeting of 28th October 2025 to highlight their concerns over the large amount of Section 106 contributions to be spent on public art, Members discussed the Section 106 process, interest being held by the District Council, the length of time taken to deal with this particular project and whether agreements could be altered. Officers confirmed that these issues had previously been raised with Braintree District Council but could pass on their concerns again.

7. MALTINGS LANE PUBLIC ART PROJECT

Members continued to discuss the length of time taken to proceed with this project and sought clarification on the amount to be spent taking into account inflation.

It was noted that there was the option to commission a public art consultant to manage the project, who would take a fee, or approach artists directly. Members discussed the feedback received from residents and **AGREED** that it should be spent on creative play as it should be art with a function.

Ideas discussed included incorporating history into the designs, such as maltings and oast houses previously in that area, or connections to Romans and Ivy Chimneys nearby. A covered sandpit with hidden fixed historical artefacts for children to discover was also discussed. It was noted that any creative play equipment installed would need to meet the public art criteria and so Officers would liaise with Braintree District Council on this.

Members **AGREED** that Officers should provide a report to the next Full Town Council on 25th November 2025 for approval of the way forward.

8. SECTION 106 CONTRIBUTIONS FOR WITHAM AND FUTURE PROJECTS

Members reviewed the S106 contributions spreadsheet with imminent funds up for expiry highlighted. It was noted that one allotment fund expires in February 2026 and that revised quotations are currently being invited for resurfacing a smaller area of the driveway and car park of Cut Throat Lane allotment site.

It was highlighted that an outdoor sport contribution of £54,803 was expiring in February 2026 which came from land at Rickstones Road development but was being used in Sauls Bridge Sports Ground. Members were not happy that funds were being used in another ward in Witham when North Witham was lacking in community facilities. It was **AGREED** that Officers would request an update on this item.

Open Space contributions with expiry dates of October 2024 and October 2025 were noted as due to be allocated to River Walk paths and bridge works, although written clarification was awaited from Braintree District Council.

Officers also **AGREED** to request an update on the town centre contributions amount of £142,880, expiry date July 2025 from Morrisons Supermarket which referred to improvements to the town but included funding towards a dedicated town centre projects officer. Members also discussed the opening up of the wall near Morrisons and into Albert Road, originally part of the planning agreement, and also requested an update on this point.

A discussion took place on the local government reorganisation and what this would mean for the unspent Section 106 contributions being held by the District Council and developments that were currently being considered. It was **AGREED** that this should be referred to the Devolution Working Group for discussion.

The Potential Open Spaces Improvement document was also reviewed and Members enquired about the town's war memorial. It was noted that the Royal British Legion has raised concerns about the structure but no structural report had actually been seen. It was **AGREED** that Braintree District Council Asset Management would be approached for further information.

It was also **AGREED** to review the process of replacing the bench in Collingwood Road with regards to costs and licensing and then look at replacing further old benches throughout the town in the future.

Meeting closed at 3.01pm

HA/30.10.2025

Tree Group Minutes of the 14th October are as follows:

Present: Eric Teverson, Richard Hawkes, Stanley Brailey, Mark Austin, Graham Wingrove, Allan Waight, Barry Fleet.

1. Apologies - none.

2 Minutes of the 2nd September accepted.

3. Matters arising - none.

4 Planting plans

- a) Species for Rickstones Recreation Ground, Alan Road play area & Town End Field - Andrew Digby of BDC had made some initial comments and had been reminded by Richard for his specific approval as we may run into a stock shortage at the nursery;
- b) Species for the Avenue to include the Nettle tree, gleditsia and sorbus;
- c) Memorial Park replacements to include hornbeam, oak, elm & field maple;
- d) Memorial trees - persian ironwood, walnut & pin oak.

We will order when we can. Barry will notify Aegon to request volunteers to help plant.

5. Watering - completed at the end of September; we may need to water sites as we plant so agreed to have the bowser on site for planting.

6. Maintenance - repairs at the Memorial Park completed; the Bryony Close, Cornel Close, Spa Road & Rosebay Close sites to be done next. We will need to acquire chippings for mulching.

7. Finance

- a) Stanley confirmed the current balance;
- b) Agreed to place some surplus funds on deposit with HSBC. Accounts with Co-op may be worth looking into too;
- c) Barry will contact Harry Bryer of ECC to advise the sums that we believe we are owed for the watering etc.

8. Website - the new site is nearly ready ! Allan has a few points to clarify but many problems now resolved; it can be linked to Facebook and can go live shortly; Richard will do reports on the last planting and watering seasons; Allan thanked for all his hard work.

