



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

OPEN SPACES MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE

AGENDA

TUESDAY 5TH MARCH 2024, 1:30PM

MEMBERS:	Councillors	S.	Ager	OFFICERS:	H. Andrews
		P.	Barlow		S. Puckey
		B.	Fleet		H. Smith
		P.	Heath		
		T.	Hewitt		
		R.	Ramage		

CO-OPTEES:	S.	Black	-	(Witham & Countryside Society)
	S.	Brailey	-	(Witham Tree Group)
	J.	Casement	-	(Witham Wombles)
	J.	Goodman	-	(Local interests)
	J.	Palombi	-	(CPRE)
	P.	Shuttleworth	-	(Local Wildlife Interests)

1) APOLOGIES

To receive apologies for absence.

2) INTERESTS

To receive any declarations of interest.

3) MINUTES

To receive the minutes of the meeting of the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee held on 5th December 2023 attached at pages 3 to 5.

4) QUESTIONS & STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

An opportunity for members of the press and public present to comment upon any item on the agenda or raise new concerns.

5) CONSIDERATION OF WRITTEN REPRESENTATIONS

To consider any written representations received by the Council.

6) CLERK'S REPORT

To receive the Clerk's Report attached at page 6.

7) 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.

8) RIVER WATER QUALITY

To receive a report attached at pages 7 to 8.

9) ESSEX WILDLIFE TRUST WILDER TOWNS AND RIVERS

To receive a report attached at pages 9 to 10.

10) JAMES COOKE WOOD IMPROVEMENTS

To receive a report attached at pages 11 to 12.

11) WHETMEAD NATURE TRAIL

To receive a verbal update on the Whetmead nature trail project.

12) DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

To note that the next meeting of the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee will be held on Tuesday 4th June 2024.



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

MINUTES

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

Date: **5th December 2023**

Present:	Councillors	B	Fleet	(Chairman)
		S.	Ager	
		P.	Barlow	
		P.	Heath	
		R.	Ramage	
	Co-optees	S.	Black	(Witham and Countryside Society)
		S.	Brailey	(Witham Tree Group)
		J.	Casement	(Witham Wombles)
		J.	Goodman	(Local Interests)
		J.	Palombi	(CPRE)
		P.	Shuttleworth	(Local Wildlife Interests)
	Officers	H.	Andrews	(Deputy Town Clerk)
		S.	Dyer	(Operations Manager)
		S.	Puckey	(Open Spaces Administrative Assistant)

25. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Cllr Hewitt.

26. **INTERESTS**

No interests were declared.

27. **MINUTES**

The minutes were **AGREED** and subsequently signed by the Chairman.

28. **QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC**

No public were in attendance.

29. **CONSIDERATION OF WRITTEN REPRESENTATIONS**

No written representations were received by the Council.

30. CLERK'S REPORT

Members were further informed that in addition to the six trees planted near Chipping Dell, two trees had been planted on the River Walk close to Guithavon Road. Members were also advised that ecology assessments of James Cooke Wood and the Closed Churchyard are due to be carried out in spring 2024 to be used as a basis for future management plans.

Members **AGREED** to receive the report.

31. OPERATIONS MANAGER'S REPORT

The Operations Manager provided a verbal update. The Operations Team have recently planted eight trees on the River Walk and flowering shrubs at Whetmead, are half way through their meadow mowing and have been involved in Witham's Halloween, Remembrance Parade and Christmas events. The only outstanding autumnal job is hedge cutting as the soil has been too wet recently to withstand the weight of the platform required.

During the winter period, the team will continue felling dead and diseased trees at James Cooke Wood, infill the man-made river bank erosion at Whetmead and continue to remove ivy from gravestones and undertake restorative pruning at the Closed Churchyard in addition to general maintenance at the allotments.

