



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

## OPEN SPACES MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE

### AGENDA

WEDNESDAY 4<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2025, 2.00PM

|                 |             |      |         |                  |            |
|-----------------|-------------|------|---------|------------------|------------|
| <b>MEMBERS:</b> | Councillors | J.M. | Coleman | <b>OFFICERS:</b> | H. Andrews |
|                 |             | B.   | Fleet   |                  | S. Dyer    |
|                 |             | P.   | Heath   |                  | S. Puckey  |
|                 |             | T.   | Hewitt  |                  |            |
|                 |             | R.   | Ramage  |                  |            |

|                   |    |              |   |                                |
|-------------------|----|--------------|---|--------------------------------|
| <b>CO-OPTEES:</b> | S. | Black        | - | (Witham & Countryside Society) |
|                   | J. | Casement     | - | (Witham Wombles)               |
|                   | J. | Goodman      | - | (Local interests)              |
|                   | J. | Palombi      | - | (CPRE)                         |
|                   | P. | Shuttleworth | - | (Local Wildlife Interests)     |

- 1) APOLOGIES**  
To receive apologies for absence.
- 2) APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN**  
To appoint a Chairman of the Sub-Committee.
- 3) APPOINTMENT OF A VICE-CHAIRMAN**  
To appoint a Vice-Chairman of the Sub-Committee.
- 4) INTERESTS**  
To receive any declarations of interest.
- 5) MINUTES**  
To receive the minutes of the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee held on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2025 attached at page 3.
- 6) QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FORM THE PUBLIC**  
An opportunity for member of the press and public present to comment upon any item on the agenda or raise new concerns.
- 7) CONSIDERATION OF WRITTEN REPRESENTATIONS**  
To consider any written representations received by the Council.

**8) CLERK'S REPORT**

To receive the Clerk's Report attached at page 7.

**9) OPERATIONS MANGER'S REPORT**

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

**10) BIO BLITZ EVENT**

To receive a report on a Bio Blitz event to be held on the River Walk attached at page 9.

**11) WHETMEAD NATURE RESERVE PHOTOGRAPHY POINT**

To receive a report on the Whetmead Nature Reserve photography point project attached at page 10.

**12) SECTION 106 FUNDING AND OPEN SPACES**

To receive a report attached at page 11.

**13) COMMUNITY ORCHARD**

To receive a report attached at page 12.



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 01376 520627  
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## MINUTES

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

Date: **5<sup>th</sup> March 2025**

|          |             |                |                             |                                                                                       |
|----------|-------------|----------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Present: | Councillors | B<br>P         | Fleet<br>Heath              | (Chairman)                                                                            |
|          | Co-optees   | S.<br>J.<br>J  | Black<br>Goodman<br>Palombi | (Witham and Countryside Society)<br>(Local Interests)<br>(CPRE)                       |
|          | Officers    | H.<br>S.<br>S. | Andrews<br>Dyer<br>Puckey   | (Deputy Town Clerk)<br>(Operations Manager)<br>(Open Spaces Administrative Assistant) |

### 38. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllr Hewitt, Cllr Ramage, J Casement, and P Shuttleworth.  
 Cllr P Barlow was absent.

### 39. INTERESTS

No interests were declared.

### 40. MINUTES

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

### 41. QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

There were no questions.

**42. CONSIDERATION OF WRITTEN REPRESENTATIONS**

No written representations were received.

**43. CLERK'S REPORT**

The Clerk's report was received by Members. It was noted that the Clerk's description of the tree risk survey would have made a suitable response to a recent letter in the Braintree and Witham Times expressing disappointment in the tree felling. Members were further informed that an official response had been sent in to the paper by the Chair of Open Spaces and Chair of Witham Tree Group explaining that only a small proportion of trees needed treatment and that the losses would be replaced in the autumn. It was further explained in the response that Witham was very well served by tree planting as there was a dedicated tree group who plant annually.

Members suggested that it might be a good idea to remind the public in the Voice magazine about the Open Spaces meetings and highlight that they are open to all residents to attend and put forward their opinions.

Members welcomed the removal of nettles at Chipping Hill bridge and it was suggested that this would be a good spot to plant more willow trees especially as near-by trees are maturing.

Members **AGREED** to receive the report.

**44. OPERATION MANAGER'S REPORT**

The Operations Manager provided a verbal update.

It is mainly a variety of ad-hoc jobs that are undertaken in the winter months. On the River Walk, the team are up to date and have cleared silt from the river at the underpass at Whetmead, cleared nettles, repaired culverts and put up new fencing and carried out some permitted tree work.

