

# Witham's Voice

Summer 2022

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**Witham**  
town council

Your quarterly newsletter

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*This edition of the Voice has a furry theme to celebrate the Witham Dog Show taking place on July 2nd, see if you can find all of the missing puppies throughout this edition.*

## VOICE COVER COMPETITION WINNER



We are pleased to announce that the winner of the Voice cover competition 2022 is Evie Wigley who is ten years old. Evie is pictured with her dog, Pebbles, who inspired her drawing. She loves dogs and can't wait to bring Pebbles along to the Witham Dog Show on the 2nd of July!



# NEW MAYOR



I am extremely honoured to have been chosen as the new Witham Town Mayor, following my year as Deputy Town Mayor. I am proud to be part of this fantastic community and will do everything I can to support and promote Witham, during my term of office. I would like to pass on my very sincere thanks to our previous Town Mayor, Cllr Angela Kilmartin., and congratulations to the new deputy Cllr John Goodman.

I look forward to meeting as many of you as I can over the next year, and can be contacted via the Town Hall office if I can be any help, or if you would like me to attend an event.

Cllr Jack Bayford



Cllr Jack Bayford pictured presenting the deputy chain to Cllr John Goodman

## ***A message from the outgoing mayor***



I have completed my year as Mayor of the town. As Covid restrictions began to ease last May, invitations started to arrive for events leading me to attend nearly 80 engagements. I have made lots of speeches, chaired lots of meetings, visited lots of people and places. The year has been lots of fun and I have enjoyed all of it. I would like to thank all of the organisations within the town for their hard work within the community and I wish my successor a very happy year of office.  
Cllr Angela Kilmartin

We are sad to announce the passing of Cllr Cliff Livermore . As a Conservative South Ward councillor for the past three years, Cllr Livermore had been involved in a variety of town activities, and was a well-liked and respected member of Witham Town Council. This is a sad loss to the town and we send our condolences to his family.



# ANNUAL REPORTS



## **Policy & Resources Committee Annual Report from Councillor Michael Lager, Chairman**

The last Annual Town Meeting was on 23rd April 2019, three years ago. Since then we've:

- seen a new Council elected;
- had to face the COVID-19 virus outbreak;
- tried to stop the Gimson development by action in the High Court;
- appointed a new Town Clerk;
- modernised the Town Hall Information centre and offices;
- completed a major programme on our tree estate;
- introduced several popular new events, renewed the Christmas lights
- and ensured the town centre offers an attractive appearance with

Most of the business is in public, and we may soon be able to broadcast our proceedings on social media to enlarge the opportunities for public participation and transparency. At our meetings we check all monies received or paid out, we keep up to speed on the use of budgets, we consider reports from our auditors, we ensure that policies are up to date especially our standing orders, financial regulations and banking arrangements, we make sure that our staff have the skills and equipment to do their jobs well. During last year we earned the Quality standard of the Local Council Award Scheme and hope to achieve "Gold" in the coming months.



## **Community Committee Annual Report from Councillor Susan Ager, Chairman**

Although the work of the Community Committee slowed during the Covid crisis, it never stopped. In the lockdown leading up to Christmas 2020, we worked with 'Home Alone on Christmas' run by Kim Barker, by using the Town Council kitchens, volunteer chefs, vegetable peelers and donations of food, Christmas cards and presents. We had plenty of volunteer delivery drivers, and we managed to provide a hot Christmas dinner to 90 people.

Community safety was monitored and problems dealt with by our Community Special Officers. Our Community is a much safer place in which to live, thanks to the constant effort of these wonderful people who willingly give up so much of their time for us. We now have 5 CSC's and all spend time in Witham helping to prevent crime occurring, doing speed checks and visible policing.

This year has also seen the Town Team, part of Witham Community Policing Team holding 'Beat Surgeries' at the Town Hall to enable residents from the town to report any concerns they might have face to face or just pop in for a chat.