Members were advised that the Operations Manager will be viewing a mower in the next few days to potentially replace the defunct Ransomes Parkway mower and reassured Members that river erosion is monitored regularly. It was also noted that Essex Highways are aware that new directional signage for James Cooke Wood is still outstanding.

Members **AGREED** to receive the report

32. WHETMEAD NATURE RESERVE SECTION 106 IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

Members were advised that the nature trail posts will be installed before the A12 widening scheme commenced and should not be affected by any works. Concern was expressed about the height of the etching posts and that a step may be necessary in front of each post if they were too tall for children.

Members **AGREED** to receive the report

33. SECTION 106 FUNDING AND OPEN SPACES

Members were informed that there was a tight deadline for the spending of Section 106 money to be used for James Cooke Wood and that quotes had been sought for a boardwalk over a boggy area of the site. Depending on the chosen option, additional funds would be spent on a noticeboard and other improvements were being considered.

A second Section 106 funded project was proposed for an area close to River View where a bee haven flower bed with bee posts is due to be created by the Bee Friendly Trust in the spring,

Members were invited to put forward any ideas for projects in future years which would enhance Witham's open spaces.

Members **AGREED** to receive the report

34. A12 WIDENING AND WHETMEAD NATURE RESERVE

Members were informed that funds would be available following the A12 widening scheme and ideas were being collated. A bird hide was suggested as an addition to the list.

The proposal of artwork underneath the bridge was particularly well received and Members were subsequently interested in knowing what was planned for the design of the bridge by the entrance to Whetmead. It was **AGREED** that this would be investigated.

Members **AGREED** to receive the report.

John Goodman left the Chamber at 14.46.

35. WATER QUALITY OF WITHAM'S RIVERS

Members were further furnished with an interpretation guide to understanding the data and it was **AGREED** that Members would review the information for the next meeting. Members recognised that the information was complex and it was further **AGREED** that Essex Wildlife Trust would be approached for additional help in understanding the impact of the information.

Members **AGREED** to receive the report.

36. WITHAM POND ENHANCEMENTS UPDATE

Members were informed that the suggested floating island is being recommended for inclusion in The Potential Open Spaces Improvements Document 2024 held by Braintree District Council which would potentially permit Section 106 money to be allocated to this project in the future, if approved. Members were advised that there is strict criteria for projects and notification of acceptance onto the list would be known in summer 2024. If the project was accepted and funds available a more detailed analysis of floating islands for Witham pond would be conducted.

Members **AGREED** to receive the report.

37. ESSEX WILDLIFE TRUST WILDER TOWNS

Members **AGREED** to receive the report.

38. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee would be held on Tuesday 5th March 2024 at the earlier time of 1.30pm.

Meeting concluded at 3.12pm.

SP/06.12.23

Signed by Chairman.....

Clerk's Report: Open Spaces Management Sub-committee

To note:

- The bee-friendly planting project, funded by Section 106 developer money, has now been completed on the River Walk by River View. This was carried out in conjunction with The Bee Friendly Trust and includes bee hotels for solitary bees, bird boxes, rosemary bushes, olive trees, skimmia, euphorbia, verbena, ivy and cornflower and sunflower seeds together with an information board of bee facts.



- Drainage works at Ebenezer Close end of the River Walk are due to take place in the coming weeks to look at addressing the water issues affecting the footpaths.
- A grant application has been made to Essex & Suffolk Water to seek funding for the suggested floating island for the duck pond. This is part of their Branch Out funding which is for environmental projects to encourage people to connect with their local natural environment.

Advice:

To receive and note.

