



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

OPEN SPACES MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE

AGENDA

WEDNESDAY 11TH AUGUST 2021, 2:00PM

MEMBERS:

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

OFFICERS:

H. Andrews
S. Dyer

CO-OPTES:

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) APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

To appoint a Chairman of the Sub-Committee.

3) APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

To appoint a Vice-Chairman of the Sub-Committee.

4) MINUTES

To receive the minutes of the meeting of the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee held on 12th February 2020 ([attached](#)), excluding informal meeting minutes of 24th February 2021 and 21st April 2021 under the Covid-19 Governance Overview.

5) CLERK'S REPORT

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

6) OPERATIONS MANAGER'S REPORT

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

7) CLOSED CHURCHYARD MANAGEMENT PLAN

To consider the previous maintenance schedule held for the Closed Churchyard and seek comments from Members in preparation for creating a Closed Churchyard Management Plan [\(attached\)](#)

8) WILDFLOWER PLANTING

To consider the wildflower planting report [\(attached\)](#)

9) ANY OTHER BUSINESS

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

10) DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

To note that future meetings of the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee will be held on Tuesday afternoons with the next meeting to be held on Tuesday 2nd November 2021 at 2pm.



Town Hall | 61 Newland Street | Witham | CM8 2FE
01376 520627
witham.gov.uk

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.	Pleasance	
		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 be 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 Oliver's 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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Chairman

HA/19.02.2020

Officer Report: Clerk's Report

Issue:

- The River Walk freehold transfer from Braintree District Council to Witham Town Council has now been completed.
- There has been some vandalism on the River Walk near the duck pond in recent months. Some further graffiti has appeared on the sub-station mural which our Operations Team have been able to remove, and the dog waste bin in the area has been repeatedly damaged resulting in a dog sponsorship sticker being replaced three times. The duck sign at the pond has also been replaced three times since it was installed in 2020.
- During the week of 11th May 2021 contractors, in partnership with Essex Wildlife Trust, successfully carried out the de-silting of the back-channel entrance on the River Walk near Luard Way enabling the river to fully flow through the back channel again.



