



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

## OPEN SPACES MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE

### AGENDA

TUESDAY 30<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2023, 2:00PM

**MEMBERS:** Councillors S. Ager  
P. Barlow  
B. Fleet  
P. Heath  
R. Ramage

**OFFICERS:** H. Andrews  
S. Dyer  
S. Puckey

**CO-OPTEEES:** S. Black - (Witham & Countryside Society)  
S. Brailey - (Witham Tree Group)  
J. Casement - (Witham Wombles)  
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 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 meeting of the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee held on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2023 (attached at page 3)

**6) 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.

**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 MANAGER'S REPORT**

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

**10) A12 WIDENING SCHEME AND WHETMEAD NATURE RESERVE**

To receive an update on proposed replacement land for Whetmead Nature Reserve (attached at page 8).

**11) RIVER WATER POLLUTION**

To consider the current situation with polluted rivers in the UK and how this affects the River Walk.

**12) TREE MANAGEMENT ON THE RIVER WALK**

To consider the management of trees on the River Walk and future planting schemes.

**13) WHETMEAD SECTION 106 IMPROVEMENT PROJECT**

To receive a report regarding Whetmead Improvement Project (attached at page 9)

**14) DUCK POND ENHANCEMENTS**

To consider a potential improvement project to the River Walk duck pond.

**15) ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

To raise enquiries or any other agenda items to be handled by the next meeting of the committee.

**16) DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

To note that the next meeting of the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee will be held on Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> September 2023.



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 01376 520627  
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## MINUTES

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

Date: **14<sup>th</sup> March 2023**

Present: Councillors

S	Hicks	(Chairman)
K.	Atwill	
C.	Lager	
T	Pleasance	
S.	Brailey	(Witham Tree Group)
J.	Casement	(Witham Wombles)
B.	Fleet	(Tree Warden)
J	Palombi	(CPRE)
P.	Shuttleworth	(Local Wildlife Interests)
H	Andrews	(Deputy Town Clerk)
S	Dyer	(Operations Manager)
S	Puckey	(Open Spaces Administrative Assistant)

### 1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Cllr S. Ager, Cllr J Goodman and S Black

### 2. **INTERESTS**

No interests were declared.

### 3. **MINUTES**

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

### 4. **QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC**

There was no public present.

### 5. **CONSIDERATION OF WRITTEN REPRESENTATIONS**

No written representations were received.

## 6. CLERK'S REPORT

The Clerk's report was received by Members. Members were informed that the tree work being undertaken is part of routine maintenance of the trees on the River Walk area.

It was noted that the garages at Ebenezer Close are in a poor state of repair and a disappointing entrance / exit to the River Walk. Members were advised that the garages are owned by Eastlight and it is believed that there is still a tenant renting one of them at present.

The Deputy Town Clerk informed Members that enquiries are still ongoing with Braintree District Council regarding responsibility for the land by Lidl and Churchills. There had recently been an accompanied site visit with BDC and the Town Council is now awaiting a response.

Members were advised that the old grazing field on Chipping Hill, by the bridge and next to the River Walk is owned by Witham Town Council and this is mowed once a year.

Members **AGREED** to receive the report

## 7. OPERATION MANAGER'S REPORT

The Operations Manager provided an update. Routine maintenance was being carried out on the River Walk which included some of the tree work identified in the 2022 tree survey. This is in addition to the qualified tree surgeon work. New culvert fencing has also been installed by Maltings Academy and extended fencing by Pattison Close. Furthermore, two new recycled plastic picnic benches have been installed at Mill Lane, one of which has an extended top for wheelchair access. The Members were further informed that a newly repaired listening bench was due shortly.

At James Cooke Wood, the team have been taking out dead trees and pruning as required. The fence mounted bin in the car park has been replaced by a freestanding green bin, the fencing has been removed and replaced by wooden bollards following vehicle damage and a stolen "Keep Clear" sign has been replaced.

At the Closed Churchyard the team have carried out general maintenance. The Members were informed that the Yellow Rattle seeds have not germinated, but the team will still plant the wildflower plugs as planned followed up with weekly maintenance of the area.