Officer Report: Water Quality of Witham's Rivers

To note:

Below are the latest readings for our rivers from - <http://environment.data.gov.uk/water-quality/view/explore>

The readings are from two sampling points:

- AN-BL03– (Appleford for River Blackwater)
- AN-BR01 – (This is for the sample point at Guithavon Flume for River Brain with 14 measurements)

AN-BL03 - Appleford for River Blackwater results

Notation	Determinand	Units	26 Apr 2023 12:17	25 May 2023 11:22	29 Jun 2023 14:47	8 Aug 2023 10:51	13 Sep 2023 08:43	17 Oct 2023 09:50	23 Oct 2023 09:29	20 Nov 2023 09:07	5 Dec 2023 09:53	17 Jan 2024 09:09
0061	pH		8.25	8.1	7.91	8.25	7.81	7.93	7.86	7.97	7.93	8.09
0076	Temperature of Water	°C	10.5	14.9	19.4	16	17.1	11	10.6	9.4	5.9	2.9
0077	Conductivity at 25 C	µs/cm	839	906	867	866	961	801	650	700	864	872
0085	BOD : 5 Day ATU	mg/l		1.6	< 1							
0111	Ammoniacal Nitrogen as N	mg/l	< 0.03	< 0.03	< 0.03	0.03	< 0.03	< 0.03	< 0.03	< 0.03	0.14	0.14
0116	Nitrogen, Total Oxidised as N	mg/l	9.7	11	7.6	7.4	9.7	8.6	15	12	11	11
0117	Nitrate as N	mg/l	9.66	11	7.56	7.38	9.67	8.58	<u>15</u>	<u>12</u>	10.9	10.9
0118	Nitrite as N	mg/l	0.038	0.04	0.038	0.02	0.029	0.019	0.032	0.03	0.075	0.066
0119	Ammonia un-ionised as N	mg/l	< 0.00057	< 0.00078	< 0.00089	0.00085	< 0.0006	< 0.0005	< 0.00042	< 0.00049	0.00161	0.00151
0162	Alkalinity to pH 4.5 as CaCO3	mg/l	270	260	240	240	260	220	190	230	240	270
0180	<u>Orthophosphate, reactive as P</u>	mg/l	0.12	0.19	0.27	0.25	0.22	0.22	0.18	0.12	0.16	0.16
9901	Oxygen, Dissolved, % Saturation	%	108.1	102.5	79.6	85.3	74.5	88.3	87.2	91.8	89.9	91.7
9924	Oxygen, Dissolved as O2	mg/l	12	10.3	7.31	8.4	7.17	9.72	9.69	10.5	11.2	12.4

AN-BR01 - Guithavon Flume for River Brain

Samples from 9 Mar 2020 to 6 Dec 2023

Notation	Determinand	Units	9 Mar 2020 10:21	25 Apr 2023 15:09	25 May 2023 11:53	29 Jun 2023 14:10	28 Jul 2023 11:36	4 Aug 2023 08:31	14 Sep 2023 13:06	16 Oct 2023 12:56	20 Nov 2023 13:29	6 Dec 2023 09:56
0061	pH		7.99	8.35	8	7.82	7.63	7.78	7.9	7.97	7.92	7.95
0076	Temperature of Water	°C	7.9	10.9	14.1	17.6	17.4	16	16.3	10.3	10.6	5.3
0077	Conductivity at 25 C	µs/cm	987	989	1070	1058	789	831	1090	1018	822	894
0085	BOD : 5 Day ATU	mg/l	1.7		1.3	< 3						
0111	Ammoniacal Nitrogen as N	mg/l	0.72	< 0.03	0.061	< 0.03	0.03	< 0.03	< 0.03	< 0.03	0.051	0.049
0116	Nitrogen, Total Oxidised as N	mg/l	12	14	16	16	9.2	9.8	14	13	12	14
0117	Nitrate as N	mg/l	11.8	<u>14</u>	<u>15.9</u>	<u>16</u>	9.16	9.77	<u>14</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>14</u>
0118	Nitrite as N	mg/l	0.18	0.036	0.091	0.048	0.044	0.029	0.02	0.0068	0.04	0.046
0119	Ammonia un-ionised as N	mg/l	0.011	< 0.00058	0.0015	< 0.00064	0.00041	< 0.00052	< 0.00069	< 0.00052	0.00081	0.00056
0162	Alkalinity to pH 4.5 as CaCO3	mg/l	260	240	240	220	190	200	250	230	240	240
0180	<u>Orthophosphate, reactive as P</u>	mg/l	0.87	0.31	0.4	0.51	0.47	0.47	0.7	0.45	0.26	0.27
6030	Silver	µg/l	< 1									
9901	Oxygen, Dissolved, % Saturation	%	91.5	113.8	98.4	75.2	80.6	77	85.2	93.5	92.2	91.3
9924	Oxygen, Dissolved as O2	mg/l	10.8	12.6	10.1	7.16	7.71	7.58	8.33	10.5	10.2	11.6

