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MINUTES

Meeting of: **Environment Committee**

Date: **Tuesday, 23rd July 2019**

Present: Councillors

T.A.	Pleasance	(Chairman)
J.C.	Goodman	(Vice Chairman)
Mrs S.	Ager	
J.C.	Bayford	
S.E.	Hicks	
Mrs A.	Kilmartin	
M.C.M.	Lager	
Mrs S.C.	Lager	
C.S.	Livermore	
R.P.	Ramage	
Miss M.L.	Weeks	
Cllr. J.	Abbott	(Essex County Council)
J.	Sheehy	(Town Clerk)
Mrs G.	Kennedy	(Committee Clerk)
Mrs H.	Andrews	(Assistant Proper Officer)

And two members of the public.

15. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Miss C. Jay who was unwell.

16. MINUTES

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Environment Committee held 28th May 2019 be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

17. INTERESTS

No interests were declared at this time.

18. QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

The Chairman welcomed Mr Barry Fleet and Mr Allan Waight, Witham Tree Group to the Meeting.

Barry Fleet, Chairman of the Tree Group, said that they are in a unique partnership with the Town Council which funds the planting of substantial trees which they water for the following two years. He stressed the important amenity value of trees with climate change and improved public health. He said the main focus this coming planting season would be a Memorial Wood to remember those who fell in the First World War. It would be an exciting project in conjunction with the District Council and will be on the greensward between Honeysuckle Way and Bramble Road.

Allan Waight then spoke in more detail about the proposed woodland. He said that the original planting would be for 25 native species trees, e.g. oak and celtic maple, funded by the District Council. The second year would be infill planting with smaller trees. They planned to start planting in National Tree Week. This would be a substantial amount of work and consideration will need to be given to obtaining a bigger bowser.

Allan and Barry then answered questions assuring Members that substantial fencing makes the trees vandal resistant but the greater problem is drought. The site had been chosen as it would be large enough to support the wooded area and have sufficient space for the trees to grow without becoming over crowded.

The Chairman thanked Allan and Barry for their informative report.

19. REPORT(S) FROM COUNTY COUNCILLORS

Essex County Councillor James Abbott explained that there had been a scheme for every Councillor to put forward their five worse paths and verges for repair. Two for Witham had been Chipping Hill footway and the verges in Walnut Drive. Other bad areas had already been marked for repair. He said that the County Council reporting system was still very variable. He had been pursuing the annual vegetation issues and was pleased that the footpath by the Catholic Bridge had been cleared and the pollarded lime trees in Collingwood Road trimmed back around the base. He reported that the flooding issues in Guithavon Valley would be resolved with new drains and pipes within the next month or two. It was proposed to repair The Avenue during August and there would be both day time and night time working. There had been a Local Highways Panel Meeting on 20th June 2019 and the zebra crossing scheme for Cressing Road was now at the design stage but funding would be required. He said that the proposed crossing in Rickstones Road would require an adjustment to the parking bays. He stated that as the proposed scheme for a slip road at the Morrisons roundabout had been cancelled, this funding might be available to fund the crossing in Rickstones Road. Members were notified that the next Highways Panel Meeting would be on 25th September 2019 and it was open to the public to attend.

Councillor Abbott was keen to support the Town Council's aspirations to acquire the Blackwater Rail Trail. He said that the County Council had spent a vast sum of money on strengthening the Catholic Bridge only to realise that it no longer links up with the Rail Trail, however it has been agreed that steps would be installed. He explained that with the extended parking restrictions in Avenue Road and Janmead, some of those displaced vehicles had transferred to The Paddocks. He referred to the forthcoming item on the Conrad Road 20 mph speed limit request and said that the strict criteria would be difficult to achieve. He said that he had heard of a request for almond trees in St Nicholas Road but considered that underground services would thwart this proposal.

He was informed that late Councillor ‘Dr Bob’s’ Memorial tree would be replaced later this year and that Greenfields were investigating getting a team in to deal with the willows in the dried up pond in Forest Road.

Members spoke about the need for traffic calming requested by the Head Teacher of Elm Hall School. Parents dropping off or collecting pupils from the three schools in Conrad Road was a serious problem and it was felt that measures needed to be taken to slow down traffic movements. Councillor Abbot explained that speed bumps would be unlikely to be permitted because this was on a bus route and would require capital expenditure, but suggested the ‘20’s plenty’ scheme could be an adequate solution, though not legally binding for enforcement.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Abbott for attending the Meeting and his informative report.

20. TOWN CLERK’S REPORT

The Town Clerk’s Report on matters arising was received.

The Town Clerk added that a bike rider at Whetmead had been successfully removed by the Operations Team and a new gateway system would be installed in September to prevent such intrusions in future.

RESOLVED That the Report be received and information noted.

21. ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE BUDGET

The Environment Committee Budget was received.

The Town Clerk explained that this was an up to date budget and the projected figures were an accurate forecast. In answer to questions the Town Clerk explained that the Open Spaces General budget line had been reduced as he was more specific in how the money was being spent; in the past the budget for James Cooke Wood was never used so it had been reduced to £200 but £1,000 had been spent some of which was for a tree felling licence which had lapsed.

RESOLVED That the Environment Budget be received and information noted.

22. HIGHWAYS REPORT

(a) The updated Highways Report was received.

