



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

## OPEN SPACES MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE

### AGENDA

WEDNESDAY 2<sup>ND</sup> SEPTEMBER 2026, 2:00PM

|                 |             |      |                |                  |            |
|-----------------|-------------|------|----------------|------------------|------------|
| <b>MEMBERS:</b> | Councillors | B.   | Fleet (Chair)  | <b>OFFICERS:</b> | H. Andrews |
|                 |             | J.M. | Coleman        |                  | S. Dyer    |
|                 |             | J.   | Goodman (Vice) |                  | S. Puckey  |
|                 |             | P.   | Heath          |                  |            |
|                 |             | R.   | Ramage         |                  |            |

|                   |                 |   |                            |
|-------------------|-----------------|---|----------------------------|
| <b>CO-OPTEEs:</b> | S. Black        | - | (Local Wildlife Interests) |
|                   | J. Casement     | - | (Witham Wombles)           |
|                   | J. Palombi      | - | (CPRE)                     |
|                   | P. Shuttleworth | - | (Local Wildlife Interests) |

- 1) APOLOGIES**  
To receive apologies for absence.
- 2) INTERESTS**  
To receive any declarations of interest.
- 3) MINUTES**  
To receive the minutes of the meeting of the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee held on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2026 attached at page 3.
- 4) QUESTIONS & STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC**  
An opportunity for members of the press and public present to comment upon any item on the agenda or raise new concerns.
- 5) CLERK'S REPORT**  
To receive the Clerk's Report attached at page 6.
- 6) OPERATIONS MANAGER'S REPORT**  
To receive the Operation Manager's verbal report on recent open spaces activities and to answer any questions put by members.
- 7) WHETMEAD MANAGEMENT PLAN**  
To receive the draft management plan for Whetmead Nature Reserve for recommendation to the Environment Committee – circulated separately.

- 8) **RIVER WALK TREES**  
To receive a report attached at page 7.
- 9) **RIVER WALK HEDGE**  
To receive a report attached at page 8.



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## MINUTES

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

Date: **3<sup>rd</sup> June 2026**

|          |             |    |              |                                        |
|----------|-------------|----|--------------|----------------------------------------|
| Present: | Councillors | J  | Goodman      |                                        |
|          |             | P  | Heath        |                                        |
|          |             | R  | Ramage       |                                        |
|          | Co-optees   | S. | Black        | (Local Wildlife Interests)             |
|          |             | J. | Casement     | (Witham Wombles)                       |
|          |             | J. | Palombi      | (CPRE)                                 |
|          |             | P. | Shuttleworth | (Local Wildlife Interests)             |
|          | Officers    | H. | Andrews      | (Deputy Town Clerk)                    |
|          |             | S. | Dyer         | (Operations Manager)                   |
|          |             | S. | Puckey       | (Open Spaces Administrative Assistant) |

Two members of the public were present.

### 1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Cllr B Fleet. Cllr J.M Coleman was absent.

### 2. **APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN**

It was **AGREED** that Cllr Barry Fleet be re-appointed Chairman.

### 3. **APPOINTMENT OF VICE- CHAIRMAN**

It was **AGREED** that Cllr John Goodman be appointed Vice-Chairman.

### 4. **INTERESTS**

No interests were declared.

### 5. **MINUTES**

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

6. **QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC**

There were no questions or statements from the public.

7. **CLERK'S REPORT**

The Clerk's report was received by Members. Members were further advised that while only two bridges had been painted to date, the other bridges would be painted in due course if volunteers could be found. It was further noted that feedback on the sculptures had been overwhelmingly positive and families were particularly enjoying the new installations.

Members **AGREED** to receive the report.

8. **OPERATION MANAGER'S REPORT**

The Operations Manager provided a verbal update. Notable issues this quarter included a riverbank repair near Pattison Close due to dogs entering the river, relocating logs from the river at Bramble Road to Whetmead as they were regularly being pushed into the river, preparing the sites on the River Walk for the sculptures and the three successful Council events including the Easter Trail, Dog Show and Bioblitz.

Following a point raised by a member of the Sub-Committee, the Operations Manager further advised that if Members wanted to provide cover for the broken fence on the River Walk at Bridge Street, then hedging could potentially be planted in the autumn / winter.

Members **AGREED** to receive the report.

Members **AGREED** that the Operations Manager would investigate appropriate hedging near the entrance to the River Walk at Bridge Street with a view to making a recommendation to Environment Committee to consider planting.

9. **REVIEW OF CLOSED CHURCHYARD MANAGEMENT PLAN**

Members were happy with the management plan overall, however there was some concern around the installation of shallow dishes, in particular given the current issues with avian flu. The Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that potential interpretation boards would only be at the entrances and would not disrupt the churchyard itself. Members felt that it might be interesting to carry out a lichen and / or bat survey although it was noted that this might be costly.

Members **AGREED** to receive the report.

10. **RIVER WATER QUALITY**

Members reviewed the River Watch results and noted that the phosphate, nitrate and ammonia levels on occasion were higher than they should be. This would continue to be monitored.

Members **AGREED** to receive the report.

**11. WHETMEAD BIO BLITZ**

Members noted that attendance was disappointing, perhaps due to the remote location and uncharacteristically hot weather on the day although those that did attend really enjoyed the event. The information gathered, which included the discovery of a rare beetle, was considered worthwhile and would feed into the next management plan for the site. Members considered that the term Bio Blitz may have been confusing, with connotations of litter picking and cleaning, and the Open Spaces Administrator advised that any future event could be called Nature Day to avoid this issue.

