



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

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

Date: **6th September 2022**

Present: Councillors

S	Hicks	(Chairman)
J	Goodman	
T	Pleasance	
S	Black	(Witham and Countryside Society)
B.	Fleet	(Tree Warden)
J	Palombi	(CPRE)
P.	Shuttleworth	(Local Wildlife Interests)
H	Andrews	(Deputy Town Clerk)
S	Dyer	(Operations Manager)
S	Smith	(P.A to the Council)

11. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllr. K Atwill, Cllr S. Ager, S. Brailey, and J Casement.

12. INTERESTS

No interests were declared.

13. MINUTES

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

14. CLERK'S REPORT

The Clerk's report was received.

It was noted that the fire on Whetmead Nature Reserve was approximately 500 square metres and the fire report was inconclusive with regards to the cause of the fire.

15. OPERATIONS MANAGER'S REPORT

The Operations Manager provided a verbal report and confirmed that the team had returned to regular grass and hedge cutting after an especially dry period. He informed Members that a tree surgeon had to be called to remove a fallen Poplar, a new commemorative bench had been installed at Pattison Close and three successful events had taken place on the River Walk; the Witham Dog Show, the Witham Town Council Jubilee event and the duck race which was organised by the Rotary Club.

The gate padlocks had been cut off by the fire service to gain access to Whetmead Nature Reserve. A welder has since been to repair the gates. It was noted that only scrub land had been damaged in the fire which will regenerate.

Members were informed that improvements at James Cooke Wood were ongoing opening up the tree canopy to increase biodiversity. The hedge at the entrance had recently been cut to improve visibility when leaving the site.

It was noted that the Open Spaces Team are often at the allotments for ongoing maintenance and minor issues and that the railway station planters had been replanted in May with red, white and blue flowers to celebrate the jubilee, which had received a positive response.

Members thanked the Operations Manager for his report. It was noted that trees on a private property on the River Walk had been burnt and there was concern that their poor condition would result in them falling onto the Town Council's land. It was **AGREED** that the office should send a letter to the property owner to clarify if any action is being taken.

It was noted that there were also dead trees on the River Walk near to a private property. These had previously been reviewed by a tree surgeon with no further action necessary and did not affect users. The trees have been retained for wildlife habitat and the property owner informed but will be periodically monitored.

16. CONSIDERATION OF WRITTEN REPRESENTATION

It was noted that the request received was an extremely common one that Members and the office receive on a regular basis, but that Members felt no action was required as they were satisfied with the balance on the River Walk currently and that the management plan is being adhered to.

The Operations Manager commented that the stinging nettles also help to minimise the levels of erosion on the river banks, as currently the areas that allow access to the river were showing signs of this.

Members **AGREED** that a stock answer should be created from the information on page 22 of the River Walk Management Plan, to provide a consistent reply to enquiries.

17. REVIEW OF THE RIVER WALK MANAGEMENT PLAN

It was noted that this item was in accordance with page 29 of the River Walk Management Plan, which informs of the duty to review the plan, so that Members have the opportunity to comment and check its progress.

Members discussed how the biodiversity was being monitored and how it would be recorded that biodiversity had increased during the period of the River Walk Management Plan.

It was **AGREED** that a biodiversity survey of the River Walk should be performed by 2025 and in 2030 to monitor progress, and that the Operations Team should also record any changes they notice.

It was also **AGREED** that it should be considered whether a list of nature sightings on the River Walk could be displayed in the Information Centre.

18. WILDFLOWER PLANTING IN CLOSED CHURCHYARD

The Operations Manager informed Members that they would be replanting a wildflower section again. It was noted that Yellow Rattle seeds would be planted in the Autumn and plug plants and further Yellow Rattle seeds would be planted in the Spring. The area would be fully managed to increase the chance of success.

19. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Members were asked whether they would like to speak at a Witham & Countryside Society meeting about the Council's open spaces. Cllr S. Hicks confirmed he would be available to do this.

Members were informed that the Tree Preservation Order request for the remaining trees at the Gimsons site had been declined by the Braintree District Council Landscape department.

It was noted that the Essex Wildlife Trust were running a rewilding initiative that offered site visits, training and resources, but it was **AGREED** that no Witham Town Council managed areas required help from this project currently as Members were happy with the balance held.

20. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the group will be Tuesday 6th December 2022.

Meeting concluded at 3.05pm

HA/SS/12.09.2022

Signed by Chairman