



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

OPEN SPACES MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE

AGENDA

TUESDAY 2ND NOVEMBER 2021, 2:00PM, COUNCIL CHAMBER

MEMBERS:

K. Atwill
J. Goodman
S. Hicks
C. Lager
T. Pleasance

OFFICERS:

H. Andrews
S. Dyer

CO-OPTEEES:

S. Black	-	(Witham & Countryside Society)
S. Brailey	-	(Witham Tree Group)
J. Casement	-	(Witham Wombles)
A. Chick	-	(Witham Rotary Club)
B. Fleet	-	(Tree Warden)
N. Heenan	-	(Environment Agency)
J. Palombi	-	(CPRE)
L. Ralph	-	(Environment Agency)
P. Shuttleworth	-	(Local Wildlife Interests)
A. Watts	-	(Wild about Witham)

1) APOLOGIES

To receive apologies for absence

2) MINUTES

To receive the minutes of the meeting of the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee held on 11th August 2021 ([attached](#))

3) CLERK'S REPORT

To receive the Clerk's Report ([attached](#))

4) OPERATIONS MANAGER'S REPORT

To receive the Operations Manager's verbal report on recent Open spaces activities and to answer any questions put by members.

5) CONSIDERATION OF WRITTEN REPRESENTATIONS

- (a) To consider resident request to install lighting on the River Walk ([attached](#))
- (b) To consider resident request for planting to encourage bees ([attached](#))

6) ANY OTHER BUSINESS

To raise enquiries or any other agenda items to be handled by the next meeting of the committee.

7) DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

To note that the next meeting of the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee will be held on Tuesday 1st February 2022



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witham.gov.uk

MINUTES

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

Date: **11th August 2021**

Present: Councillors

S	Hicks	(Chairman)
K	Atwill	
J	Goodman	
T	Pleasance	
S	Brailey	(Witham Tree Group)
B	Fleet	(Tree Warden)
J	Palombi	(CPRE)
H	Andrews	(Assistant Town Clerk)
S	Dyer	(Operations Manager)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from J Casement, A Chick, Natasha Heenan, Cllr C Lager, and P Shuttleworth.

2. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

Councillor Steve Hicks was appointed as the Chairman of the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee for 2021/2022

3. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

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

4. MINUTES

The group discussed minute 41 of the 12th February 2020 Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee meeting. It was noted that Witham Tree Group had raised issues with Braintree District Council Planning Enforcement department regarding newly planted trees within the Lidl site development

which are now dead. Members also noted that Cllr Goodman has sent correspondence to Braintree District Councillor Gabrielle Spray in April 2021, with no response and a reminder was sent on 4th August regarding the removal of trees on the same site as part of the construction works for the Lidl store. It was suggested that Witham Town Council should also contact Braintree District Council regarding dead trees on the Lidl site.

The minutes were agreed and subsequently signed by the Chairman.

5. CLERK'S REPORT

The Clerk advised the group that she had recently received the annual maintenance schedule from the Environment Agency and would circulate details to members.

The recent transfer of the River Walk to Witham Town Council was welcomed by Members as well as the clearance of the back channel. It was noted that the back channel will need regular maintenance to keep the entrance clear.

Discussion took place regarding the recent vandalism on the River Walk of the litter bin near the pond and duck sign in the same location.

6. OPERATION MANAGER'S REPORT

The Operations Manager provided a verbal report. He confirmed that grass cutting and strimming was still being carried out and that this would usually have slowed down but the weather over the summer period has meant that cutting was still required.

He confirmed that the recent purchase of a working platform meant that his team are able to carry out tall hedge cutting rather than contracting out this work.

He advised the group that routine work continues at James Cooke Wood, Whetmead and the Closed Churchyard. The recently acquired allotments has also required initial maintenance following the transfer of the site to Witham Town Council. The Operations Team are also continuing to carry out some Highways Devolution work and with their current workload are near to maximum capacity.

It was noted that a Willow tree had recently fallen between the duck pond and the water gauging station. The tree has been reported to the Environment Agency as it is on their land.

The group mentioned the A12 widening and the implications this would have for Whetmead Nature Reserve. It was also noted that there is a hole on the River Walk near to Highfields Road bridge which would need permanently filling.

7. CLOSED CHURCHYARD MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Clerk advised that a new Closed Churchyard Management Plan was a business item for the Environment Committee during 2021/2022 and that the current maintenance schedule held is outdated.

