



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

MINUTES

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

Date: **5th March 2025**

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

38. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Cllr Hewitt, Cllr Ramage, J Casement, and P Shuttleworth. Cllr P Barlow was absent.

39. **INTERESTS**

No interests were declared.

40. **MINUTES**

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

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

There were no questions.

42. **CONSIDERATION OF WRITTEN REPRESENTATIONS**

No written representations were received.

43. **CLERK'S REPORT**

The Clerk's report was received by Members. It was noted that the Clerk's description of the tree risk survey would have made a suitable response to a recent letter in the Braintree and Witham Times expressing disappointment in the tree felling. Members were further informed that an official response had been sent in to the paper by the Chair of Open Spaces and Chair of Witham Tree Group explaining that only a small proportion of trees needed treatment and that the losses would be replaced in the autumn. It was further explained in the response that Witham was very well served by tree planting as there was a dedicated tree group who plant annually.

Members suggested that it might be a good idea to remind the public in the Voice magazine about the Open Spaces meetings and highlight that they are open to all residents to attend and put forward their opinions.

Members welcomed the removal of nettles at Chipping Hill bridge and it was suggested that this would be a good spot to plant more willow trees especially as near-by trees are maturing.

Members **AGREED** to receive the report.

44. **OPERATION MANAGER'S REPORT**

The Operations Manager provided a verbal update.

It is mainly a variety of ad-hoc jobs that are undertaken in the winter months. On the River Walk, the team are up to date and have cleared silt from the river at the underpass at Whetmead, cleared nettles, repaired culverts and put up new fencing and carried out some permitted tree work.

At James Cooke Wood, an appointed contractor had carried out thinning work and the chipping work is due to be done shortly. The creation of a dead hedge is being considered for the boundary.

There is nothing to report at Whetmead but further work will be carried out on the river bank in the Spring.

A lot of time has been spent in the Closed Churchyard this past month. The team have taken down some of the self-set trees, carried out pruning and chipped the brash for the footpaths, raised the crown on some trees and removed the ivy where appropriate. A tawny owl has been heard in the grounds recently and a little owl pellet discovered on a grave stone. There are plans to install bird and bat boxes soon.

At the allotments, there have been a few plot clearances and the water switched off for the winter and recently put back on again.

It was further clarified that where the river bank has collapsed close to Pattison close, repair options are being considered, potentially with the aid of Section 106 money.

The Deputy Town Clerk advised that where the drainage work had not been successful last year in the Glebelands area, this was being addressed and a report from an appointed consultant was expected shortly with advice on how to proceed. It was acknowledged by Members that the area was known for its springs and that problems were likely to be ongoing.

Members **AGREED** to receive the report.

45. DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR ALL SAINT'S CHURCHYARD

Members were advised that the plan was based on an Essex Ecology report, however there were plans for additional surveys where possible in order to provide a more complete account of the species currently present. Members were further informed that discussions were taking place with a representative from Essex Wildlife Trust to try and facilitate a bioblitz with volunteers. Members suggested a lichen report may also be appropriate and welcomed the installation of bird, owl and bat boxes.

The Deputy Town Clerk clarified that it was hoped interpretation boards would be funded via Section 106 money and that it had been put forward to be included on Braintree District Council's Potential Open Spaces Improvement document. Members suggested that any future boards should use simple straightforward language in order to engage adults and children alike.

Members **RECOMMENDED** that the adoption of the management plan be approved by the Environment Committee.

Cllr Heath left the Chamber at 14.30.

46. WITHAM RIVER WATCH

Members were informed that samples were taken monthly from the bridge at Whetmead and Bramble Road. Only two had been conducted so far but it would be interesting to monitor any patterns or changes over a year. Members were further advised that measurements were taken for temperature, turbidity, dissolved solids, ammonia, phosphate and nitrate levels within the context of the location. To date it had been noted that the phosphate levels were higher at Bramble Road than Whetmead, suggesting agricultural run-off before the river enters the Witham parish. An article has been written for the Voice to inform residents.

Members **AGREED** to receive the report.

47. WITHAM TOWN COUNCIL EVENTS

Members were pleased with the number of events being offered this year and felt it was a good way to bring the River Walk to residents' attention. The Deputy Town Clerk clarified that the VE day event would be held on May 8th but exact timings had not yet been finalised.

Members **AGREED** to receive the report

48. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee would be held on Wednesday 4th June 2025 at 2pm.

Meeting concluded at 2.45pm.

SP/06.03.25

Signed by Chairman.....