Thank you to all committee members and members of staff who work to make the Community in Witham come together and enjoy living in our beautiful town.



These reports are only shortened versions, so if you would like to read the full reports please contact Witham Town Council.

#### **Planning & Transport Committee Annual Report from Councillor John Goodman, Chairman**

Upon reading my last report from three years ago, the most contentious issue by far was the proposed development of 78 homes at Gimsons but, most regrettably, as you are aware this development was subsequently approved by Braintree District Council as the local Planning Authority despite the overwhelming opposition from over 700 residents with the vast majority of their objections being made on sound planning grounds. Furthermore, it will be recalled that Witham Town Council, being universally opposed to this development, even instigated a Judicial Review in the light of the fact that we were in full support of our residents and the Heart of Witham Group which had been formed with the sole intention of opposing the development but this Judicial Review was not upheld in our favour by the Court.

One proverbial crumb of comfort, so to speak, is the fact that the approval had a substantial number of conditions attached and to this end the Town Council has created a Gimsons Review Group in order to monitor these various conditions. Furthermore, I am pleased to report that, following our site visits, the developer has agreed to work more closely with our Open Spaces Supervisor, particularly in respect of the clarity surrounding the site's boundary with the Town Park which remains a contentious issue.



#### **Environment Committee Annual Report from Councillor John Goodman, Chairman**

As you know, the Town Council is responsible for four areas of open space in and around Witham with the oft-quoted "jewel" being the town's River Walk. In this respect, I am delighted to report that in July 2021 Witham Town Council was able to secure the freehold of the River Walk after many years of negotiation with Braintree District Council. During the past year a new River Walk Management Plan covering the next ten years has been put in place.

While making reference to the River Walk, as part of the Environment Committee's ongoing Business Plan, we have commissioned a survey of the footpath and cycleway network which traverses the River Walk and although only initial stages of this survey have been carried out, it is accepted that this will be a long-term project with its inherent budgetary factors. However, an early aspiration is to undertake the replacement of the four bridges, and in particular that which crosses the river towards Helen Court and the Town Park, as these bridges are showing distinct signs of age and as a Town Council now in freehold ownership of the River Walk, we have a duty of care to all users. Although the replacement of bridges and repair to the footpaths and cycleways is, as I have intimated, a long-term project, it is anticipated that this will lead eventually to the River Walk attaining 'Green Flag' status.



# YOUR COUNCIL



Below is an update on some of the recent actions and outcomes of Council meetings.

Council meetings are open to any members of the press or public to attend and registration beforehand is not necessary. Dates of our Full Town Council and committee meetings are published on the back page.

## **The Queen's Green Canopy**

The Town Hall has been inundated with knitted leaves after they were requested in the last addition of the Voice. The green canopy was erected over the front of the Town Hall just before the jubilee weekend and photos of it can be found on our Facebook page. The Town Council would like to thank everyone who took part, and to our volunteers who helped to put them all together!



## **Funded pond conservation project from the Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group**

“We are seeking landowners who are prepared to dig or restore wildlife ponds on their land.

The project is part of Natural England's District Level Licensing scheme (DLL) - a strategic approach to licensing for great crested newts, which seeks to provide bigger, better and more joined up habitat for this orange-bellied amphibian at a landscape scale. The ponds restored and created under the scheme will not only provide high quality habitat for newts; they will benefit numerous other pond-associated species. Most of the 150 or so pond projects we've delivered under the scheme to date have been fully funded – you can view some of these ponds at our website: [www.fwageast.org.uk/ponds](http://www.fwageast.org.uk/ponds) “

## The Town Clock Returns

We are pleased to report the town clock has returned after several months of restoration. The works have returned the clock to its original visual condition, protected it from future corrosion and updated the battery to a more powerful model.



## Witham Town Council's Friendship Bench

Witham Town Council has installed a Friendship Bench outside the Town Hall in Newland Street which was officially opened by Town Mayor Councillor Angela Kilmartin and Community Committee Chairman Councillor Susan Ager. The idea behind the bench is that people who are lonely are encouraged to sit and make friends.