The team filled a skip of rubbish at the allotments and upcycled the two old Mill Lane picnic tables by installing them in the communal area.

At the station, the team will be planting perennial shrubs in the single planters in April to help reduce costs and the tiered planters will have bedding plants as per last year.

Members reported that the back channel in the river is silting up again and requested it is added to the Operation's Team schedule. It was also reported that a tree on the River Walk by Armond Road had broken strappings which the Operations Team agreed to remove.

An enquiry was made by Members regarding the watering of the Jubilee Tree on Guithavon and it was noted that the Operations Team would be watering it regularly as this is a new tree.

**8. A12 WIDENING SCHEME AND WHETMEAD**

The Deputy Town Clerk informed Members about the land offered as a replacement to that taken by the A12 widening scheme. One area of land had been accepted as an appropriate replacement; however, the second area had been rejected due to poor access. The Members were informed that another meeting is scheduled to discuss how to proceed further.

Members were concerned that the area finally offered would not be equivalent to that lost.

Members **AGREED** to receive the information.

**9. WHETMEAD IMPROVEMENT PROJECT**

Members agreed that the steps needed replacing and it was noted that future development, following the A12 widening, should consider the possibility of mobility access.

Members put forward ideas for wildlife to include on the proposed information posts.

Members **AGREED** to receive the information.

**10. ESSEX WILDLIFE TRUST WILDER TOWNS**

Members **AGREED** that joining the scheme would be beneficial and would complement the work currently planned for the open spaces.

**11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

It was noted that the developers at Gimsons were clearing ground very close to the border of the land allowed.

It was noted that the secondary school children at Monday's Town Meeting had concerns about the amount of litter on the River Walk and that consideration should be given to the number and siting of bins. It was agreed that the Operations Team would note any litter hotspots.

Members were informed that the River Walk was mentioned in a 1972 article in a countryside magazine.

It was noted that there appear to be an increase in the number of rats and Muntjac deer around areas close to the River Walk.

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

It was noted that the next meeting of the Sub-Committee would be in May.

Meeting concluded at 3.00pm

HA/SP/22.3.23

Signed by Chairman.....

