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MINUTES

Meeting of: **Environment Committee**

Date: **Tuesday 22nd July 2025**

Place: **Town Hall, 61 Newland Street, Witham.**

Present:	Councillors:	J. Martin	(Chairman)
		J.C. Coleman	(arrived 7.52 p.m.)
		B. Fleet	
		L. Headley	
		J. Robertson	
		A. Sloma	
		B. Taylor	
		H. Andrews	(Deputy Town Clerk)
		G. Kennedy	(Committee Secretary)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Adelaja and J.M. Coleman; and Councillor J.C. Coleman who would be late. Councillor Hewitt was absent.

RESOLVED That the apologies be received and approved.

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Environment Committee held 14th April 2025 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3. INTERESTS

Councillor Fleet declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute 8 – Witham Tree Group, as he was a member of that group.

4. QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

There were no members of the press or public present.

5. CLERK'S REPORT

The Clerk's Report on matters arising was received.

The Deputy Town Clerk explained that the Bioblitz event for adults and children was being held on 23rd July on the River Walk where wildlife species would be identified.

Members were saddened by the arson attacks on grass areas in Witham and noted that nature trail cameras had been installed. The importance of being vigilant and reporting these incidents straight away was stressed.

RESOLVED That the report be received and information noted.

6. COMMITTEE INCOME AND EXPENDITURE

The income and expenditure reports for the year ended 31st March 2025, with exception report and for the period 1st April 2025 to 15th July 2025 were received.

The Deputy Town Clerk explained that the new financial system now showed expenditure month by month.

RESOLVED That the income, expenditure and exception reports be received and noted.

7. OPEN SPACES MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE

The Minutes from the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee meeting held on 4th June 2025 were received.

The Chairman thanked the Sub-Committee and Operations Team for all their hard work.

RESOLVED That the Minutes be received and noted.

8. WITHAM TREE GROUP

Councillor Fleet had declared an interest.

Witham Tree Group minutes held in April and June 2025 were received.

Councillor Fleet highlighted the problems of dying trees on the Rivenhall Park estate. In April 2023 there had been 225 live trees and 164 dead ones. Now there were just 150 live trees. Of the 78 replacement trees planted in February, 59 were dying through lack of aftercare and there was likely to be similar problems on other new estates. Mention was also made of mature trees at Gimsons which had died during the development through lack of care which were replaced with saplings. He said that planning approval states that any tree lost within five years had to be replaced and developers were liable to replace after 4½ years. Members spoke about management companies on new estates and hoped that if residents were paying charges they would insist on dead trees being replaced.

RESOLVED That the minutes be received and information noted.

9. HIRE OF OPEN SPACES POLICY

Members were asked to receive and review the Hire of Open Spaces policy.

RESOLVED That the Hire of Open Spaces policy be received and agreed.

10. COMMEMORATIVE ITEMS ON WITHAM TOWN COUNCIL OPEN SPACES POLICY

Members were asked to receive and review the Commemorative Items on Witham Town Council Open Spaces Policy.

In answer to a question the Deputy Town Clerk explained that when purchasing a commemorative bench people are advised that flowers will be allowed for a two week period at Christmas and anniversaries then they will be removed.

RESOLVED That the Commemorative Items on Witham Town Council Open Spaces Policy be received and agreed.

11. SNOW CLEARANCE POLICY

Members were asked to receive and review the amended Snow Clearance Policy.

The Deputy Town Clerk explained that an additional paragraph had been added to ensure that the footpath on the Glebelands area of the River Walk which was subject to natural springs would be salted and gritted if necessary.

RESOLVED That the amended Snow Clearance Policy be received and agreed.

12. BIODIVERSITY POLICY

Members were asked to receive and review the Biodiversity Policy.

RESOLVED That the Biodiversity Policy be received and agreed.

13. ALLOTMENT MANAGEMENT REPORT

A report was received regarding the proposed increase in allotment rents for 2027/2028.

The Deputy Town Clerk explained that it was necessary to give allotment holders a year's notice of increased rents. It was proposed to increase the rents to 54p per m² an increase of 3p per m².

RESOLVED That an increase in the allotment rents to 54p per m² be approved for 2027/2028.

14. ALLOTMENT SITE MANAGEMENT POLICY

Members were asked to receive and review the amended Allotment Site Management Policy.

RESOLVED That the amended Allotment Site Management Policy be agreed.

Councillor J.C. Coleman arrived at the Meeting.

15. BLACKWATER LANE PUBLIC RIGHT OF WAY

A report was received regarding Braintree District Council using Section 106 monies to create a footpath surface on the Public Rights of Way track (PROW 101) along the River Brain to Whetmead which was owned by the Town Council. The District Council had asked that the Town Council be responsible for the ongoing maintenance which should be minimal.

RESOLVED That the report be received and approval given for the Town Council to be responsible for ongoing maintenance of this section of PROW 101.

16. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED That under the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960 S.1(2) and in accordance with Standing Order 3(d), the press and public should be excluded from the remainder of the meeting due to the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.

17. RIVER WALK PEDESTRIAN BRIDGES

A report was received regarding repairs to the four pedestrian bridges on the River Walk.

The Deputy Town Clerk added that a temporary closure would be required for Laurence Avenue bridge as it was a Public Right of Way and permits would be required from the Environment Agency for work over the river. It was expected that Section 106 funding would cover the costs of the repairs.

Members agreed to award the contract to Foster Contracting Ltd.

RESOLVED That the report be received and the contract for repairs to the bridges be awarded to Foster Contracting Ltd at a cost of £24,409.00.

18. RIVER WALK

A report was received about the groundwater issues on the River Walk in the area of Ebenezer Close. Following a survey it had been suggested that the creation of swales to regrade land levels might be a solution and quotes were sought but it would be necessary for a substantial amount of trees to be felled.

Members recognised that there was no guarantee that this expensive work would solve the problem as the springs appear in different locations. They were informed that the groundwater at present was minimal and the Open Spaces Team would dig in the boggy section to attempt to divert the water.

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It was agreed that any potential work should be held in abeyance while monitoring the location and that signage be considered for the winter warning of the ground conditions. A QR code requesting feedback was also mooted.

RESOLVED That the report be received and the proposed work be held in abeyance at this time while monitoring

There being no further business the Chairman closed the Meeting at 8.13 p.m.

Councillor J. Martin
Chairman

HA/GK/24.7.2025