



Town Hall | 61 Newland Street | Witham | CM8 2FE  
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## MINUTES

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

Date: **11<sup>th</sup> August 2021**

Present: Councillors

|   |           |                        |
|---|-----------|------------------------|
| S | Hicks     | (Chairman)             |
| K | Atwill    |                        |
| J | Goodman   |                        |
| T | Pleasance |                        |
| S | Brailey   | (Witham Tree Group)    |
| B | Fleet     | (Tree Warden)          |
| J | Palombi   | (CPRE)                 |
| H | Andrews   | (Assistant Town Clerk) |
| S | Dyer      | (Operations Manager)   |

### 1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from J Casement, A Chick, Natasha Heenan, Cllr C Lager, and P Shuttleworth.

### 2. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

Councillor Steve Hicks was appointed as the Chairman of the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee for 2021/2022

### 3. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

Barry Fleet was appointed as the Vice-Chairman of the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee.

### 4. MINUTES

The group discussed minute 41 of the 12<sup>th</sup> February 2020 Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee meeting. It was noted that Witham Tree Group had raised issues with Braintree District Council Planning Enforcement department regarding newly planted trees within the Lidl site development which are now dead. Members also noted that Cllr Goodman has sent correspondence to Braintree District Councillor Gabrielle Spray in April 2021, with no response and a reminder was sent on 4<sup>th</sup>

August regarding the removal of trees on the same site as part of the construction works for the Lidl store. It was suggested that Witham Town Council should also contact Braintree District Council regarding dead trees on the Lidl site.

The minutes were agreed and subsequently signed by the Chairman.

## **5. CLERK'S REPORT**

The Clerk advised the group that she had recently received the annual maintenance schedule from the Environment Agency and would circulate details to members.

The recent transfer of the River Walk to Witham Town Council was welcomed by Members as well as the clearance of the back channel. It was noted that the back channel will need regular maintenance to keep the entrance clear.

Discussion took place regarding the recent vandalism on the River Walk of the litter bin near the pond and duck sign in the same location.

## **6. OPERATION MANAGER'S REPORT**

The Operations Manager provided a verbal report. He confirmed that grass cutting and strimming was still being carried out and that this would usually have slowed down but the weather over the summer period has meant that cutting was still required.

He confirmed that the recent purchase of a working platform meant that his team are able to carry out tall hedge cutting rather than contracting out this work.

He advised the group that routine work continues at James Cooke Wood, Whetmead and the Closed Churchyard. The recently acquired allotments has also required initial maintenance following the transfer of the site to Witham Town Council. The Operations Team are also continuing to carry out some Highways Devolution work and with their current workload are near to maximum capacity.

It was noted that a Willow tree had recently fallen between the duck pond and the water gauging station. The tree has been reported to the Environment Agency as it is on their land.

The group mentioned the A12 widening and the implications this would have for Whetmead Nature Reserve. It was also noted that there is a hole on the River Walk near to Highfields Road bridge which would need permanently filling.

## **7. CLOSED CHURCHYARD MANAGEMENT PLAN**

The Clerk advised that a new Closed Churchyard Management Plan was a business item for the Environment Committee during 2021/2022 and that the current maintenance schedule held is outdated.

A discussion took place regarding the War Graves Commission and Cllr Pleasance advised that he volunteers for them by assisting with surveys of their gravestones. The Commission are now very active and involved with cleaning and marking all the Commonwealth graves. It was suggested a half metre cut could be considered around each war grave. It was also suggested that a site plan map, with names of the commonwealth war graves could be installed onto the site in the future.

Grass cutting in the churchyard is currently twice a year but discussion took place regarding more frequent grass cutting. A balance is required for the plan between wildlife areas and keeping the site tidy. It was noted that the Operations Manager will review that current maintenance schedule

and a new revised management plan will come back to the Sub-Committee for further review in the future.

#### **8. WILDFLOWER PLANTING**

The wildflower report was received and welcomed by the Sub-Committee and the suggested planting locations within it. It was noted that Yellow Rattle plant should be included in any planting carried out as it is semi-parasitic to grass and would aid successful wildflower planting.

Discussion took place regarding a carefully managed cutting regime to ensure successful wildflower planting. The locations were agreed for trial planting, and if workload allows, initial planting may take place in the Autumn. If larger areas of wildflower planting are proposed after trial planting has been carried out, a recommendation would need to be made to include the project as a business item for Environment Committee as part of the annual corporate strategy planning process.

#### **9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

It was noted that due to the passing of Brian Wilmer, there is no representative on the Sub-Committee from Witham & Countryside Society. It was agreed that Susan Black, the W&CS secretary should be invited to join the Sub-Committee.

A discussion took place regarding the Gimsons development as work on the site has now started. Queries to what plans were in place regarding the avoidance of building waste going into the river as the Gimsons site will be higher than the River Walk, and whether there will be a barrier from the development to prevent direct access on to the back channel. The Clerk advised that a Gimsons Review Group had recently been created and had their first meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> August. The working group will be ensuring that the developers adhere to all the planning requirements.

#### **10. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

Future meetings of the group will be Tuesday afternoons and the next meeting is confirmed as Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2021.

Meeting concluded at 3.35pm

HA/25/08/2021