The two areas that just “fail” the national standards are Nitrates (pass fig is 11.3) and Orthophosphates (pass fig is 0.095, our figures are moderate but not poor or bad which is above 1). Other readings are at acceptable levels.

Upon seeking more help from the Environment Agency they said *“Concentrations of nitrates and phosphates in our rivers come from a number of sources both natural and manmade. The largest concentrations with the possibility of reduction come from agriculture and wastewater treatment. From agriculture, concentrations are leached from the soil, this may be due to the over application of manure or manufactured fertilisers or applications made when it’s unlikely there will a plant requirement or uptake. It can also be under circumstances like we are having at present where prolonged or heavy rainfall events washes soils directly from fields. From wastewater treatment it is dependent on what materials are coming into treatment works(human and trade effluent). Phosphates are particularly difficult to strip from incoming effluent and require considerable investment in equipment to do so. Discharges of poorly treated effluent can also occur due to system failures at works and again current weather patterns increase the likelihood of storm discharges. Unfortunately treatment works have a finite capacity to treat incoming flow and in periods of heavy or prolonged rainfall a proportion of incoming flow will be discharged as screened(rag/paper etc removed)effluent without treatment. Most works have some storm storage capacity, but again this is a finite resource and once filled discharges will occur.*

Obviously, wastewater treatment is high profile at the moment and campaigns are now in place to improve the quality of final effluent being discharged. On a larger scale, pressures are being put on water companies to improve their operations through encouraged investment and the threat of unlimited fines if significant failures occur. In agriculture more emphasis is being placed on farmers protecting their soils and managing their applications of fertilisers. We now have regulation in the in the form of ‘Farming Rules for Water’ Regs which includes the requirement for manure management plans, soil testing, records of applications and field risk mapping. “

Note that Otters, regularly seen in the River Brain, are considered to be a flagship indicator of good river health.

Advice:

- To note the information

SP/28.02.2024

Officer Report: Essex Wilder Towns and Rivers

To note:

On 14th February 2024, the Wilder Communities Manager, Danielle Carbott and the Wilder Rivers Officer, Ben Mott from Essex Wildlife Trust visited the River Walk. A walk took place from Helen Court bridge to Chipping Hill bridge and concentrated on looking at the river as part of their River Champions scheme.

The following feedback was received -

Surveys and training opportunities

Water Vole Surveys – These are run by the People’s Trust for Endangered Species from mid April to early June. The survey is relatively straightforward, focusing on latrines (grouped droppings), feeding stations (clumps of nibbled reed), and burrows. There is online training on the PTES website, and it is possible (though not guaranteed) that EWT will run in person training before the survey window begins. It is suggested that these are a good idea for this stretch of the Brain, particularly in the back channel and that there are no mink (as far as known) on site.

Essex River Watch – The River Watch survey will equip volunteers to monitor a broad range of river health aspect (fertiliser levels, turbidity, temperature, dissolved oxygen, salinity, and some others). Further information about this will be provided shortly once the project is ready to go live.