Back Channel - 9th May 2021



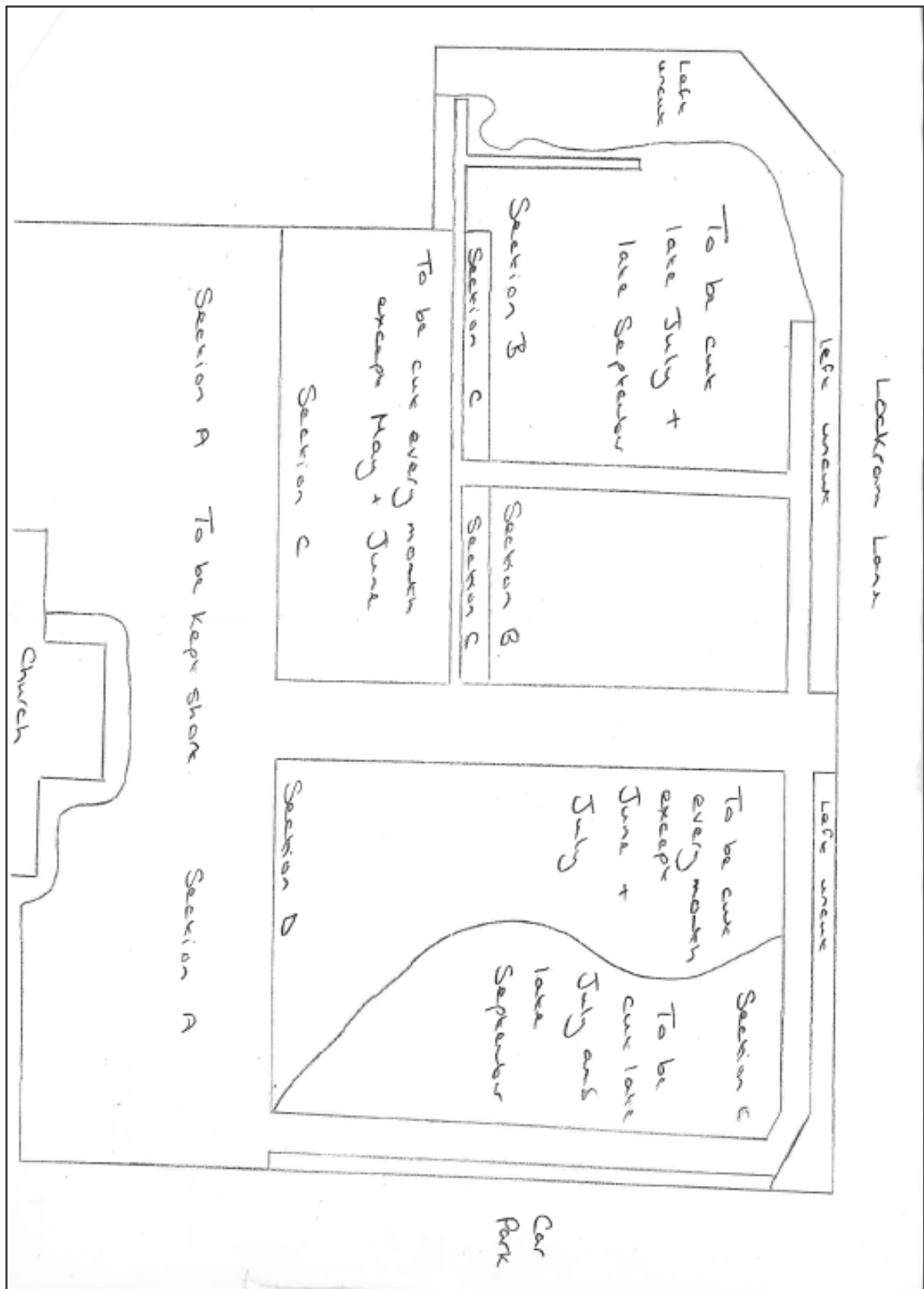
Back Channel - 11th May 2021

- The Operations Team now have the required PPE equipment to carry out work in the river and have commenced clearance of built-up debris that has accumulated certain areas.
- Further training has been carried out by the Operations Team during 2021 which has included the attainment of tree survey inspections, using a powered pole pruner, and chainsaw maintenance and cross-cutting qualifications.

Advice:

To receive and note

Item 7



GROUND MAINTENANCE OF CLOSED CHURCHYARD
GUTHAVON STREET, WITHAM
ANNUAL MAINTENANCE WORK

1.0 Grass Areas

Areas of lawn consisting of grass species and other associated vegetative growth referred to hereunder as grass.

1.1 Grass Cutting

Lawn section, marked A.

- 1.2** Grass Minimum height 25mm.
Grass Maximum height 80mm.

1.3 Arisings

Evenly distribute on lawn area only. Any arisings drifting onto adjacent paths, roadways, cultivated areas or memorials shall be removed by the operator before moving to next site. Staining by grass on memorial must be removed before operator moves to next grass section.

1.4 Machinery type (suggested)

Pedestrian operated mowers, tractor powered, drawn cylinder mowers, trimmers and hand rotary mowers, as appropriate.

1.5 Quality

All grass will be cut cleanly and evenly, to the same height on each area. Each area will be completed before commencing work on the next area. The Contractor should take every care to prevent ridging.

1.6 Weather Conditions

When undue damage would occur to the ground surface due to wet weather, grass may be allowed to grow up to 25mm over the required height at the discretion of the Town Council, but any excessive arisings will be required to be removed by the Contractor. On the improvement of weather conditions, the required specification will be adhered to.

2.0 Paths

This item refers to pathed areas shaded

The paths running through and on the perimeter of the Closed Churchyard shaded as above should be a maximum of 6ft in width and kept clear of any saplings etc. **Adjacent growth should be cut back in such a way as to prevent overhanging and where agreed swathes of grass cut to produce a more natural line.**

These paths should be mown to a standard as required in 1.2 - 1.6 as above.

3.0 Grass Cutting – North west corner marked B.

3.1 This area is of rough cut grass containing wild flowers to be cut at the direction of the Town Council to maximise wild flower seed distribution.

3.2 **This area is inclined to become overgrown with brambles. Care should therefore be taken to ensure that this area is kept under control.**

3.3 Thin and remove new elder, blackthorn and hawthorn each winter.

3.4 A maximum of 2 cuts per year should be made. The first cut to commence in late July when annual flowering plants have ripened their seed for distribution. The second and final cut should be made at the end of the growing season.

3.5 Arisings

Remove all arisings from 4-10 days following cut.

3.6 Machinery

Mechanical grass cutter which can be operated without damage to the ground surface and according to good horticultural practice.

3.7 Quality

All grass will be cleanly and evenly cut to the same height on each area. Each area shall be completed before commencing work.

3.8 **In conjunction with the wishes of neighbours, a small area of graves in this section adjacent to the fence are to be allowed to become overgrown with a minimum amount of maintenance to trim back excessive overgrowth, however occasionally it will be necessary to cut back the brambles that encroach on the garden of 9 Old Parsonage.**

4.0 Grass Cutting - Long cut to be managed as semi-hay meadow, area marked C

4.1 Grass minimum height 50mm.

4.2 To be cut to March and April, to remain uncut May and June to allow seed distribution, and to be cut from July each month during the growing season.

4.3 Arisings

Remove all arisings from the Churchyard area.

4.4 Machinery

Tractor powered rotary mower, or drawn cylinder mowers, as appropriate.