At James Cooke Wood, an appointed contractor had carried out thinning work and the chipping work is due to be done shortly. The creation of a dead hedge is being considered for the boundary.

There is nothing to report at Whetmead but further work will be carried out on the river bank in the Spring.

A lot of time has been spent in the Closed Churchyard this past month. The team have taken down some of the self-set trees, carried out pruning and chipped the brash for the footpaths, raised the crown on some trees and removed the ivy where appropriate. A tawney owl has been heard in the grounds recently and a little owl pellet discovered on a grave stone. There are plans to install bird and bat boxes soon.

At the allotments, there have been a few plot clearances and the water switched off for the winter and recently put back on again.

It was further clarified that where the river bank has collapsed close to Pattison close, repair options are being considered, potentially with the aid of Section 106 money.

The Deputy Town Clerk advised that where the drainage work had not been successful last year in the Glebelands area, this was being addressed and a report from an appointed consultant was expected shortly with advice on how to proceed. It was acknowledged by Members that the area was known for its springs and that problems were likely to be ongoing.

Members **AGREED** to receive the report.

**45. DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR ALL SAINT'S CHURCHYARD**

Members were advised that the plan was based on an Essex Ecology report, however there were plans for additional surveys where possible in order to provide a more complete account of the species currently present. Members were further informed that discussions were taking place with a representative from Essex Wildlife Trust to try and facilitate a bioblitz with volunteers. Members suggested a lichen report may also be appropriate and welcomed the installation of bird, owl and bat boxes.

The Deputy Town Clerk clarified that it was hoped interpretation boards would be funded via Section 106 money and that it had been put forward to be included on Braintree District Council's Potential Open Spaces Improvement document. Members suggested that any future boards should use simple straightforward language in order to engage adults and children alike.

Members **RECOMMENDED** that the adoption of the management plan be approved by the Environment Committee.

Cllr Heath left the Chamber at 14.30.

**46. WITHAM RIVER WATCH**

Members were informed that samples were taken monthly from the bridge at Whetmead and Bramble Road. Only two had been conducted so far but it would be interesting to monitor any patterns or changes over a year. Members were further advised that measurements were taken for temperature, turbidity, dissolved solids, ammonia, phosphate and nitrate levels within the context of the location. To date it had been noted that the phosphate levels were higher at Bramble Road than Whetmead, suggesting agricultural run-off before the river enters the Witham parish. An article has been written for the Voice to inform residents.

Members **AGREED** to receive the report.

**47. WITHAM TOWN COUNCIL EVENTS**

Members were pleased with the number of events being offered this year and felt it was a good way to bring the River Walk to residents' attention. The Deputy Town Clerk clarified that the VE day event would be held on May 8<sup>th</sup> but exact timings had not yet been finalised.

Members **AGREED** to receive the report

**48.     DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee would be held on Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> June 2025 at 2pm.

Meeting concluded at 2.45pm.

SP/06.03.25

Signed by Chairman.....

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

- Footpath repairs have been successfully completed at Moat Farm Chase and Saxon Drive where tree roots were breaking up the paths.
- Designs have been received for reprofiling the land near Ebenenzer/Glebe area of the River Walk to create swales to improve the issue of water encroaching onto the footpaths. Quotes are currently being invited to carry out the works.
- River Walk footbridge formal inspection reports were received earlier this year and quotes are currently being invited for recommended works required on the four Witham Town Council pedestrian bridges. This will involve resurfacing, repairing concrete parapet posts and resealing and waterproofing half joints.
- The new Closed Churchyard Management Plan was formally approved and adopted at Environment Committee on 14<sup>th</sup> April 2025.
- Vandalism is continuing at Whetmead Nature Reserve with one of the nature trail posts being replaced for the second time following installation a year ago. All the nature posts and the noticeboard at the nature reserve have been graffitied in recent months. The installation of a nature trail camera is currently being considered.
- In March Tawny Owl boxes were installed in both James Cooke Wood and the Closed Churchyard. Two further boxes were installed on each site which are also suitable for bats. If budget allows we can look to install more boxes on other open spaces later in the year.
- In Autumn 2024 a trial section of Mill Lane Meadow was 'cut and collected', a management technique recommended by Essex Wildlife Trust in an attempt to recreate the buttercup meadow that once grew there. This has shown promising results and therefore it is planned to extend the 'cut and collect' method to the entire meadow this Autumn in an effort to fully restore the meadow

**Advice:**

To receive and note.