A discussion took place regarding the War Graves Commission and Cllr Pleasance advised that he volunteers for them by assisting with surveys of their gravestones. The Commission are now very active and involved with cleaning and marking all the Commonwealth graves. It was suggested a half metre cut could be considered around each war grave. It was also suggested that a site plan map, with names of the commonwealth war graves could be installed onto the site in the future.

Grass cutting in the churchyard is currently twice a year but discussion took place regarding more frequent grass cutting. A balance is required for the plan between wildlife areas and keeping the site tidy. It was noted that the Operations Manager will review that current maintenance schedule and a new revised management plan will come back to the Sub-Committee for further review in the future.

8. WILDFLOWER PLANTING

The wildflower report was received and welcomed by the Sub-Committee and the suggested planting locations within it. It was noted that Yellow Rattle plant should be included in any planting carried out as it is semi-parasitic to grass and would aid successful wildflower planting.

Discussion took place regarding a carefully managed cutting regime to ensure successful wildflower planting. The locations were agreed for trial planting, and if workload allows, initial planting may take place in the Autumn. If larger areas of wildflower planting are proposed after trial planting has been carried out, a recommendation would need to be made to include the project as a business item for Environment Committee as part of the annual corporate strategy planning process.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

It was noted that due to the passing of Brian Wilmer, there is no representative on the Sub-Committee from Witham & Countryside Society. It was agreed that Susan Black, the W&CS secretary should be invited to join the Sub-Committee.

A discussion took place regarding the Gimsons development as work on the site has now started. Queries to what plans were in place regarding the avoidance of building waste going into the river as the Gimsons site will be higher than the River Walk, and whether there will be a barrier from the development to prevent direct access on to the back channel. The Clerk advised that a Gimsons Review Group had recently been created and had their first meeting on 19th August. The working group will be ensuring that the developers adhere to all the planning requirements.

10. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Future meetings of the group will be Tuesday afternoons and the next meeting is confirmed as Tuesday 2nd November 2021.

Meeting concluded at 3.35pm



ITEM NO: 3

Officer Report: Clerk's Report

Issue:

- A surveyor has been instructed to complete an inspection of the River Walk near Ebenezer Close to address the surface water issues in this area. A survey and ground investigations have been carried out and the subsequent report is awaited.
- The first trial of wildflower planting has been carried out in the Closed Churchyard. The Operations Team have carried out improvements to site recently and this has included a section dedicated to wildflowers. Mixed seeds have been planted which includes Yellow Rattle, Poppy, Wild Carrot, Birdsfoot Trefoil, Tufted Vetch and Self Heal.
- An application has been made to take part in Braintree District Council's community tree and bulb planting scheme as part of their Climate Change Strategy. Bulbs have been applied for to plant in the Closed Churchyard and tree whips to trial plant at Whetmead Nature Reserve. Liaison is also taking place with Witham Tree Group who have applied for the same scheme and are considering planting their bulbs in James Cooke Wood.
- A meeting took place with Highways England on 23rd September 2021 to discuss the possible implications the A12 widening would have on Whetmead Nature Reserve. The meeting was very beneficial and included a walk to Whetmead with ecologists and the landscape architect working on the project with suggestions for mitigation.

Advice:

To receive and note

Sent: 29 September 2021 09:11

To: Info Centre <infocentre@witham.gov.uk>

Subject: River Walk Lighting

Good Morning,

I'd like to chat to someone about installing some lighting along the river walk to encourage more people to use it after dark. With the nights drawing in the river walk becomes inaccessible for a large number of people as it goes from being a nice welcoming walk to somewhere that feels quite unsafe when it's dark which is such a shame.

The River Walk is a beautiful part of Witham that gives huge health benefits for the local community by allowing us to use it for various forms of exercise and therefore if we could add lighting it would allow more people to continue to use after dark be it for exercise or a safer walk home from the station for example. It would also mean that for those of us who can only exercise in the evening we have a much safer place to exercise instead of using the roads or pavements which I'm sure road users would be very happy about

The Mental & Physical health benefits of adding lighting to the river walk are incredibly advantageous and I hope that we begin conversations about how we can set this up.

Many thanks,

Sent: Tuesday, October 5, 2021 6:15 am

To: Cllr Stevie Hicks

Subject: From a beekeeper 🐝

Hi Mr Hicks,

Do you have any influence on the planting around Witham? I would like you to help in plugging the 'June Gap'. This time is known by beekeepers as a time when the early forage has gone and there is a gap before the summer flowers take over. It is when forage for pollinators diminishes. It never used to be like this but modern agriculture and destruction of plant life generally, has caused this phenomenon. I have read in our beekeeping journal that planting Phacelia as wildflower (normally used as a green manure) can help pollinators during this time.