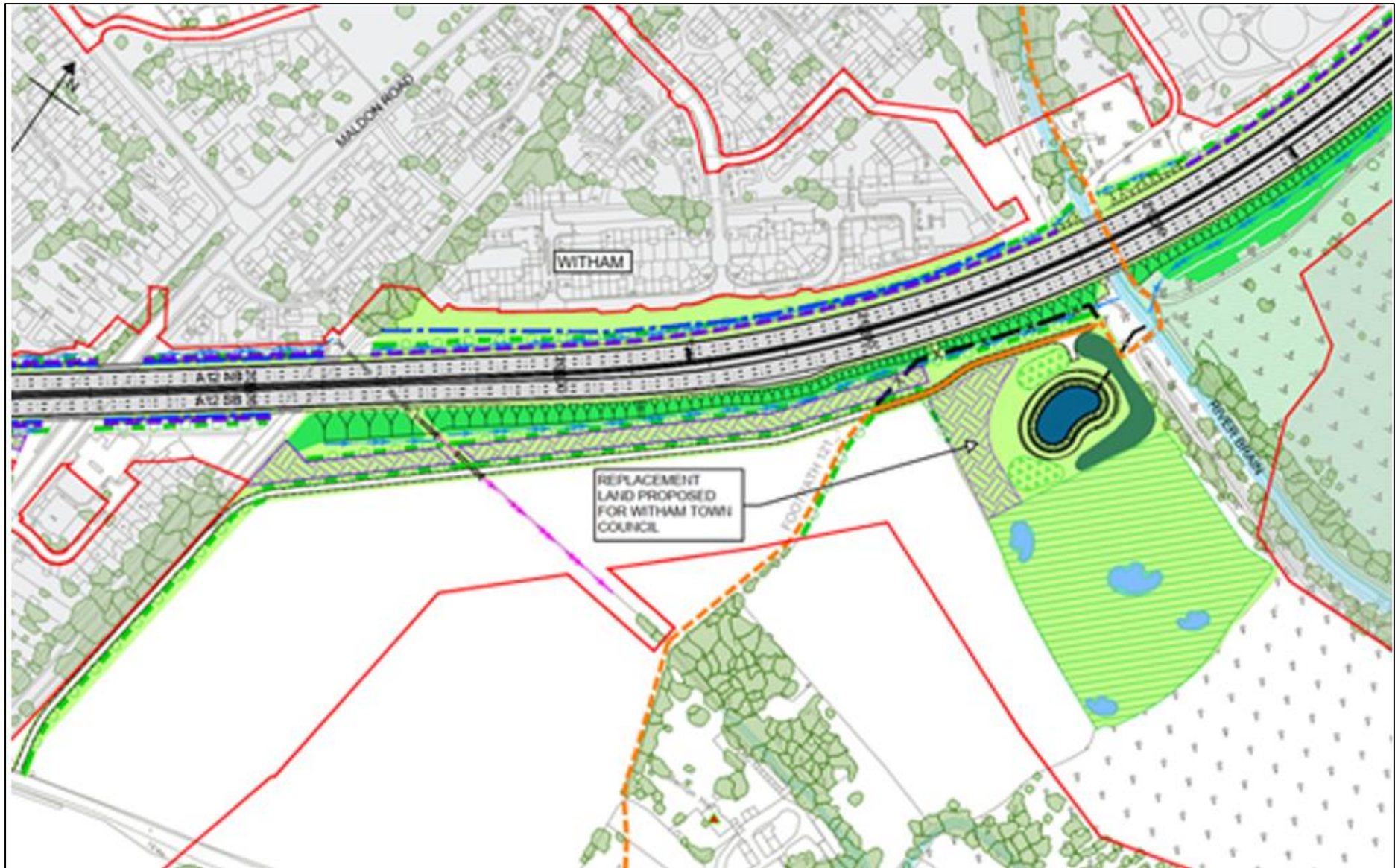
**Clerk's Report: Open Spaces Management Sub-committee**

**To note:**

- Drainage works have now been completed on the River Walk between Ebenezer Close and Bramble Road which appears to have alleviated the footpath surface water issues in the area. There are two further areas in this section of the River Walk which also have some surface water issues which will now be investigated further.
- The initial stage of footpath improvements to the River Walk started in May with the commencement of line markings being reinstated on the dual footpath/cycleways.

**Advice:**

To receive and note.





**Clerk's Report: Whetmead Nature Reserve Section 106 improvement project**

**To note:**

At the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee meeting of 14<sup>th</sup> March 2023 members were advised that there is Section 106 funding of £13,161.21 available to be allocated for improvements to Whetmead Nature Reserve.

At the Full Town Council meeting of 20<sup>th</sup> March 2023, Members approved the first proposals for the project –

- It was resolved to accept the quotation from DRH Landscapes for £3,200 for replacement steps at the north end of the nature reserve.
- It was resolved to accept the quotation from Panelwarehouse for £1,340 for a noticeboard.

Both proposals and quotations have now been accepted by Braintree District Council's Section 106 department and the cost of both will come out of the funds available.

Nature sign interpretation posts with etching rubbing plaques are also being considered from the remaining funds and were also discussed at the Full Town Council meeting of 20<sup>th</sup> March 2023. These can be used to start making more distinctive nature trails throughout the site. It was resolved to obtain further information regarding the quotations presented to Members which has now been obtained but has not yet gone back to Council for approval.

Work is continuing on the project and it is expected that there will still be funds remaining after the purchase of the nature sign posts for further improvements. It is suggested that this could be spent on an interpretation board at the confluence of the Rivers Brain and Blackwater which could give information about the rivers and the associated wildlife that visitors may expect to see.

Suggested wording for potential nature posts have been circulated separately for input and comments

**Advice:**

- To note information.
- To approve suggested wording on nature 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. As the Council has also formed a Climate Change Working Group, this should also be considered –

- (a) Biodiversity – no negative impact.
- (b) Crime and disorder – no impact.
- (c) Climate – no negative impact.