Members referred to the obsolete bus shelters with the withdrawal of the 72 service and that these would be utilised elsewhere.

Members were informed that the Minutes from the Local Highways Panel had just been received and relevant sections would be considered at the next Environment Committee Meeting.

RESOLVED That the Highways Report be received and noted.

(b) The results of The Paddocks parking survey were received.

The Town Clerk said that there had been a clear mandate for extended parking restrictions.

RESOLVED That an application be made to extend the parking restrictions in The Paddocks.

23. CONRAD ROAD – SPEED LIMIT

The Town Mayor explained that she had been approached by Michael Woods, the Head Teacher of Elm Hall School, regarding the introduction of a 20 mph speed limit in Conrad Road.

Members agreed that ‘20’s Plenty’ campaign should be encouraged and that Councillors S.E. Hicks and Miss M. Weeks would contact the three schools in September.

RESOLVED That the schools be encouraged to take part in the ‘20’s Plenty’ campaign.

24. PLANNING APPLICATIONS AND TRANSPORT SUB-COMMITTEE

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Planning Applications and Transport Sub-Committee held 28th May, 10th and 24th June, and 8th July 2019 were received.

RESOLVED That the Minutes be received and noted.

25. OPEN SPACES MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE

The Minutes from the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee held 19th June 2019 were received along with the recommendation at Minute 8 to review the cycleway signage and for a new tree survey to be commissioned from ECOS.

The Town Clerk explained that it would be sensible to consider fingerpost signage for the cycleway and there would be the opportunity to discuss Section 106 monies with the District Council. He said that the Town Council had already had a comprehensive tree survey undertaken at a cost of £3,000 and he considered there was little justification in carrying out a further one to identify rare trees. It was agreed to hold in abeyance the request for a further tree survey to identify rare species until the remedial work on the trees had been completed.

RESOLVED That the Minutes be received and fingerpost signage for the cycleway be considered, in conjunction with Section 106 funding.

RESOLVED That the proposed ECOS tree survey be held in abeyance until the remedial work on the trees has been completed.

Councillor Mrs S.C. Lager left the Council Chamber before the vote was taken.

26. DOG/LITTER BIN REQUESTS

A request was received from Councillor J.C. Bayford for an additional dog bin in James Cooke Wood and an additional dog bin and litter bin on Whetmead Nature Reserve.

The Town Clerk said that these bins could be provided under delegated powers within the Office.

RESOLVED That the additional bins be provided under delegated powers.

27. TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION STEERING GROUP

The Notes of the Town Centre Regeneration Steering Group Meeting held 3rd June 2019 were received.

The Town Clerk explained that twice an officer from Braintree District Council had given up her time to attend a Meeting which was inquorate.

Members considered that if this were to happen in the future, the Meeting should continue but additional Members should also be appointed.

RESOLVED That the Notes be received and Councillor Mrs S. Ager be appointed to serve on the Town Centre Regeneration Steering Group; and that Mrs JoAnn Williams be asked if she would be willing to be co-opted.

Councillor Mrs S.C. Lager returned to the Council Chamber.

28. HIGHWAYS DEVOLUTION

Members noted that the grant for Highways Devolution had now been received.

The Town Clerk said that Members should refer lists of items which need attention to the Assistant Proper Officer preferably with a photo and map of the exact location.

RESOLVED That the information be received and Members send details of items requiring attention to the Assistant Proper Officer.

29. 1,000 TREES PROPOSAL

A report regarding the proposal to plant a 1,000 trees in Witham was received.

Members recognised that a scheme to plant 1,000 trees is over-ambitious but it could be included in the Business Plan as an aspiration to plant within the next ten or fifteen years. Suitable locations would be a problem and smaller trees which would not require as much maintenance in the future should be considered.

RESOLVED That the report be received and the Town Council's aspirations to plant more trees be included in next year's Business Plan.

30. NATIONAL TREE PLANTING WEEK

Information was received from Councillor Mrs S. Ager regarding National Tree Planting Week.

Members agreed that an application for a grant from the Essex Association of Local Councils should be made on behalf of the Tree Group.

RESOLVED That a grant be applied for from the Essex Association of Local Councils to support the work of the Witham Tree Group.

31. TREE GROUP

The Notes from the Tree Group Meetings held 7th May and 11th June 2019 were received and annual report with map of the proposed Memorial Wood tabled.

RESOLVED That the Notes, report and map be received and noted.

Councillor C.S. Livermore left the Meeting.

EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED That under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the press and public be excluded from the Meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest.

32. TENDERS

A report including tenders for the proposed LED replacement project was received.

The Town Clerk explained that the new Extended Procurement Process had been used to satisfy requirements under the Public Contract Regulations. He recommended that A & J Lighting be awarded the contract. Members were informed that they were the Town Council's existing contractor, based locally and been easy to contact. He said that a pre-contract Meeting would be held, interim payments made and retention of a payment until work had been satisfactorily completed.

RESOLVED That A & J Lighting be awarded the contract to replace the lamps on the Town Council street lights with LEDs at a cost of £19,065.

33. PUBLIC DOMAIN

Members agreed that the item discussed in Private Session should be moved into the Public Domain.

RESOLVED That the item discussed at Minute 32 – Tenders, be moved into the Public Domain.

There being no further business the Chairman closed the Meeting at 8.50 p.m.

Councillor _____
Chairman
JS/GK/26.7.2019