**Officer Report: Bio Blitz Event**

**Issue:**

Witham Town Council will be holding a Bio Blitz Event on Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2025 on the River Walk in conjunction with Essex Wildlife Trust and Essex Field Club.

Officers have been in conversation with Essex Wildlife Trust about holding an event to identify and record species found on our open spaces and also to engage young people in nature activities. Essex Field Club have also agreed to come to support the event bringing along knowledgeable volunteers to assist with the wildlife surveying.

The event will start in Guithavon Road, near the picnic benches, at 10am. Participants will have the opportunity to explore either direction towards the duck pond or to Mill Lane Meadow to collect biodiversity data. Younger children will be provided with worksheets to complete, while older participants will be guided in using nature recording apps such as iNaturalist to document their findings.

It is hoped that the Bio Blitz event will be an enjoyable and educational experience encouraging community involvement in local wildlife monitoring.

*Essex Wildlife Trust holds its own Bio Blitz event each year. The Essex Bio Blitz 2025 runs from 1<sup>st</sup> April to 30 September 2025 where county wide wildflower observations are recorded through the iNaturalist app. Further information can be found here - <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/the-essex-bioblitz-2025>*

**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 – Positive impact in being aware of species and how WTC are managing biodiversity.
- (b) Crime and disorder – No impact.

**Advice:**

- To receive and note.

**Officer Report: Whetmead Nature Reserve Fixed Photography Post**

**Issue:**

An engraved fixed point photography post is due to be installed at Whetmead this year. It will record the landscape changes over a period of time. Photographs can be taken at different times with mobile phone cameras, uploaded and sent to Witham Town Council to collate.

By collecting and comparing these photographs, we can document how the landscape changes throughout the seasons and years. The images may also be put together to create a video to highlight the differences. Fixed point photography posts are already being used successfully by other organisations, such as Sussex Wildlife Trust and Forestry England. For examples of how these post work, please visit -

<https://sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/discover/photo-posts>



**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 – Positive impact with recording landscape for biodiversity and climate change.
- (b) Crime and disorder – Potential for vandalism.

**Advice:**

- To receive and note.

HA/27.05.2025

**Officer Report: Section 106 Funding and Open Spaces**

**Issue:**

Work is continuing on projects that have or will be funded by Section 106 funding available –

- Foot/cycle path repairs have been completed at Moats Farm Chase and Saxon Drive which has been funded by Section 106 funding.
- Approval has been received from Braintree District Council to use Section 106 funding for three further bee havens on the River Walk. These will be installed near Bramble Road, Moats Farm Chase and near Guithavon Road. Work will start on these in the coming months.
- Braintree District Council are working on installing a hard surface footpath on the Public Right of Way along the river at Blackwater Lane which leads to the entrance of Whetmead Nature Reserve. This is from Section 106 funding available to improve footpaths in the vicinity or to provide a bridge over the River Brain at this area. No tender was received for providing a bridge therefore the path installation is now being pursued.
- Public Art Section 106 funding of £24,352 with an expiry date of July 2025 for approval is also being worked on. The original proposal to install artwork on the railway bridges near the River Walk leading to Asda and potentially Armond Road is looking unlikely but is still being considered. Invitations are currently being sought for designs and quotes for wooden carved sculptures to be installed at various locations on the River Walk.
- There is a further £13,828.67 of S106 funding available with an approval expiry date of October 2025 to be used towards improvement and enhancement of the River Walk and facilities. It is considered that this could be used for the planned bridge improvement works or further path improvements.

**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 – Additional bee havens planting will have positive impact to biodiversity and climate change.
- (b) Crime and disorder – Potential vandalism on public art project(s).

**Advice:**

- To receive and note.

HA/28.05.2025

**Officer Report: Community Orchard**

**Issue:**

The idea of a Community Orchard has been promoted by the Council and, at the Environment Committee meeting of 14<sup>th</sup> April 2025 (minute 65), it was resolved that funding opportunities and practicalities in establishing a community orchard for the benefit of the community be investigated.

Currently, the field at Chipping Hill, which is part of the River Walk, is being considered for the creation of a community orchard. It is not currently open to the public and is cut once a year in the Autumn.



A traditional orchard is defined as having a minimum of five fruit trees and it has been suggested that heritage fruit trees, that are no longer commercially available, will be considered for planting. Further considerations will be made and a working group could be formed to manage the orchard if the project goes ahead.

**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 – Tree planting will have positive impact on biodiversity and climate change
- (b) Crime and disorder – No impact

**Advice:**

- To note that investigations will take place to look into the funding opportunities and practicalities in establishing a community orchard.