



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

OPEN SPACES MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE

AGENDA

TUESDAY 5TH SEPTEMBER 2023, 2:00PM

MEMBERS:	Councillors	B. Fleet (Chairman)	OFFICERS:	H. Andrews
		S. Ager		S. Puckey
		P. Barlow		S. Dyer
		P. Heath		
		T. Hewitt		
		R. Ramage		

CO-OPTEEES:	S. Black	-	(Witham & Countryside Society)
	S. Brailey	-	(Witham Tree Group)
	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) CO-OPTION

To approve the co-option of Mr John Goodman onto the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee.

4) MINUTES

To receive the minutes of the meeting of the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee held on Tuesday 30th May 2023 attached at pages 3 to 6.

5) 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.

6) CONSIDERATION OF WRITTEN REPRESENTATIONS

To consider any written representations received by the Council.

7) CLERK'S REPORT

To receive the Clerk's Report attached at page 7.

8) 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.

9) RIVER WATER POLLUTION

To receive a report, attached at page 8.

10) DUCKPOND ENHANCEMENTS

To receive a report, attached at pages 9 to 13.

11) RIVER WALK LAND BY LIDL

To receive a report, attached at pages 14 to 15.

12) DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

To note that the date of the next Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee meeting will be held on Tuesday 5th December 2023 at 2pm.



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

MINUTES

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

Date: **30th May 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)
		P.	Shuttleworth	(Local Wildlife Interests)
	Officers	H	Andrews	(Deputy Town Clerk)
		S	Dyer	(Operations Manager)
		S	Puckey	(Open Spaces Administrative Assistant)
	Member of the Public		John Goodman	

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from J Palombi.

2. **APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN**

It was **AGREED** that Cllr Barry Fleet be appointed Chairman.

3. **APPOINTMENT OF VICE- CHAIRMAN**

It was **AGREED** that Cllr Susan Ager be appointed Vice-Chairman.

4. **INTERESTS**

No interests were declared.

5. **MINUTES**

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

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

There were no questions.

7. **CONSIDERATION OF WRITTEN REPRESENTATIONS**

No written representations were received.

8. **CLERK'S REPORT**

The Clerk's report was received by Members. Members were further informed that the new line markings on the River Walk were now complete and awaiting an official audit by the Town Council. It was noted that some members of the public felt that the cycle markings on the path approaching both sides of River View Bridge by Gimsons were misleading as cycling is not permitted over the bridge.

The Deputy Town Clerk advised Members that enquiries are still ongoing with Braintree District Council regarding responsibility for the land by Lidl and Churchills. This will be on the agenda for the next meeting,

Members **AGREED** to receive the report.

9. **OPERATION MANAGER'S REPORT**

The Operations Manager provided a verbal update. Grass cutting was being carried out as per the River Walk management schedule and parts of the river had been cleared of debris ready for the Duck Race in July. A new culvert fence and noticeboard had been installed by the Duck Pond and 3 new trees had been planted on the River Walk. Additionally, the team had installed the new Listening Bench on Guithavon Green to replace the vandalised version.

At James Cooke Wood, the team have been removing dead and diseased trees over the winter period, as recommended by the Forestry Commission report. This work has allowed light to penetrate the canopy, improved overall tree health and successfully created greater bio-diversity on the forest floor. Members were informed that a couple of schools were known to use the wood as well as regular dog walkers.

At Whetmead, the team are keeping the paths clear and carrying out any remedial work. In addition, the parking bays have been clearly marked and the new North Steps have just been completed.

At the Closed Churchyard, the team have undertaken general maintenance. The Members were informed that ivy was gradually being cleared from previously covered graves and that the wildflower plugs had been planted and were so far doing well.

Routine maintenance was continuing at the allotments and summer station planting was expected to begin in the next fortnight.

Members **RECOMMENDED** that an event be held to mark the 30-year anniversary of the creation of James Cooke Wood either in the autumn or next year.

It was noted by Members that the pathway from Tithe Close to Powers Hall End was broken up and covered in weeds. It was believed that this was the responsibility of Essex Highways but it was **AGREED** that this would be looked into.

10. A12 WIDENING SCHEME AND WHETMEAD

The Deputy Town Clerk updated Members on the land offered and accepted as a replacement to that taken by the A12 widening scheme.

Members were informed that the Statement of Common Ground was likely to be signed that evening and that the current proposal was for work to begin in 2024 through to 2027. Members were advised that Whetmead will be closed to the public during most of this work. Members **RECOMMENDED** putting a plan in place to mark the re-opening of the nature reserve, following completion of the work.