9 List of trees planted - details of the structure discussed.

10. Veteran trees - Stanley & Mark have found significant numbers of such trees in the town, up to 87 identified so far; they aim to complete the research by the end of the year [NB: it won't include trees in residential gardens]; Mark will set up a separate website to release the details..

11. Donated trees - it was agreed that the horse chestnuts could go off Spa Road adjacent to the others of the same species; siting of the oak to be decided; Eric has some elms and sycamore..

12. Volunteer Essex website - no volunteers come forward yet.
13. Bulb planting - Richard has chased BDC [Levi White] for permission.
14. Any other business
 - a) Lynfield elm - Allan has chased BDC for any news;
 - b) It had been suggested that we give a talk to local businesses ;
 - c) Whips have been offered to us by ECC - Barry will advise Harry Bryer that we could have a modest number, say, 50.
- 15 Next meeting - 18th November at Eric's, 7.30 pm.

Tree Group minutes 18th November 2025

Present: Stanley Brailey, Graham Wingrove, Ken Davies, Eric Teverson, Richard Hawkes, Allan Waight, Mark Austin, Barry Fleet.

1. Apologies - none.
2. Minutes of 14th October accepted.
3. Matters arising - Harry Bryer of ECC had requested photos & maps of the trees planted 2024/25 funded through them. These would be the top end of the cyclepath from Rivenhall Oaks and at Rickstones Recreation Ground. Eric will supply these details.
4. Planting 2025/26
 - a] Rickstones Recreation Ground - a line of seven paulownia [foxglove tree] planted successfully last week; there is a problem with the next tranche as movable goals are chained to the side fence though BDC are asking the football club to move them; we will plant what we can;
 - b] Alan Road playground - we wish to plant norway maple & hornbeam though Andrew Digby of BDC suggests we use persian ironwood so possibly have a combination of all three types;
 - c] Town End Field - AD of BDC has approved planting of acer, elm, poplar & tulip tree;
 - d] The Avenue - tree species agreed;
 - e] Memorial trees - tree species agreed;
 - f] Memorial Park - we already have 5 trees for the Park, plus possible donated trees;
 - g] Donated trees - Mr P Gidlow has two horse chestnuts, which we would plant off Humber Road adjacent to others of the same type; Mr P Revell has an oak in his garden, to be lifted; members have other miscellaneous small trees.

Note: the Town Council are funding the following:

5 at the Memorial Park, 5 at Town End Field, 6 at the cemetery entrance road, 7 at the Alan Road playground, i.e. a total of 23.

5 Maintenance - two thirds of the trees have been checked; the London plane at Greenfields may need extra protection; there was a query from a resident of Pinkham Drive regarding the work done to the tree there, to which Barry has responded, explaining the work done.

6 Finance

- a] Stanley confirmed the current balance; Allan has some expenses due;
- b] Barry has agreed with ECC the amounts owed to us from the Urban Tree Fund;
- c] Deposit account - Stanley advised the latest re setting up an account - two of us will need to visit the Chelmsford HSBC branch;
- d] Currently unknown if groups like us are liable for tax on interest etc.

7 Website - draft is looking okay; the archive is included; some editing needs correcting but subject to that, it was agreed that we should proceed; then we will receive Wordpress software which will enable us to add to it; Allan has paid for data protection licence / copyright etc.

8 Record of trees planted - Allan working on this, which will be in location order, making it easier to update.

9 Veteran trees - Stanley & Mark have identified 113 trees so far, and have the River Walk upstream from Bridge St, The Avenue and the former Gimsons site to survey; potentially there could be 150/200 veteran trees in the town excluding any garden trees.

10 Bulb planting - we now have permission from BDC but too late so will defer to next year.

11 Any other business

- a] Stanley has dealt with weeds around trees at Spa Road;
- b] Eric has ordered wood chippings as we now think this is the best mulch;

c] Eric reported that the U3A had wondered if we could give them a talk but nobody volunteered to be a speaker!

12. Next meeting: Tuesday, 6th January, 7.30 pm at Eric's.

January Tree Group Minutes are as follows:

Present: Stanley Brailey, Eric Teverson, Richard Hawkes, Graham Wingrove, Barry Fleet