## Annual Town Meeting

The Annual Town Meeting returned this year after a break due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. There was a change in format this year as community organisations were invited along to give reports and hold stalls to promote their organisations. Some of these included the Big Sing, Templar's Association, Helen Rollason and many more. The event was a great success and the Town Council hopes to do this again next year.



# READER SURVEY

We are asking our readers to take part in a survey to see how many people the Voice targets and if there is any way we can make it better. Please fill in the form below and return it to Witham Town Hall, Newland Street, CM8 2FE before August 1st.

**What edition of the Voice would you say you read the most?**

- Spring
- Summer
- Autumn
- Winter
- No preference

**Why do you read the Voice?**

- Council event information
- Information on clubs and groups
- Council work and projects
- Other

**If you selected other, please elaborate**

.....

**Would you still be able to read the Voice if it could only be accessed online?**

- Yes
- No

**If Witham Town Council discontinued production of the Voice would this be an issue?**

- Yes
- No

**Is the content in the Voice engaging and enjoyable to read**

- Yes
- No

**Would you struggle to access certain information without the Voice?**

- Yes
- No



# WHAT'S ON IN WITHAM

Witham Town Council's Easter Quest returned on April 16th for the second time and was a great success, we would like to thank everyone who came along.



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## Dog Show

JULY

This year's Dog Show will involve stalls and fun shows in the arena. Make sure you pop down and join us on the River Walk between Chipping Hill and Armond Road for a great day out between 10am-3pm

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## Witham Festival 2022

SEPT

Join us for an old favourite with a brand new twist! This year we will be celebrating slightly differently, but we still promise a fun day out for the whole family!

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## Spooktacular Trail

OCT

The Spooktacular Trail is a fun family treasure hunt along Witham's River Walk, with lots of tricks and treats along the way!

For updates on all of our events, visit our website and social media pages.



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town council



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# HISTORY OF OUR OPEN SPACES

Witham Town Council are responsible for maintaining some of our most precious open spaces in town.

## RIVER WALK

The River Walk is regarded as the Jewel in the Crown of Witham and provides a natural corridor of just under 2 miles through the town from Ebenezer Close in the north down to Maldon Road in the south.

Its origins date back to the late 1930's when Witham Urban District Council purchased the first parcels of land which today forms the River Walk. Witham started to grow in the 1960s, and Witham resident Tom Henderson was Assistant County Planner with Essex County Council during this time when plans were made for the future of Witham including a proposal for a river walk. He later became Witham & Countryside Society's Chairman and continued to see the river walk project completed in the 1970s bringing the countryside to the middle of the town.

In April 2005 Witham Town Council became responsible for the management of the River Walk under leasehold from Braintree District Council. After a number of years of negotiations, Witham Town Council became the freehold owner of the River Walk in June 2021.

The River Walk is a well-loved asset which is used by many people of Witham, providing a recreational green space and a network of paths to enjoy walking, cycling and leisure time or as a pleasant route around town. There are also areas reserved for wildlife providing natural habitats for various species.

Various projects have been carried out on the River Walk over the years, including the much admired WW1 mural at the gauging station near the duck pond and the re-creation of the back channel of the River Brain which helps to reduce the flow of the river whilst providing important wildlife habitats



## WHETMEAD NATURE RESERVE

Whetmead Nature Reserve is located at the end of the River Walk in Maldon Road accessed through Blackwater Lane under the A12 by-pass. The site is about 10 hectares of grassland, flowering plants, shrubs and young trees alongside the River Brain where it meets the River Blackwater.



Originally managed as a hay meadow and grazing for sheep and cattle, by the mid twentieth century, it was used by the County Council as a general rubbish tip. Once the site was full it was returned to Braintree District Council in 1976 as an open space. Witham and Countryside Society suggested that it should be a nature reserve and it was officially designated as a Local Nature Reserve in 1981. Whetmead was transferred to Witham Town Council in 2005 whose Operations Team now look after it.

