



# Witham

town council

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## MINUTES

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

Date: **5<sup>th</sup> September 2023**

Present:

Councillors	B	Fleet	(Chairman)
	P.	Barlow	
	P.	Heath	
	R.	Ramage	
Co-optees	S.	Black	(Witham and Countryside Society)
	J.	Casement	(Witham Wombles)
	J.	Palombi	(CPRE)
	P.	Shuttleworth	(Local Wildlife Interests)
Officers	S	Dyer	(Operations Manager)
	S	Puckey	(Open Spaces Administrative Assistant)

One member of the public was present.

13. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Cllr Ager, Cllr Hewitt and S Brailey.

14. **INTERESTS**

No interests were declared.

15. **CO-OPTION**

It was **AGREED** that Mr John Goodman be appointed as a co-opted member of the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee.

16. **MINUTES**

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

17. **OPERATIONS MANAGER'S REPORT**

The Operations Manager provided a verbal update. Following the breakdown of the larger mower (Ransomes Parkway) and also the trailer, combined with the wet warm weather encouraging grass growth, it has been a challenging period, however the team are up-to-date with their maintenance schedule.

On the River Walk there has been a spate of vandalism around the Ebenezer entrance which the team have rectified throughout the summer, while close to Luard Way a new bench has been installed.

At James Cooke Wood, regular maintenance has continued and our Tree Surgeon has cut back a Willow Tree overhanging the fishing lake, while at Whetmead, the frequency of grass cutting has increased on the top and the paths have been widened to allow two people to walk side-by-side.

At the Churchyard, the small wild flower project has been a success and it will be continued next year, however the general maintenance schedule is currently under review as it is outdated.

At the allotments there has been a series of difficult plot clearances which have been undertaken by the team, and at the station, the planters have been filled for the summer season and will be refreshed at the end of September ready for Winter.

Members were advised that working without the Ransomes Parkway mower meant that the grass cutting was slower but options were being explored for future grass cutting on Witham's open spaces.

Members were advised that the Operations Team would have access to Whetmead for most of the A12 widening scheme and Members **RECOMMENDED** that this be monitored to ensure regular access is maintained.

#### **18. DUCKPOND ENHANCEMENTS**

The report was received. Members were interested in potentially adding to the reeds in the duck pond and it was **AGREED** that this would be investigated in more detail.

It was also **AGREED** that the floating islands would be researched further as it was considered a potential haven for wildlife which might currently be detrimentally impacted by the heavy footfall of the area. Members felt that although funding may be an immediate issue, it would be beneficial to have the information for future planning and that sponsorship by local business could potentially be considered.

The Operations Manager advised that a list of small manageable jobs is kept aside for local volunteers who contact the Council offering their assistance.

The Operations Manager left the Chamber at 14.29

#### **19. QUESTIONS & STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC**

A member of the public expressed concern that Whetmead would be closed to the public from 2024 to 2027 and wanted to know if alternative access had been considered and whether it could not be included. Furthermore, concern was expressed about the flora and fauna and whether they had been logged as part of the planning process, of particular concern was the Lizard Orchid, the only example in central Essex. Finally, the member of the public would like reassurance that this would not become a brown field site and therefore considered for building land. The concerns were noted.

It was **AGREED** that the environmental surveys conducted on behalf of Essex Highway would be reviewed.

**20. CONSIDERATION OF WRITTEN REPRESENTATIONS**

No written representations were received by the Council.

**21. CLERK'S REPORT**

The Clerk's report was received by Members. Members were further informed that some trenching work would begin on farmer's field next to Whetmead during the week commencing 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023 and that a welfare unit would be sited at the A12 bridge entrance. Members were also advised that National Highways would be clearing the silt under the A12 bridge on behalf of Witham Town Council.

Members **AGREED** to receive the report.

**22. RIVER WATER POLLUTION**

Members **AGREED** to receive the report and wanted to see the layman summary when it was available. It was **AGREED** that the water pollution level report should be requested annually.

**23. RIVER WALK LAND BY LIDL**

Members **AGREED** to receive the report. Members were keen for Witham Town Council to take ownership of the land between the old Bramston site and Newland Street from Braintree District Council. Members further requested clarity on the Lidl sign planning application and the time allowed for Churchills for sale signage.<sup>1</sup>

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

It was noted that the date of the next Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee meeting will be held on Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> December 2023 at 2pm.

**Meeting concluded at 2.56pm**

SP/06.9.23

Signed by Chairman.....

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<sup>1</sup> Further investigation has revealed that Lidl's retrospective planning permission for there was refused and it is currently going through appeal. Churchill's signage can remain until the last property is sold.