



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

OPEN SPACES MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE

AGENDA

WEDNESDAY 3RD DECEMBER 2025, 2.00PM

MEMBERS:	Councillors	B.	Fleet (Chairman)	OFFICERS:	H. Andrews
		J.M.	Coleman		S. Dyer
		J.C.	Goodman (Vice)		S. Puckey
		P.	Heath		
		R.	Ramage		

CO-OPTEEES:	S.	Black	- (Witham & Countryside Society)
	J.	Casement	- (Witham Wombles)
	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 Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee held on 3rd September 2025 attached at page 3.

4) QUESTIONS AND 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) CLERK'S REPORT

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

6) OPERATIONS MANGER'S REPORT

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

7) REVIEW OF THE RIVER WALK MANAGEMENT PLAN

To carry out a review of the River Walk Management Plan to ensure that all desired outcomes are being worked towards and decisions are being taken in accordance with this plan – circulated separately.

8) RIVER WALK BIODIVERSITY

To receive a report on various biodiversity projects proposed for the River Walk attached at page 7.



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

MINUTES

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

Date: **3rd September 2025**

Present:	Councillors	B	Fleet	
		P	Heath	(arrived 2.17pm)
	Co-optees	S.	Black	(Witham and Countryside Society)
		J.	Casement	(Witham Wombles)
		J.	Palombi	(CPRE)
		P	Shuttleworth	(Local wildlife Interests)
	Officers	H.	Andrews	(Deputy Town Clerk)
		S.	Dyer	(Operations Manager)
		S.	Puckey	(Open Spaces Administrative Assistant)

14. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from J Goodman. Cllr Ramage was absent.

15. INTERESTS

No interests were declared.

16. MINUTES

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

17. QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

A resident had emailed asking for an update on the poor condition of the fence between 1 Bridge Street and the River Walk. The Deputy Town Clerk informed the Committee that there had been no further communication between the Town Council and the owner of 1 Bridge Street, although it was believed that further tree work was due to be done in the autumn. Members were further informed that the Council had no health and safety concerns about the fence, as there was a nettle bed in front of it should it fall, and will not actively be pursuing the resident on this matter at this time.

The resident had an additional question regarding the future of the old dead Willow tree by Luard Way. Members were informed that the tree had been surveyed last year and was not considered to be a safety hazard, even though it was nearing the end of its life. The tree would continue to be checked at regular intervals. Members felt that it was good to see children enjoying tree climbing and dead trees were still a good habitat for insects. A new willow tree may be considered near this site in the future.

18. CLERK'S REPORT

The Clerk's report was received by Members. The Deputy Town Clerk further advised that two new benches would be installed on the River Walk close to Pattison Close in the next few months, that the additional bee havens would be completed in the autumn and that an information board had been put in on the River Walk on Armond Road as a memorial to the Witham Rail Crash of 1905.

Cllr Heath entered the Chamber at 2.17pm

Members **AGREED** to receive the report.

19. OPERATION MANAGER'S REPORT

The Operations Manager provided a verbal update.

The Operations Team is up-to-date with the River Walk. Unfortunately, there has been some vandalism and two benches had been removed for repair, but a new bench had been installed in Maldon Road. There have been several fires on the River Walk over the summer and a nature trail camera has been erected close to Ebenezer to deter further arson attempts.

There have been two events on the River Walk which went well; the Teddy Bears' Picnic and the Rail Disaster Remembrance.

Regular maintenance has been continuing at James Cooke Wood, widening the rides and cutting back vegetation as well as replacing some fencing with new posts.

There has been the usual maintenance at Whetmead. In addition, two etching posts have been reset, the river bank has been repaired and a new nature camera installed to act as CCTV.

The team are up to date with the churchyard and the allotments.

The Operations Manager advised that the Mill Lane Meadow would be mowed in October and two Members expressed an interest in being part of the volunteers to collect the grass.

Members **AGREED** to receive the report.

20. BIO BLITZ EVENT

Members agreed that the event had been a success and that Essex Wildlife Trust's attendance had played a large part in the day being well received. Members were informed that it was hoped the event would be repeated next year, either in the Closed Churchyard or Whetmead, if Essex Wildlife Trust and Essex Field Club could attend.

Members **AGREED** to receive the report.

