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MINUTES

Meeting of: **Environment Committee**

Date: **Monday, 24th July 2023**

Place: **Town Hall, 61 Newland Street, Witham.**

Present: Councillors

S.	Ager	(Chairman)
J.C.	Coleman	(Vice Chairman)
E.	Adelaja	
J.M.	Coleman	
L.	Headley	
J.	Martin	
R.	Ramage	
A.	Sloma	
B.	Taylor	

Also in attendance: Cllr. P. Barlow

S.	Brailey	(Witham Tree Group)
A.	Waight	(Witham Tree Group)
H.	Andrews	(Deputy Town Clerk)
G.	Kennedy	(Committee Clerk)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received and approved from Councillor Fleet.

RESOLVED That the apologies be received and approved.

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Environment Committee held 3rd April 2023 be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

3. INTERESTS

Councillor J.C. Coleman declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute 6 – Town Clerk’s Report, as he had signed up to be a volunteer on the Salt Bag Partnership Scheme.

4. QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

There were no members of the press and public present.

The Chairman suggested that Item 12 on the Agenda be brought forward.

5. WITHAM TREE GROUP

(a) Report to Town Council

A report was received from Witham Tree Group covering their activities for the 2022 – 2023 season.

Allan Waight, Deputy Chairman of the Witham Tree Group, referred Members to his report and the financial assistance that had been received from Essex County Council towards planting. With the success of this scheme the Tree Group looked likely to receive additional funding this year. He said that there was a lot of work for the group to undertake and in answer to a question he explained that each tree after planting would receive 20 litres of water each week between April to September to ensure that they survive the dry summer months. He added that last year only two trees failed, out of the 70 planted, probably because of soil conditions.

Members were all appreciative of the work undertaken by the Tree Group and suggested that in a future edition of the Voice a plea for volunteers could be made.

RESOLVED That the report be received and noted.

(b) Tree Group Minutes

The Tree Group minutes for the meetings held April, May, June and July 2023 were received.

RESOLVED That the Tree Group minutes be received and noted.

6. CLERK’S REPORT

Councillor J.C. Coleman had declared an interest.

The Clerk’s Report on matters arising was received.

She explained that the Town Council had signed up to Essex Highways’ Salt Bag Partnership Scheme. Forty bags of salt would be delivered to the Town Hall and then distributed to volunteers for use in icy conditions.

RESOLVED That the report be received and noted.

7. COMMITTEE INCOME AND EXPENDITURE REPORT

The income and expenditure report for the periods 1st April 2023 to 31st May 2023 and an exception report were received.

The Deputy Town Clerk explained that an exception report had been added which explained why it would appear that there had been an over-spend on the budget.

RESOLVED That the reports be received and noted.

8. HIRE OF OPEN SPACES POLICY

Members were asked to review the Hire of Open Spaces Policy.

RESOLVED That the Hire of Open Spaces Policy be received and agreed.

9. COMMEMORATIVE ITEMS ON WITHAM TOWN COUNCIL OPEN SPACES POLICY

Members were asked to review the Commemorative Items on Witham Town Council Open Spaces Policy.

RESOLVED That the Commemorative Items on Witham Town Council Open Spaces Policy be received and agreed.

10. SNOW CLEARANCE POLICY

Members were asked to review the Snow Clearance Policy.

The Deputy Town Clerk suggested that in view of being part of the Salt Bag Scheme the wording in relation to clearing the front of the Town Hall should be amended.

RESOLVED That the Snow Clearance Policy be received and agreed with an amendment at paragraph 3, that the following should be deleted ‘and any snow clearance should be left to them. Witham Town Council’s Operations Team will clear, salt and grit’ and the following inserted ‘However, as a member of the Essex Highways Salt Bag Partnership, the Witham Town Council’s Operations Team will clear the public pavement outside the Town Hall as well as’.

11. OPEN SPACES MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE

The Minutes from the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee Meeting held 30th May 2023 were received.

Comment was made that the nettles growing close to the paths on the River Walk were dangerous to children and it was asked that consideration be given for the nettles to be cut back to provide a little wider pathway. This suggestion would be referred back to the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee.

RESOLVED That the Minutes be received and noted.

12. TREE MANAGEMENT REPORT

A recommendation report from the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee was received.

Members congratulated the Open Spaces Operatives on the work they had undertaken.

RESOLVED That the report be received and £1,000 from the tree maintenance budget be used for tree planting on the River Walk.

13. WITHAM IN BLOOM

A report regarding town centre floral displays was received and Members asked to consider re-instating Witham in Bloom.

Members remembered the hard work that had been undertaken by the Witham in Bloom Group to make the town attractive and to involve the community. It was agreed that the biggest problem would be in attracting volunteers and that the Town Council would need to give support in setting up the group. It was agreed that a re-launch of the group would benefit the community and the environment.

RESOLVED That the report be received and the Town Council promote the re-instatement of an independent Witham in Bloom group.

14. PARISH PATHS PARTNERSHIP REPORT

Members were asked to consider a report on Essex Highway's Parish Paths Partnership.

The Deputy Town Clerk explained that the Town Council had been part of the Essex County Council trial Devolution Scheme but because of constraints had been unable to spend all of the grant provided. Now the trial had finished it had been suggested that, as the Town Council could not continue to undertake the devolution work, consideration should be given to be part of the Parish Paths Partnership Scheme. This would mean that on Public Rights of Way vegetation could be cut back and signage improved using remaining grant funds. Members were asked if they could undertake to walk the Public Rights of Way on their Wards and report back any areas which needed work.

RESOLVED That the report be received and Members assess each Public Rights of Way in their Ward and report back to Officers of any work required.

15. CLIMATE ACTION PLAN

Members were asked to consider and approve the Climate Action Plan recommendation from the Climate Change Working Group.

The Chairman advised that the Climate Change Working Group had not yet met this civic year so the recommendations were from the previous administration.

RESOLVED That the Climate Action Plan recommendation be received and accepted.

16. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED That under the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960, the press and public be excluded from the Meeting for the consideration of the remaining items of business on the grounds they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information falling within Schedule 12A (S3) of the Local Government Act 1972.

17. SECTION 106 AGREEMENT – WHETMEAD NATURE RESERVE

A report was received giving costings for proposed projects on Whetmead Nature Reserve funded through a Section 106 Agreement.

The Deputy Town Clerk explained that the Section 106 funds had to be used by the end of October. The bulk of the money had been used to provide improved steps down to the River Blackwater and for a notice board. She explained that it was proposed to make a nature trail around the reserve and use interpretation posts. The remaining money could be used for another interpretation board and planting to enhance natural habitats.

Members discussed the options available and the suggestion was made that QR codes could also be used on the posts.

RESOLVED That the report be received and information noted.

RESOLVED That fifteen interpretation posts from Nature Sign Design be agreed at a cost of £6,735.

RESOLVED That an interpretation sign, for siting at the confluence of the rivers, from Nature Sign Design be agreed at a cost of £1,550.

RESOLVED That the quotation from Highfields Nursery be accepted at a cost of £819.70.

There being no further business the Chairman closed the Meeting at 8.58 p.m.

Councillor S. Ager
Chairman

HA/GK/26.7.2023