Today Whetmead provides a home to a diverse variety of wildlife, including regular sightings of Buzzards, Red Kites and other raptors. The area is popular with dog walkers, ramblers and provides an expansive quiet space that is enjoyed by many to simply relax, or observe and study wildlife.

## JAMES COOKE WOOD

James Cooke Wood is a 14 acres woodland found in Maldon Road near the boundary of Witham. Witham Town Council originally purchased the land in 1992 with the intention of planting a community woodland. This was realised during the winter of 1993/94 when tree planting was carried out, initially by councillors and local residents, and was completed by a local forestry contractor. British local trees were planted, including Oak, Alder, Ash, and Silver Birch. The woodland was created to provide a quiet area for local residents and to provide wildlife habitats.

The wood is named after James Cooke who was a 16-year old boy accused of causing a fire near Oliver's Farm where he worked. He was subsequently hanged outside Chelmsford Gaol in 1829. The arson attacks continued after his execution suggesting that he was most likely innocent.

Although the wood is regularly used by dog walkers, it is not widely known by all residents of Witham. Not accessible by footpaths, a small car park is available to those visiting the wood. Several benches can be found at various locations around the wood and within the grassed central area to relax and enjoy the surroundings.



# COMMEMORATIVE BENCH SCHEME

A commemorative bench was installed for Cllr Paul Ryland who sadly passed away last year. A respected member of the Witham community, Cllr Ryland served on the Witham Urban District Council from 1966— 1974 , and also later served for many years as a member of Witham Town Council. Cllr Ryland was a keen conservationist who pushed for more trees to be planted and protected, and enjoyed regular walks with his dogs in James Cooke Wood.

Below are photos of Cllr Ryland's family and members of Witham Town Council at the installation.



## The Scheme

The purpose of this scheme is to provide members of the public a means of remembering a loved one with a lasting tribute. A commemorative bench can be dedicated to a special person or even a much loved pet and installed in one of Witham Town Council's open spaces, while also improving the availability of public seating across the town. You can choose to have a bench in areas of The River Walk, Whetmead Nature Reserve and James Cooke Woods. Your preferred location can be chosen from a map available in the Town Hall. When your bench is installed, a ribbon cutting ceremony can be held for you, family and friends to mark the occasion, if you wish. We can also provide you with copies of photographs of the occasion for you to keep. For more information and to take part in this scheme, simply contact Witham Town Council on 01376 520627 to discuss.



## TOWN HALL AND INFORMATION CENTRE

Office: 01376 520627  
townclerk@witham.gov.uk

Information Centre: 01376 502674  
infocentre@witham.gov.uk

### 61 Newland Street, Witham, Essex, CM8 2FE

Witham Town Council Offices are open Monday - Thursday 9:00AM-5:00PM and Friday 9:00AM-4:00PM.

The Information Centre in the Town Hall is open from 9:00AM-4:30PM Monday, Tuesday and Thursday, 10:00AM - 4:30PM Wednesday and 9:00AM - 3:50PM Friday.

Both are closed Weekends and Bank Holidays.

Meetings of your Town Council are open for you to attend. There is usually an opportunity before the beginning of each meeting to speak directly to members of the council regarding current agenda items.

Full details are displayed at [www.witham.gov.uk](http://www.witham.gov.uk)

Agendas are on display on the noticeboard in Newland Street.

Meetings usually begin at 7:30PM and Planning Applications & Transport Committee meetings at 6:30PM. These are held in the Council Chamber at the Town Hall.

### FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

**Town Council: 4th July, 1st August, 30th August**

**Environment: 18th July, 10th October**

**Policy & Resources: 12th September**

**Planning & Transport: 4th July, 18th July**

## YOUR COUNCILLORS

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