4.5 Weather Conditions

When undue damage would occur to the ground surface, due to wet weather, grass may be left uncut at the discretion of the Witham Town Council, but excessive arisings will be required to be removed from the site by the Contractor. On the improvement of the weather conditions, the required specifications will be adhered to.

- 8.2 On the completion of the flowering and die-back cycle, when instructed by the Town Council, grass cutting should re-commence.

8.3 Arisings

All arisings should be removed from the site by the contractor for his disposal.

8.4 Quality Aim

To allow naturalised bulbs to flower and mature in any grass area in which they are planted.

9.0 Hedging and Trees

- 9.1 Hedging and perimeter trees should be inspected once per year and cut back, if necessary following consultation with Town Council.

- 9.2 All sycamore saplings should be removed.

10.0 Perimeter railings and fences

- 10.1 Once a year all growth should be removed from the base of the railings.

- 10.2 Approximately half of the wall from the north east corner of the Churchyard should be kept clear of ivy and other growth to encourage lichen.

11.0 Memorials

The majority of Memorials in the Churchyard are old and not in good condition, as far as is practical no memorial stone, kerb or railing should be removed even when broken, without prior consultation with Witham Town Council. **However, memorials that could fall over MUST BE LAID DOWN ON THE GRAVE TO PREVENT INJURY. ANY CONCERN MUST BE DEALT WITH IMMEDIATELY.**

With the exception of wild roses, no saplings or brambles should be allowed to grow through graves in Sections A, C, D or E.

There are a number of war graves – both War Grave Commission headstones and private memorials (a list is attached) that should be kept clear of all vegetation. Likewise there are graves (a list is attached) that are still tended and it is important to ensure that a pathway to each listed grave is cut.

12.0 Lichen

- 12.1 To encourage the growth of lichen, which needs plenty of light, a number of graves will be identified to be maintained to promote the growth of lichen.

- 12.2 These graves are to be trimmed clear of all grass and other growth

- 12.3 A number of ash trees will be identified to be kept clear of ivy and other plants to encourage the growth of lichen

5.0 Grass Cutting – Long cut to be managed as semi hay meadow, area marked D

- 5.1 To be cut to a minimum height of 50 mm.
- 5.2 To be cut March, April, May/early June, to remain uncut late June to mid-August and then to continue cutting each month during the growing season.
- 5.3 As 4.3
- 5.4 As 4.4
- 5.5 As 4.5

6.0 Grass Cutting – Meadow Area marked E

- 6.1 This area of rough grass containing wild flowers is to be cut to maximise wild flower seed distribution.
- 6.2 A maximum of two cuts per year should be made. The first cut to commence in late July when annual flowering plants have ripened their seed for distribution and the second cut to be late September. **(In addition, every second or third year, there should be an extra cut in early spring to keep the hogweed and cow parsley from gaining too much dominance)**
- 6.3 As 3.5
- 6.4 As 3.6
- 6.5 As 3.7

7.0 Litter Collection - All Grass Areas.

- 7.1 Remove all litter and all other debris.
- 7.2 Frequency prior to grass cutting operations and at other times to provide at least a collection of all litter every two weeks throughout the year.
- 7.3 Remove all leaf litter to a standard of a maximum residual leaf cover of 5 leaves per square metre - four times a year during September to February - Dates to be agreed by Witham Town Council.
- 7.4 All Arisings
Remove from site for Contractor's disposal.
- 7.5 Quality Aim
To provide a litter free, and cared for churchyard.

8.0 Bulbs and Corms

- 8.1 On emergence of the bulbs or corms, grass cutting of the immediate area containing them is to cease.

13.0 Shrubs

Twice a year, in June and the end of September the shrubs near to the church should be trimmed back to retain their shape.

14.0 Site Meetings

Site Meetings will be arranged monthly during the growing season.

15.0 Contractors

It is appreciated that on occasions the contractors will not be able to carry out maintenance as agreed and they must therefore inform the Town Hall Office accordingly. Any slippage that results, can be compensated by special cuts to Section B, as agreed by the Town Hall Office.

October 2004

Wildflower planting



Planting of wildflower meadows has grown in popularity in recent years as a way of increasing bio-diversity and therefore making a contribution towards reducing climate change. As well as being potentially aesthetically pleasing, wildflowers provide bees, butterflies and other pollinators with food sources throughout the seasons and habitats for insects and other wildlife.

Enquiries have previously been made from Members, residents and from the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee regarding the aspiration to have wildflower sections planted on Witham Town Council managed land. The newly adopted River Walk Management Plan also comments on the scope for new habitat creation including wildflower meadows.

