



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

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

Date: **24th May 2022**

Present: Councillors

J	Goodman	
T	Pleasance	
S	Ager	
C	Lager	
S	Black	(Witham and Countryside Society)
S	Brailey	(Witham Tree Group)
J	Palombi	(CPRE)
H	Andrews	(Deputy Town Clerk)
S	Dyer	(Operations Manager)
H	Smith	(Operations Team)
C	Strachan	(Assistant RFO)

In the absence of the current Chairman of the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee, it was agreed that Cllr J Goodman should preside as Acting Chairman of the meeting.

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Cllr. K Atwill, J Casement, B Fleet and N Heenan

2. **APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN**

Councillor Steve Hicks was appointed as the Chairman of the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee for 2022/2023.

3. **APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN**

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

4. TERMS OF REFERENCE

Members discussed the Terms of Reference for the new civic year 2022-2023. The question was raised whether it should include the allotments but as the allotments currently come under the Community Committee it was agreed that it did not need to be included.

It was agreed that quarterly meetings were sufficient, but that any relevant communication outside of the meetings should be shared with members of the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee.

The Terms of Reference were **AGREED** for the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee.

5. MINUTES

A query was raised regarding obtaining Tree Preservation Orders on the Gimsons development. It was noted that this was heard by the Planning Applications and Transport Committee and is currently being looked into. This will be dealt with outside of the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee as it relates to land not belonging to Witham Town Council. The Gimsons Review Group are also assessing the development.¹

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

6. CLERK'S REPORT

The Clerk confirmed that in addition to the attached report, a factsheet had been circulated today from Environment Agency advising of their maintenance schedule for the current year.

A question was raised as to whether there was any further news with regards to land loss at Whetmead due to the A12 widening scheme. It was noted that the current proposals were agreed at Full Town Council meeting on the 11th April 2022. National Highways are due to submit their Development Consent Order (DCO) in June and any further information will be circulated with the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee once known.

National Highways have been fully consulting with Witham Town Council on the widening scheme and have advised that during construction public access to Whetmead Nature Reserve will be restricted potentially for up to one year, with the Operations Team having limited maintenance access. Members discussed the increased noise levels from the widening and that materials used were due to be noise reducing, and a fence and bund alongside the A12 would also reduce noise.

7. OPERATIONS MANAGER'S REPORT

The Operations Manager provided a verbal report and confirmed that the team were into the grass cutting season on the River Walk. A new commemorative bench had recently been installed at Moat Farm Chase and two donated Horsechestnut trees had been planted near Ebenezer Close. Anglian Water had also opened up their outfalls near Ebenezer Close to assist with the water issues in the area although further work would be necessary to reinstate the ditches at the back of properties.

He confirmed that he had been liaising with the contractor dealing with ground investigations at Whetmead and that the ground had recently been reinstated following damage caused by the

¹ The Gimsons Review Group reports to the Planning and Transport Committee

contractor. A meeting has been arranged for two weeks' time to oversee that the work carried out was sufficient. It was also noted that a new commemorative bench had been installed at Whetmead.

It was noted that the planting of wildflower seeds at the Closed Churchyard had not been successful. It was **AGREED** to revisit this with a new planting proposal to be established.

The frequency of grass cutting was also discussed with regards to the No Mow May initiative. The Operations Manager confirmed that the amenity grass area is currently cut once a week during the summer season. It was agreed that the River Walk currently has the right balance of amenity areas and wild areas.

8. POND CONSERVATION

The Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group East had provided details a pond conservation project which had been submitted to the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee to consider following a referral from the Environment Committee and members discussed suitable locations.

The pond in Forest Road was suggested as it is overgrown. It was noted that it was an ephemeral pond and as the water levels have dropped it is dry. The land also belongs to Eastlight and it was suggested that it had been part of a project before. It was therefore agreed to look into the historic notes regarding this area.

Members also discussed James Cooke Wood and the pond in the back channel. It was noted that the project also related to private land owners and that members would consider further if there was any suitable land that may fall within the project remit.

Councillor Pleasance left the meeting at 14.54pm.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

It was noted that members of the Environment Committee were due to walk the whole of the River Walk following discussions of potential repairs due to the footpath and cycle ways. A survey had previously been carried out with suggested repairs necessary. Members agreed that they would like to join the walk. It was **AGREED** to send details of the survey to members.

James Cooke Wood was a location used as part of BBC Radio Essex Quest programme providing good advertising for the site. It was **SUGGESTED** that a signpost should be installed to direct the public to the woods.

It was noted that Witham Amateur Operatic Society may be holding an opera in James Cooke Wood.

Members discussed planting wildflowers and bluebells in James Cooke Wood. Ongoing tree felling is required to open up the canopy and provide more light to the floor which would aid this.

A query was raised regarding dormice in the area. The Clerk advised that ecology surveys being carried out at Whetmead as a result of the A12 widening project included a survey of dormice on the site.

Concerns were raised regarding replacing bridges on the River Walk as were installed in the 1970's and are of historical significant to the area. It was suggested that when assessed, the

bridges are reviewed for both repair and replacement. The Sub-Committee were not aware of any public complaints being received.

The Witham Tree Group were due to plant 25 trees in Spa Road, but due to time constraints this will have to be delayed until the next planting season.

10. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the group will be Tuesday 6th September 2022.

Meeting concluded at 3.15pm

HA/CS/30.05.2022

Signed by Chairman