Concern was raised about public footpath closures throughout the duration of work, and how these might be advertised. Members were assured that there would be regular forums ongoing throughout work to raise concerns of this nature.

Members **AGREED** to receive the information.

11. RIVER WATER POLLUTION

Members discussed potential pollution levels in the River Brain and Blackwater and that, given the current national scandal surrounding river pollution, it might be advisable to investigate the situation in our own rivers. Members were informed that the Environment Agency undertake regular monitoring and it was **AGREED** that they would be contacted in the first instance for information.

12. TREE MANAGEMENT ON THE RIVER WALK

Members were concerned that several Willow trees had been felled as part of the Tree Management Programme and that, given the relatively short life of Willows, and the number of mature trees in our stock, it was likely that more would be felled in the next few years. Consequently, it was **RECOMMENDED** that the planting of young Willow trees be included in the River Walk Maintenance Schedule next winter.

13. WHETMEAD SECTION 106 IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

Members **AGREED** to receive the information and further **AGREED** to feedback on the nature posts by the end of June.

14. DUCK POND ENHANCEMENTS

Following the success of Tiptree's pond enhancements, Members would like to consider introducing reeds into Witham's Duck Pond to improve biodiversity.

It was **AGREED** that this would be investigated further and recommended to Environment Committee for consideration.

15. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Members commented on the weeds on Newland Street, especially by the bus stop and were informed that this was the responsibility of Braintree District Council.

Members were concerned about rats in the River Brain by the Gauging Station but were informed that Braintree District Council regularly monitored the pond area location for vermin.

16. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Sub-Committee would be Tuesday 5th September 2023.

Meeting concluded at 3.05pm.

HA/SP/30.5.23

Signed by Chairman.....

Clerk's Report: Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee

To note:

- A successful Teddy Bear's Picnic event was held on River walk on 10th August 2023.
- The tree planting recommendation has been approved by Environment Committee. £1k will be spent on River Walk tree planting over the 2023/2024 winter planting season.
- Officers met a representative from Essex Wildlife Trust with regards to joining EWT Wilder Towns project. From this, further support and training will be provided to the Town Council on any future projects.
- A wildlife watcher scheme was launched by the Town Council for children over the summer holiday period. The scheme was reported online by the Braintree & Witham Times and the Information Centre Manager was also interviewed on BBC Radio Essex on 31st July 2023 about it. A nature spotting board can now be found in the Information Centre, the idea for which originated from the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee.
- Some metal detecting is due to take place on the River Walk in relation to historical Bath Houses located near Chippingdell and Armond Road. The results will be shared with the Town Council.

Advice:

To receive and note.

Officer Report: River Brain water quality

Issue:

At the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee meeting of 30th May 2023, river water pollution was discussed and it was agreed that Environment Agency would be contacted for information about the water quality of the River Brain and Blackwater in Witham.

An initial enquiry was made with the Environment Agency who have provided details of how to access water quality data as follows -

- There is a water quality monitoring sonde in the River Brian at Black Notley (about 5.5km upstream of Witham) measuring temperature, pH, turbidity, conductivity, ammonium and dissolved oxygen.
- The catchment data explorer: [Blackwater Operational Catchment | Catchment Data Explorer](#)
- Anglian Water recently added this map to their website showing where storm overflows are located and data about how often they spilled in 2022: [What we're doing to improve your local rivers & coastline \(anglianwater.co.uk\)](#)
- Storm overflow event duration monitoring data can be downloaded at: [Storm overflows \(anglianwater.co.uk\)](#)

Further enquiries have been made to interpret the data provided.

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. As the Council has also formed a Climate Change Working Group, this should also be considered –

- (a) Biodiversity –no negative impact
- (b) Crime and disorder – no impact
- (c) Climate – no negative impact

Advice:

- To receive and note.

Officer Report: Duck Pond Enhancements

Issue:

Officers have started research into enhancing the River Walk Duck Pond by introducing reeds and creating further habitat to the water.

Darren Tansley, Essex Wildlife Trust's Wilder Rivers & Protected Species Manager, visited the River Walk on 27th June 2023 to give some advice. He has provided the following guide showing how a similar project was completed on an ex fishing lake on the River Colne where water filtering and habitat was added to the water body.

Further enquiries are currently being made to establish the feasibility of such a project. Initial costs are suggested to start at £15k so further research is taking place into whether there would be funding available for this project. A recommendation could then be made to Environment Committee in due course.