1. Apologies - Allan Waight, Mark Austin.
2. Minutes of 18th November accepted.
3. Matters arising - none.
4. Planting
 - a) Completed works - Alan Road playground, Town End Field, Witham cemetery entrance;
 - b) To do - The Avenue, Memorial Park replacements, Memorial trees, donated trees; Two memorial trees to be planted 15th Jan along with Memorial Park replacements;
 - c) Whips etc. Mark has planted 45 of 60 received from the Woodland Trust , at the top end of the cyclepath area , near the Rivenhall Oaks estate.
5. Maintenance - Eric, Richard & Barry have repaired the vandalised cages on the green near the sub-station off Cut Throat Lane; we will need to replace cages on deer damaged trees; it was suggested that we look at the trees on the Humber Road estate as some minor works needed on the Tesco funded trees [we have already dealt with ours]; the Forest Road area is still to be done.
6. Finance
 - a) The Treasurer confirmed the current bank balance;
 - b) No news yet re the funds from the Forestry Commission, to be received via ECC;
 - c) Deposit account to be set up;
 - d) No news re tax position.
7. Website - the new site is now live, which we are pleased to note; the trees planted list is still to be added. Circa 600 trees. NB: it was noted that our Facebook site now has 50 followers with 400+ views recently.
8. Veteran trees - 113 recorded in the town so far; survey work will continue once the weather improves; the veteran tree list could be added to the website.
9. Lynfield elm - Allan had advised that there had been no further news except that the BDC arboriculturist is monitoring the suckers; we could ask Andrew Digby if he has any update.
10. Any other business
 - a) Forest Road Residents Association Eco-event. It was agreed that we would have a stall on Tuesday, 17th February. Eric has display boards, Richard has leaflets, Eric has photos, Richard & Janet will be available though other volunteers needed;
 - b) Rivenhall Oaks estate - Mark had advised that the five year planning requirement on Bellway to replace any lost trees has now expired;
 - c) Stanley advised that olive trees had been planted on the roundabout adjacent to the Redrow estate, which is an unusual choice.
11. Next meeting - Tuesday, 10th February, Eric's house, 7.30 p.m.



Witham Town Council: Environmental Policy

Witham Town Council is committed to reducing its environmental impact and creating a sustainable community for residents and future generations. Climate emergency declarations have been made by Essex County Council and Braintree District Council to become carbon neutral by 2030. This has highlighted the requirement for Witham Town Council to strive to reduce its impact on the environment and consider climate change while delivering its services, carrying out its duties and when considering all strategic decisions.

Introduction

The Town Council is committed to acting sustainably and already carries out activities to minimise their carbon footprint, including the following –

- In 1993/94 the Council planted a 14-acre wood with trees to create James Cooke Wood. A management plan, renewed in 2024, follows a schedule of work to enhance the area for wildlife and ensure a sustainable healthy woodland for generations to come
- Whetmead Nature Reserve was a former landfill site but is now a wildlife haven. There are future ambitions to make further enhancements.
- The freehold of the River Walk was transferred to Witham Town Council in 2021 and a 10-year River Walk Management Plan was adopted during 2020/21 which ensures that long term climate benefits are in place, including replacing trees which have died or are felled for safety reasons.
- The closed Churchyard is managed to enhance its value to wildlife while respecting the graves within. In 2024 Essex Ecology Ltd were engaged to provide advice for a new management plan, adopted in 2025, to ensure the site's maintenance continues to maximise the area's biodiversity.
- Supporting Witham Tree Group in their tree planting activities within the town.
- A ban of pesticide use on our open spaces.
- ~~Wildflower initiatives are taking place on our open spaces.~~ Returning wildflowers to Mill Lane Meadow through cut and collect techniques.
- All 75 Witham Town Council lamp columns were replaced with LED bulbs during 2019/2020 which have a longer life span and so lower carbon emissions.
- Installing ultra-low voltage LED Christmas Lights installed, reducing consumption by 20%.
- The Information Centre distributes recycling bags, sells biodegradable food caddy liners at close to cost and collects used batteries and ink cartridges for safe disposal.
- ~~Introducing improved communal composting facilities at Cut Throat Lane allotment site,~~ Encourage the use of water butts and composting at Cut Throat Lane and Wright Grove allotments as well as discouraging tenants' use of pesticides.
- ~~Future plans to consider~~ Replacing open spaces equipment with battery operated alternatives to reduce the use of fuel.
- Maximising recycling at the Town Hall and at events to minimise waste sent to landfill.

- Encouraging car sharing by staff where possible.
- Using green electricity tariffs for the town hall and toilet block where possible.
- Solar panels are due to be installed on the new Maltings Lane community centre.

This policy applies to all land, property and equipment that Witham Town Council owns, manages or is responsible for as well as services it delivers. The Council will ensure compliance with all environmental regulations, laws and codes of practice including The Water Act 2003, The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, Climate Change and Sustainable Energy Act 2006, Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005, Duty of Care (Waste), Water Framework Directive.

Objectives

Witham Town Council recognises that its day-to-day operations and activities can have an impact on the environment in a negative way. This policy aims to establish broad objectives in ensuring that the Council will continually strive to reduce its impact on the environment and consider climate change in the development of all its activities.

