



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

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

Date: **12th February 2020**

Present:	Councillors	J.C.	Goodman	(Chairman)
	Miss	C.	Jay	
		S.E.	Hicks	
		T.	Pleasanton	
		R.P	Ramage	
		S.	Brailey	(Witham Tree Group)
		J.	Casement	(Witham Wombles)
		B.	Fleet	(Tree Warden)
		J.	Palombi	(CPRE)
		P.	Ryland	(WTC Councillor)
		P.	Shuttleworth	(Local Wildlife interests)
		D.	Smith	(Local Wildlife interests)
	Mrs	H.	Andrews	(Assistant Proper Officer)
		J.P.	Sheehy	(Town Clerk)
		S.	Dyer	(Operations Manager)

34. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Brian Wilmer who was unwell.

35. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations received.

36. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD 9TH OCTOBER 2019

Minutes from the previous meeting were agreed and subsequently signed by the chairman.

37. QUESTIONS & STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

No members of the public present.

38. CONSIDERATIONS OF WRITTEN REPRESENTATIONS

A written representation had been received by the office from Janet Gyford. She had raised concerns regarding feeding bread to ducks at the River Walk pond. After discussion it was considered that new signage should be installed in the pond advising against feeding bread to the ducks and posters on the noticeboards informing the public about suitable food for ducks. It was suggested that the information centre could consider selling duck food and advertised through noticeboards, leaflets and Social Media.¹

39. OPERATIONS MANAGER'S REPORT

A verbal report was given by the Operations Manager. He advised that over the winter period the team had been busy with repairs on the River Walk, cleaning graffiti, had started tree works in James Cooke Wood and had been busy with tree maintenance following the recent storm. He confirmed that 35 trees had been lost including 3 large ones. The team had cleared the majority of fallen trees making them safe and cleared pathways. One tree in the river had been reported to Environment Agency and a further tree had been reported to Essex Arboriculture to deal with. Details were given regarding log piles left on sites for wildlife habitat being taken away by the public. It was suggested that logs could be moved to other sites with the potential to place some at Whetmead as there is no vehicle access.

Members advised that although the River Walk is now fully enclosed by knee railings, quadbikes had been seen recently by the Helen Court area of the River Walk and through the Town Park. The clerk advised that although they are not permitted on the River Walk, the bye-laws are difficult to enforce but welcomed further information from members regarding any future sightings.

40. CLERK'S REPORT

Members received the clerk's report, noting that standing items for each Council managed site will be on all future agendas. This followed the cancellation of December's meeting and will prevent this happening in the future.

The Closed Churchyard was discussed and members were advised that staff were in contact with the War Graves Commission regarding the war graves and to ensure that they were cleaned prior to the VE Day 75th anniversary in May.

41. RIVER WALK

The Chairman called for any comments or observations regarding the River Walk. Concerns were raised regarding the replanting of trees at the Lidl site and whether the developer had met their contract terms. It was **AGREED** to contact Braintree District Council's planning department for clarification. Members discussed the general problem of new developments and their obligation to replant trees.

Concerns were raised that the hand brushing work in the river did not appear to have been carried out by the Environment Agency as planned.

Discussions took place about the backwater channel as this is now blocked up again. It was **AGREED** that the Operations Manager would assess this and if necessary liaise with the Essex Wildlife Trust to clear the entrance to the channel.

¹ Duck food has been purchased and is now on sale in the Information Centre for 70p per bag. This has been advertised on Social Media and will soon promoted at the duck pond noticeboard too.

42. WHETMEAD NATURE RESERVE

Members noted that they had earlier discussed leaving log piles in Whetmead for wildlife habitat. Members discussed the planting of trees on the site but this had previously been unsuccessful in the past. Discussions also took place regarding the A12 widening project and the long-term implications that this may have on Whetmead.

43. JAMES COOKE WOOD

The Chairman called for any comments or observations regarding James Cooke Woods and to take into account Councillor Pleasance's recent report.

The pedestrian access to the site was discussed and members were advised that there is a long-term aspiration to link up to the Blackwater Rail Trail to the Wood. It was also **AGREED** that the site should be advertised more by the Town Council as many residents are not aware of its existence. Members were advised that James Cooke Wood is included in Witham's Town Trail literature which could be incorporated into marketing the site and social media can also be used for promotion.

Members discussed the report with regards to future activities of the site following the recent decision to retain James Cooke Wood as a Council asset. Discussions took place regarding liaising with the owner of Olivers Nursery about activities which would be mutually beneficial. It was considered that there is a lot of scope to promote it as a community wood and there is already a future Halloween event planned on the site. Members were informed that the Operations Team have the capabilities to manage the site and direction was required from members regards its future management.

It was **RECOMMENDED** that Councillor Pleasance's report should be endorsed in full and future activities to be researched taking to account practical and financial feasibilities.

44. CLOSED CHURCHYARD

Members had earlier discussed the Closed Churchyard and the need to tidy the site prior to the VE Day commemorations in May. Members also discussed what adjustments could be made to the churchyard to make a difference to wildlife diversity. The creation of a pond had been previously considered but this would not be appropriate with the Parochial Church Council. It was also **AGREED** that the site should be promoted and research carried out to create a wildflower area and potentially install a seat.

45. NEW RIVER WALK MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Chairman called for comments regarding the draft of the River Walk Management Plan supplied to members. It was noted that it should comply with the Green Flag criteria and **AGREED** that John Palombi and the Assistant Proper Officer would go through the final draft, once prepared, to ensure that it conforms.

The Clerk requested assistance from members with wildlife species and appropriate photos. It was also suggested to include a map where notable species had been located and it was **AGREED** that David Smith and other members would assist. A species map could also be included in leaflets promoting the River Walk.

It was **AGREED** to name the different sections of the River Walk from Ebenezer Close southwards as Spa Springs, Chipping Hill, Guithavon Valley, Mill Lane Meadows and Howbridge and include these on the new maps of the plan. It was also **AGREED** that within the different area types of the plan, such as sedge beds, riverview meadows, it would indicate in which named section of the River Walk they could be found.

Members discussed encouraging the public to report what wildlife had they seen so that a record could be kept and it was also suggested that an I-Spy type book for the River Walk could be considered for visitors to mark off when particular wildlife species had been spotted.

It was **AGREED** that members should provide information and photos to the office in the next 3 weeks to be included in the River Walk Management Plan so that the final draft can be presented to members at the next meeting in April.

46. FUTURE PLANS FOR HELEN COURT/MALDON ROAD AREA OF THE RIVER WALK

Members were advised that the area had now been cut as agreed at the last meeting and members now needed to provide direction regarding managing the site. The creation of a wildflower meadow was still desired by the group and it was **AGREED** to approach Pictorial Meadows and British Flora for advice regarding how to do so. It was suggested that local schools could potentially get involved if it becomes a project to create the wildflower meadow.

47. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The issue of fly-tipping was discussed at the entrance of Whetmead. Members were advised that the area from the dog waste bin towards the Whetmead entrance is the responsibility of the Council and the Operations Team monitor and clear the area regularly. The main fly-tipping occurs nearer the entrance to Blackwater Lane and is understood to belong to County Council. Members were advised that the possibility of additional CCTV cameras is currently being considered for the town and this is a potential location being looked at. Members noted that there was also persistent dog fouling in this location and the possibility of CCTV cameras may also assist with this problem.

48. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The time and date of the next meeting was confirmed as **Wednesday 15th April 2020 at 3.00pm**.

There being no further business, the Chairman closed the meeting at 4.40pm

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Councillor J Goodman
Chairman

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