21. WHETMEAD NATURE RESERVE

The Deputy Town Clerk advised Members that the camera post would be put up in the near future and the Operations Manager added that he had identified a location which would include a view of Wickham Bishops Church.

Members were interested to know who owned the woodland area by the north steps at Whetmead and, if it was owned by National Highways, if it might be integrated into the reserve. The Deputy Town Clerk was not aware of land ownership in the area but this was not currently in the council's plans.

Members **AGREED** to receive the report.

22. RIVER WALK PUBLIC ART

Members were invited to feed back any ideas for sculptures or locations as soon as possible. Members were further advised that The Town Council was still awaiting final funding confirmation but it was anticipated that the project would begin in the next couple of months.

Members expressed an interest in graffiti art being part of any future public artwork, identifying the rail bridges over the River Walk and road bridge over the entrance to Whetmead as potential locations. The Deputy Town Clerk advised that while the rail bridges had been ruled out due to difficulty obtaining agreement from Network Rail, it was hoped that artwork may be considered at the Whetmead underpass in the future.

Members **AGREED** to receive the report.

Meeting concluded at 2.51pm.

SP/3.9.25

Signed by Chairman.....

Clerk's Report: Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee**To note:**

- Relevant permissions have now been received to undertake the necessary repairs to the pedestrian bridges on the River Walk. Officers are liaising with the appointed contractor to arrange a schedule for the works.
- Officers are continuing to progress the River Walk nature sculpture project with the appointed artist. The project will comprise of six totem pole style sculptures, three bee sculptures and seven additional nature inspired pieces. Installation is currently expected to start in April 2026.
- A tree survey has recently been completed covering Whetmead and Witham Town Council land off of Blackwater Lane. Together with identified maintenance required for specific trees on the River Walk, a total of eight trees have been recommended for remedial works over the winter period. Quotations have been invited for these works.
- A successful day took place with volunteers on 16th October 2025 helping with the clearance of Mill Lane meadow. This was to assist with the 'cut and collect' process of the meadow. This work is intended to reduce nutrient levels and create conditions that will allow wildflowers, particularly buttercups to thrive.
- Additional bee haven areas have now been created on the River Walk bringing the total number of locations to four – Helen Court, Guithavon, Moat Farm and near Bramble Road.
- The Whetmead photography post has now been installed at the top of the hill on the nature reserve enabling visitors to capture seasonal landscape photos. Images submitted are being added to the Town Council website to build a time-lapse record of the changing scenery.
- Two trees have been planted on the River Walk for National Tree Planting week. A Willow has been planted near the new bee friendly installation near Guithavon and an Acer was planted by the Town Mayor near Helen Court.

Advice:

To receive and note.

Officer Report: River Walk – Biodiversity Monitoring

Issue:

Following the success of the bioblitz in July, we have been considering ways to further increase our knowledge and understanding of the taxa on the River Walk while engaging local residents in local nature and conservation.

Data is already collected in a number of ways including:

- Annual Glow Worm survey carried out by Essex Wildlife Trust
- Annual Water Vole survey carried out the Operations Team
- Resident and staff feedback recorded on the Wildlife Watch Board in the Information Centre
- A Bio-blitz (the first one recorded in 2025 with another planned in 2026)

These tools do not provide an exhaustive list of species, however it is proposed that to supplement this data, Witham Town Council, also carries out the following in 2026:

- A bat survey in 2026 (Between May and September) and again in 2030 as this is a protected species that may need help.
- A summer pond /river dipping (free ticketed) day to review aquatic life with an aquatic expert.
- An annual butterfly count in July / August as part of the national Big Butterfly Count to begin to track their populations over time at one or more specific points on the River Walk.
- An annual bird watch in January, as part of the national RSPB big national birdwatch, and again in Summer to begin to track bird populations over time, at one or more specific points on the River Walk.

It is proposed that the latter two surveys could be done by inviting volunteers to take part (crowdsourcing) which would have the added benefit of engaging with the local community in wildlife monitoring.

Any additional ideas by the group and any contacts who could help achieve these aims would be welcomed.

Impact Assessment

The Town Council has a statutory duty to consider the effects of its decisions on biodiversity, and crime and disorder in the area.

- (a) Biodiversity – Positive impact on biodiversity.
- (b) Crime and disorder – No impact.

Advice:

- To receive and note.

SP/27.11.2025