Meeting concluded at 3.00pm.

SP/9.6.26

Signed by Chairman.....

**Clerk's Report: Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee**

**To note:**

- Small areas of the River Walk are under consideration for resurfacing. Applications will be made to claim Section 106 contributions to fund the project.
- Enquiries regarding the reinstatement of the riverbank near Pattison Close are continuing. However, it is proving difficult to obtain appropriate advice and quotations.
- Work continues on illustrations for future replacement interpretation boards for the River Walk, Whetmead and James Cooke Wood. Illustrations have been provided by the Witham university student and regular meetings have been taking place with him as his illustrations progress.
- The new series of Channel 4's Taskmaster programme starts on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2026 at 9pm and the first episode will feature the sponsored dog bin in James Cooke Wood.
- Witham Town Council invited residents to take part in the Butterfly Conservation's Big Butterfly Count 2026 between 17<sup>th</sup> July and 9<sup>th</sup> August. A small response was received and 8 different species were recorded – Gatekeeper, Green-veined White, Meadow Brown, Peacock, Red Admiral, Small Copper, Small White and Speckled Wood.

**Advice:**

To receive and note.

**Officer Report: River Walk Trees**

**To note:**

The most recent River Walk tree survey was undertaken in December 2024. It assessed 617 individual trees and 46 tree groups, representing a total of 1,343 trees. The survey found that 97% of the trees were in good or fair physiological condition.

Tree surveys of public open spaces are normally undertaken every two years. Quotations are therefore currently being sought for a further survey during 2026/27.

The survey noted that while the age class ratio of the River Walk trees is good, new trees should continue to be planted to maintain this balance over time. Where trees have been lost in recent years, replacement planting has taken place where budget has allowed.

Given the presence of several veteran trees along the River Walk, it is proposed that further planting takes place during the 2026/27 winter season. In particular, there is a significant Oak tree, classed as 'ancient/veteran' in the tree survey, located near the Pattison Close/Laurence Avenue section of the River Walk. Planting a young Oak in the wider area would help provide long-term succession as the tree nears the end of its life.

Potential locations for a young Oak include Pattison Close, nearer the road entrance and Luard Way, near the landmark Willow that is also nearing the end of its life. The nettle-bed area near Bridge Street may also be suitable for additional tree planting to soften the appearance of the boundary. Locations are to be carefully considered to not affect residential properties' view and/or increase maintenance responsibilities of the Open Spaces Team.

Witham Tree Group receives funding of £3,000 from Witham Town Council each year to support tree-planting projects across Witham. If the Council's budget is insufficient, the Tree Group could be approached to support River Walk planting from its 2026/27 funding allocation.

**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 and climate – New tree planting has a positive impact on biodiversity and climate.
- (b) Crime and disorder – No impact

**Advice:**

- To note that a new tree survey and tree planting will be carried out during the 2026/27 winter period and to discuss any future tree planting suggestions.

HA/25.08.2026

**Officer Report: River Walk hedging**

Members have previously suggested considering planting hedging to provide cover for an unsightly, broken fence bordering the River Walk near Bridge Street. During the summer, growing season the fence is hidden by a substantial, dense bed of stinging nettles that obscures the fence completely. However, when the nettles die back in winter, the fence becomes visible which has prompted complaints about the appearance of this section of the River Walk.

The proposed planting covers a large area and is approximately 40 metres in length. A native hedgerow would normally be planted in two staggered rows, set approximately 40 cm apart, at a density of six plants per linear metre. This would require 240 plants, with an additional 5-10% allowance for losses during establishment, resulting in a total requirement of approximately 250-265 plants.

A mixed native species hedge is recommended. No individual species should represent more than 70% of the planting mix. Suitable species could include hawthorn, blackthorn and hazel with other species added where appropriate. The cost of plants could range from £300 to £3,000 depending on the size, type and quality of the plants.

There are government grants to assist with planting new hedges that can pay up to £22.97 a metre. However, there are other things to consider –

- Initial planting – The site would require extensive preparation to remove the current stinging nettle bed and plant the hedging plants. The existence of nearby tree roots may make excavation, planting and future maintenance more difficult.
- Limited screening – a newly planted native hedge would not provide any meaningful screening immediately. Bare-root hedging can require several growing seasons to establish, fill gaps and achieve sufficient density. It could be at least 2 years before a newly planted hedge conceals the fence and this would be after successful watering, weed control and maintenance of the planting area.
- Value for money – the proposal would address the visual impact of a single private boundary fence but only after a significant establishment period. It would require Council funds, ongoing maintenance and staff resources that could otherwise be directed towards wider open space priorities.
- Maintenance – establishing a hedge would require regular watering particularly during the first two summers, together with weed control, plant replacements and formative pruning. This would create an additional demand on the Open Spaces team.

**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 – A mixed native hedge could provide additional biodiversity benefits. However, the current stinging nettle bed provides ecological value supporting a range of insect species. Removing it would therefore result in the loss of an established habitat until the replacement hedging matures.

(b) Crime and disorder – Creating a hedge rather than a stinging nettle bed would create a more permanent area of vegetation capable of providing concealment which may have a negative effect on crime and disorder.

**Advice:**

- It is recommended not to pursue with planting a hedge on the River Walk at Bridge Street due to burden this would have on staff resources, the financial cost and the time taken to provide sufficient screening for one property boundary.  
(The creation of native hedgerows in general is supported by the Council where it is proportionate, deliverable and has a clear benefit)

HA/26.08.2026