The Council will aim to improve its environmental performance and influence improvement in Witham in the following ways:

- Use energy, natural resources and non-renewable resources efficiently and strive to minimise waste and pollution.
- Seek to use local suppliers as far as possible to reduce the delivery carbon footprint of goods.
- Making environmental impact part of any contractual bidding process and encouraging event suppliers to adopt environmental practices.
- Inform Witham's residents of the Council's environmental activities and respond and react to feedback.
- Promote and support individual behaviour change in Witham's residents, leading by example and supporting environmentally friendly activities.
- Support local businesses in adoption of low-impact practices.
- Manage its land using environmentally-friendly practices that will promote biodiversity and protect habitats.
- Plan to carry out a complete review of the Town Council's fleet for lower carbon alternatives at the point of end of life of the current fleet.
- Support and encourage climate change initiatives in planning applications through the creation of the Neighbourhood Plan.
- Taking part in the Essex and Suffolk River's Trust River Watch initiative in measuring pollution levels in the River Brain and Blackwater.

Specific Environmental Actions

The Council will commit to environmental action in the following specific areas -

Water Management

- Water to be used efficiently for Council activities and at the Town Hall.
- Maximise the use of water butts.
- Minimisation of pollution and conservation of the River Brain through the River Walk and Whetmead including the river banks which provide an important wildlife habitat.

Energy Management

- Monitor energy use and look at instigating energy-saving measures at the Town Hall.
- Raise awareness of energy efficiency to staff when using Council resources.
- Promote energy saving practices to residents.

Biodiversity and Open Spaces

- Protect and enhance the natural environment of the Council's open spaces, including creating new habitats for wildlife.
- Continue to manage Council open spaces to promote and protect biodiversity.
- Continue to exclude the use of all pesticides on Council managed open spaces.
- Extend wildflower initiatives ensuring invasive species are excluded.
- Look for opportunities to introduce new hedgerows to create wildlife corridors.
- Open spaces to be managed effectively to enhance the quality of the natural environment while providing amenity space for residents and protected well-being for species onsite.

Raising Awareness

- Promote the awareness of environmental issues within the town and encourage recycling and other positive environmental actions.
- Highlight carbon footprint reducing measures to residents.
- Work with partner organisations to raise awareness.

Reviewed and adopted at Environment Committee held 9th January 2023, minute no 36.

Last reviewed: 26th January 2026

Next Review: January 2027

Officer Report: River Walk – Biodiversity Report Consideration

Issue:

On 6th September 2022, the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee, while reviewing the River Walk Management Plan, agreed that they would like a biodiversity survey of the River Walk to be carried out by 2025 and again in 2030 to monitor progress.

While researching and considering a full biodiversity survey, officers were of the view that this would not provide value for money for the council as this was estimated to be in excess of £4k. Given the differing habitats and varied taxa (plants, birds, mammals, fungi etc) on the length of the River Walk, a complete biodiversity survey would be labour intensive, time consuming (requiring seasonal surveys to be accurate) and expensive to provide meaningful results.

Data is already collected in a number of ways including:

- Annual Glow Worm survey carried out by Essex Wildlife Trust
- Annual Water Vole survey carried out the Operations Team
- Resident and staff feedback recorded on the Wildlife Watch Board in the Information Centre
- A Bio-blitz (the first one recorded in 2025 with another planned in 2026)

These tools do not provide an exhaustive list of species, however it is proposed that to supplement this data, Witham Town Council, instead of a full survey, also carries out the following:

- A bat survey in 2026 (Between May and September) and again in 2030 as this is a protected species that may need help.
- An annual butterfly count in July / August as part of the national Big Butterfly Count to begin to track their populations over time at one or more specific points on the River Walk.
- An annual bird watch in January, as part of the national RSPB big national birdwatch, and again in Summer to begin to track bird populations over time, at one or more specific points on the River Walk.

It is proposed that the latter two surveys could be done by inviting volunteers to take part (crowdsourcing) which would have the added benefit of engaging with the local community, promoting conservation and keeping cost levels down.

While the proposed three additional surveys cannot fully replace a full audit, it is believed that this approach will provide a rich source of information over time which is more sustainable and almost as effective.

Impact Assessment

The Town Council has a statutory duty to consider the effects of its decisions on biodiversity, and crime and disorder in the area.

- (a) Biodiversity – Positive impact on biodiversity.
- (b) Crime and disorder – No impact.

Advice:

- To agree to two citizen science surveys in 2026 and a bat survey (2026 and 2030) rather than carry out an expensive biodiversity audit now and in 2030