Riverfly – Riverfly monitoring is a long-standing and popular volunteer survey, in which volunteers are trained to take water samples and from those samples identify 8 core groups of Riverflies. Roughly, the amount of Riverflies found translates to a ‘score’, which is then compared to a baseline score set by the relevant EA officer (this happens when a new survey site is established). If the score falls below this baseline score – which is known as a trigger level – than the EA are alerted to and investigate a potential pollution event. If interested, EWT will carry out a follow up site visit when the levels are lower, and the water clearer, as it would be useful for identifying suitable sites for Riverfly monitoring (safe access, ankle – knee deep water in regular flows, gravel riverbed).

There will be various training events run by Essex Wildlife Trust in the coming year that Witham Town Council can take part in as part of the Wilder Towns and River Champions scheme and will be updated on these shortly.

River Management

Trees in the river channel was discussed as some local residents perceive this to be contributing to flooding problems. EWT advised that in general terms, complex structures within a river are a good thing. Complex structures create a greater diversity of habitat, which in turn supports a greater diversity of microbial and invertebrate life. They slow water at some points, creating deeper areas where the water is held up, and conversely also create shallower zones where water flows faster and subsequently is more oxygenated – a big boost for the insects living in and around the water that require oxygen to breathe, and therefore also the fish which feed upon them.

During high rainfalls and peak flows, complex structures slow flow rates whilst still letting water through, reducing peak discharges and easing flooding pressures downstream. Conversely, upstream flood risk is increased slightly,

but this can be managed by placing these structures strategically in relation to floodplains. Simple structures, such as concrete weirs, are very different, and cause problems for fish and eels moving upstream, which they need to do for various stages of their life cycles (spawning, feeding etc). They also limit nutrient and sediment transportation, which are key functions of a healthy river. So – to generalise a little - barriers in rivers is a bit of a complex topic, but where appropriate, complex structures (fallen trees and woody debris) are a positive for river function and biodiversity, whereas simple structures (concretised human-made infrastructure) are not.

Some parts of the river are particularly straight, contributing to fast flows and increased flood risk downstream. Some marginal planting in these areas, where vegetation (likely to be sedges, reeds, grasses) is planted out from the bank into the channel, will help create a more natural, meandering flow – not only slowing water in places, but also increasing filtration of pollutants, and boosting biodiversity. Such planting will also help to strengthen the river banks and reduce soil erosion, which can lead to excessive sediment build up further downstream. This planting might need to be caged, or done by filling in sediment behind willow/hazel stakes, in order to prevent excessive spread. Floating wetlands might also be an option here.

Advice:

To note and obtain interest in carrying out surveys on our rivers.

Officer Report: James Cooke Wood improvements

To note:

- The boardwalk installation, funded through Section 106 contributions has now been completed. This has been installed in the north-east area of the wood which is subject to flooding and, prior to the boardwalk, was inaccessible for a large portion of the year.



- A new noticeboard has also been purchased from Section 106 funds and will shortly be installed at the entrance to James Cooke Wood as part of ongoing improvements. The noticeboard will share community information, Witham Town Council news as well as a history of the woods and educational literature about the wildlife on site.
- Woodland management work took place in February to carry out thinning of the trees as recommended by the Forestry Commission to reduce the trees by 30%. 50% of this work has now been carried out and it is hoped, with funding approval, that the remaining works will be carried out later in the year after bird nesting season. The work is necessary for the health of the wood and will improve its biodiversity, promote health tree growth and encourage wildlife. The timber felled will be removed from the site in the near future as agreed with the contractor but the left over brash will remain in the woods to create wildlife habitats.
- 2,000 bluebell and snowdrop bulbs were planted recently by the Operations Team near to the entrance to the woods.
- A site survey is due to take place in March by Essex Ecology Services, the consultancy arm of Essex Wildlife Trust. The report provided by as a result of the survey will be used to create a new management plan for James Cooke Wood.

- The next major improvement to James Cooke Wood to be considered will be to look at enhancing the car park. Research will take place and advice sought to consider how best to do this.

Advice:

To receive and note.

HA/27.02.2024