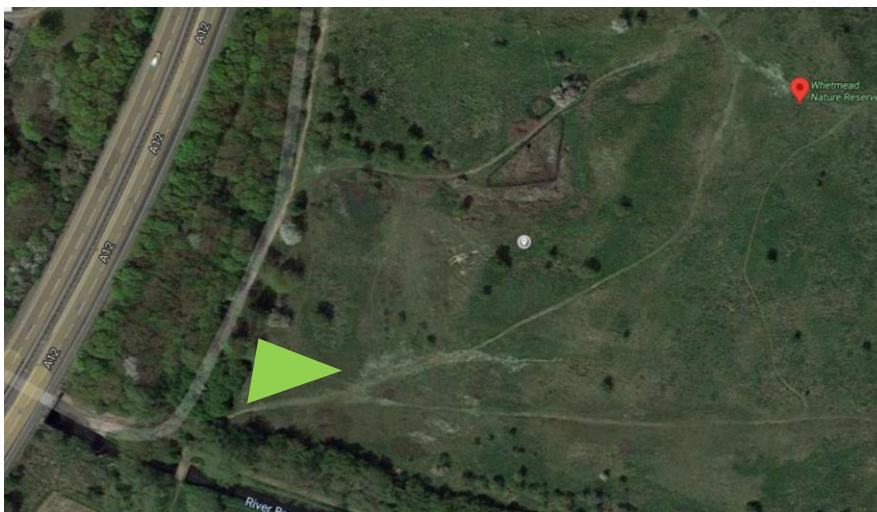
Consideration should now take place on locations and scale of wildflower planting on Council managed land if Members agree to proceed.

Proposed locations

Whetmead –

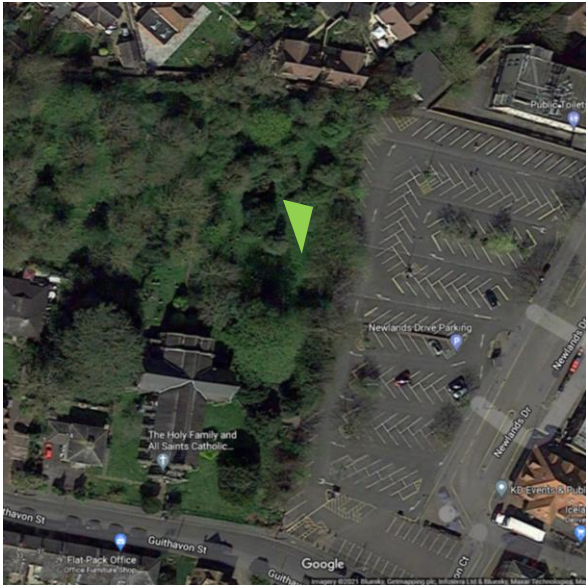
Planting at Whetmead has not been trialled before because of the nature of the land having previously been a land fill site. However, research shows that wildflowers actually thrive on poor nutrient soil and therefore Whetmead may be an ideal location for planting.

The upper elevated section of the nature reserve is quite coarse with a minimal variety of plants and so at the top of the south steps is proposed as an area for wildflower planting. The Council are already considering improvements to Whetmead which has a large scope for enhancements to develop the nature reserve. If successful, there are further planting opportunities throughout the whole site.



Closed Churchyard –

The north corner of the churchyard has a vacant area which was once considered for a pond but could be suitable for trial planting of a wildflower area. There are already some wildflowers naturally growing throughout the churchyard so planting an area specifically for wildflowers will add to the attractive appearance of this location as well as increasing biodiversity.



River Walk –

The River Walk has various locations that could be trialled for wildflower planting without reducing any amenity grassland. One area that could be suitable is on the Helen Court side of the river near River View. This location is a quieter part of the River Walk with a commemorative bench and mown pathways through stinging nettles but may benefit from wildflower sections.



Preparation and planting

Before embarking on large scale planting to create a wildflower meadow, which could be costly and also labour intensive, some trial planting should be considered to determine how successful such planting will be.

Wildflowers flourish better on poor nutrient soil and one free of weeds and grasses that will dominate the area. The soil at the suggested locations has been tested by WTC Operations Manager to determine its PH type and so that the appropriate seeds can be purchased. Both Whetmead and the Churchyard have alkaline soil and testing of soil at the Helen Court area of the River Walk shows that it is slightly acidic.

The purchase of perennial mixed native wildflowers is preferable as the flowers return yearly. Costs for seeds can vary greatly from £10 - £130 per 100g depending on the quality and variety. Seeds should then be sown in suitably prepared ground, preferably in early Autumn, at 2-5 grammes per metre squared which would mean that cost of trial planting could be relatively low. Once planted, regular maintenance will also be needed, removing grasses and controlling weeds in the first year to encourage success, and routine upkeep in the future. Subject to agreement, plans will be made to carry out some small-scale trial planting with mixed perennial wildflower seeds in a minimum of one location of Council managed land.