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. As the Council has also formed a Climate Change Working Group, this should also be considered –

- (a) Biodiversity – if approved, this project will increase the biodiversity of the pond.
- (b) Crime and disorder – no impact.
- (c) Climate – if approved, further plants would be introduced to the pond which will aid with reducing carbon emissions.

Advice:

- To receive and note

Biohaven installation process

The substrate mats can be designed to any shape, free floating or tethered together. First the soil is compacted into the holes and across the top of each island component.





Pre-planted coir mats are then cut to size and placed on top of the substrate and soil. They are pegged into place with large metal staples.



Anchors of netted rocks are then tied to loops run through the substrate mat. The ropes anchoring the islands are cut to the length required, ensuring enough slack to account for natural rises in water level.





The completed island is tipped into the water off a tarpaulin, then rowed out to the installation location with the rock anchors on top. The anchors are then slid off the island and dropped into position. The floatation of the island is checked then the next section collected.





The finished islands in place. Beneath the islands a hanging network of roots, rhizomes and attached biofilm is formed. This provides a huge active surface area for biochemical processes and physical processes (filtering and entrapment) to occur.

The floating islands on this lake provide the only dry habitat on the open water in an otherwise deep water environment. This is useful for plants, birds, inverts and provides shelter for small fish.



Officer Report: River Walk land by Lidl and Churchills

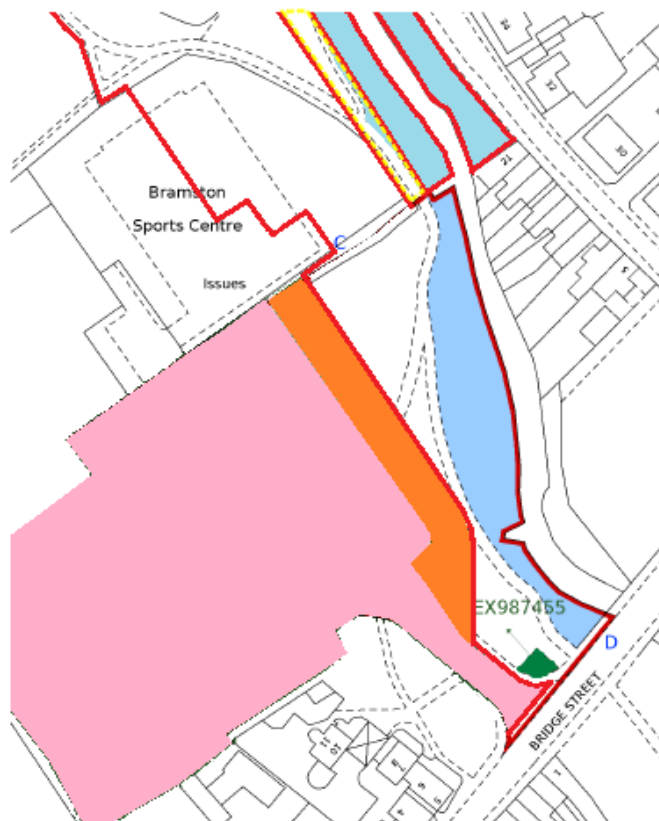
Issue:

There have been ongoing enquiries regarding the ownership and maintenance responsibilities of River Walk land by Lidl and Churchill. Following liaison with Braintree District Council a map of ownership has now been prepared as follows -

Land ownership north of Bridge Street, Witham

Drawn 01.08.2023 pending completion of registration of freehold transfer to Witham Town Council to enable BDC and WTC to ensure appropriate maintenance arrangements are in place.

Please note that the river itself is unregistered



KEY

Land edged red (excluding land tinted green and blue) = BDC

Land tinted blue (based on leasehold title plans) = WTC

Land tinted green = Lidl

Land tinted pink = Lidl

Land tinted orange (plus old Bramston site to north west) = Churchill

Land edged yellow (dashed line) = unregistered

Braintree District Council have updated their maintenance records are responsible for the section on the left side of the footpath running from Bridge Street to the back of Maltings Academy. Further discussions are taking place regarding the future landscaping of this section of land and if there is any funding available for improvements.

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. As the Council has also formed a Climate Change Working Group, this should also be considered –

- (a) Biodiversity – no impact
- (b) Crime and disorder – no impact
- (c) Climate – no impact

Advice:

- To receive and note

HA/30.8.2023