



**OPEN SPACES MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY 12TH FEBRUARY 2020 AT 3:00PM**

AGENDA

MEMBERS: Councillors -	J.C.	Goodman (Chairman)		
	S.E.	Hicks		
	Miss C.	Jay		
	T.	Pleasance		
	Mrs S.C.	Lager		
	R.P.	Ramage		
	S.	Brailey	-	Witham Tree Group
	J.	Casement	-	Witham Wombles
	A.	Chick	-	Witham Rotary Club
	B.	Fleet	-	Tree Warden
	N.	Lodge	-	Environment Agency
J.	Palombi	-	CPRE	
L.	Ralph	-	Environment Agency	
P.	Shuttleworth	-	Local Wildlife Interests	
D.	Smith	-	Local Wildlife Interests	
A.	Watts	-	Wild About Witham	
B.	Wilmer	-	Witham & Countryside Society	
OFFICERS:	J.P	Sheehy	-	Town Clerk
	Mrs H.	Andrews	-	Assistant Proper Officer
	S.P.	Dyer	-	Operations Manager

1. APOLOGIES

To receive any apologies for absence

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

To receive any declarations of interest

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD 9TH OCTOBER 2019

To receive the minutes of the previous meeting for comments and observations
[\(attached\)](#)

4. 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.

5. CONSIDERATIONS OF WRITTEN REPRESENTATIONS

To consider any written representations received by the Council

6. 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.

7. CLERK'S REPORT

To receive the Clerk's report ([attached](#))

8. RIVER WALK

To consider any items and/or new proposals from members relating to the River Walk

9. WHETMEAD NATURE RESERVE

To consider any items and/or new proposals from members relating to Whetmead Nature Reserve

10. JAMES COOKE WOODS

To consider any items and/or new proposals from members relating to James Cooke Woods and in conjunction with the report ([attached](#))

11. CLOSED CHURCHYARD

To consider any items and/or new proposals from members relating to the Closed Churchyard

12. NEW RIVER WALK MANAGEMENT PLAN

To receive the first draft of the new River Walk Management Plan for consideration by members

13. FUTURE PLANS FOR HELEN COURT/MALDON ROAD AREA OF THE RIVER WALK

To consider the future plans of the area of the River Walk by Helen Court, close to Maldon Road which has been set aside as a wildflower section.

14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

To raise enquiries or any other agenda items to be handled by next meeting of the committee.

15. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

To note that the next meeting of the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee will be held on Wednesday 15th April 2020 at 3pm



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

MINUTES

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

Date: **9th October 2019**

Present:

Councillors	J.C.	Goodman	(Chairman)
Miss	C.	Jay	
	S.E.	Hicks	
Mrs	S.C.	Lager	
	R.P	Ramage	
	S	Brailey	(Witham Tree Group)
	J	Casement	(Witham Wombles)
	A	Chick	(Witham Rotary Club)
	B	Fleet	(Tree Warden)
	J	Palombi	(CPRE)
	P	Shuttleworth	(Local Wildlife interests)
	D	Smith	(Local Wildlife interests)
	J.P	Sheehy	(Town Clerk)
	S	Dyer	(Operations Manager)

24. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

25. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations received.

26. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD 19TH JUNE 2019

Minutes from the previous meeting were agreed and subsequently signed by the chairman.

27. QUESTIONS & STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

No members of the public present.

28. CONSIDERATIONS OF WRITTEN REPRESENTATIONS

No written representations had been received.

29. OPERATIONS MANAGER'S REPORT

A verbal report was given by the Operations Manager. He advised that following the addition of a 4th member of staff in the Operations Team, greater capacity was slowly being realised as a programme of cross training is implemented.

30. CLERK'S REPORT

Members received the clerk's report, noting that a first draft of the new River Walk Management Plan had been discussed and reviewed by the selected panel of Members and will return to a future meeting of the committee for in-depth analysis. Additional details concerning river clearance work being conducted by the Environment Agency were also received and a final update concerning an installation of knee railing at Saxon Drive.

31. FUTURE PLANS FOR HELEN COURT/MALDON ROAD AREA OF THE RIVER WALK

Members considered immediate future plans for this section of the River Walk. After debate, it was considered that a robust future plan for this area should be set out within the new River Walk Management Plan with consideration to be given to improving signage in the area and consideration of options open to the Council to improve and encourage a wildflower meadow in this area.

It was **AGREED** that the Operations Team would perform a single cut to this area in recognition that as part of the original management proposals of the wildflower meadow, an annual cut to stimulate and encourage growth should take place. The site would then be left alone until further consideration for a more robust management arrangement as part of the new management plans.

32. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

A query was raised concerning the grant of consent for the Lidl site adjacent to the River Walk to ensure that development was not encroaching on the River Walk in any way¹

33. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The time and date of the next meeting was confirmed as **Wednesday 4th December 2019 at 3.00pm.**

There being no further business, the Chairman closed the meeting at 4.01pm

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Councillor J Goodman
Chairman

JS/25.11.2019

¹ Development proposals have been examined against the Town Council's title deeds of the River Walk, confirming development is within the correct boundaries and does not encroach on the River Walk.

Clerk's Report: Open Spaces Management Sub-committee

To note the following –

Standing items on agenda

Future agendas of the Open Spaces Management Sub-committee will have standing items for each Council managed open space site – River Walk, Whetmead Nature Reserve, James Cooke Wood and the Closed Churchyard. This will give members the opportunity to discuss any issues with any of the sites and to put forward proposals for future management.

River Walk Tree work 2019/2020

To note the tree maintenance is currently ongoing on the River Walk from Armond Road to Maldon Road. The final part of the 3-year tree maintenance schedule is due to take place in the next financial year.

James Cooke Wood

To note that at the Town Council meeting of 13th January 2020, members discussed the possibility of selling James Cooke Woods. It was resolved not to sell the woods but for members to now consider the management of the woods and how best to utilise it. Members to consider this at item 10 of the agenda in conjunction with Councillor Pleasance's report with suggestions for making improvements and better use of James Cooke Woods.

Whetmead

To note that the installation of the new 'V' shaped gate at the entrance of Whetmead has not deterred off-road motorised bikes from accessing the site. They are now gaining access via the adjacent field and across the concrete bridge. After speaking with the landowner, a quote is currently being obtained to install another gate by the bridge to the field.

HA/04.02.2020

Advice:

To note.

James Cooke Wood Debate

The future of James Cooke Wood the last administration 2015-18. A proposal was debated to sell the wood and use the money on other projects to benefit the Witham Community. The proposal was voted against, and the wood was retained.

Discussions developed among Councillors on how WTC could best use this facility some were forthcoming but not of great substance. However, one was attentively agreed, to try and tidy up and thin out the trees to allow the light to penetrant allowing the flora and fora to grow through making it visually more attractive. To make a start the Open Spaces Team were asked to consider winter working schedule, how much was achieved is yet unknown. A consideration was also given to obtain a quote from a contractor to complete the project in a short time with no particular outcome.

With the new administration consisting of newly voted in Councillors, this subject of putting the wood on the market was represented to the Environment Committee 11th November 2019, there was quite a reaction against this proposal prior to the meeting, therefore an agreement was reached to put it to the next full Council meeting to come to a decision, I believe it unlikely that the proposal will carry favour and be defeated.

James Cooke Wood being retained, WTC must choose to apply funds to make it viable and attractive green space to be used by all.

Options of Maintenance

1. To use the Open Spaces Team, now that grass cutting is at a minimal, and maximise the resource's 3 days a week through the Winter months (Jan-Mar) onto applying their tree cutting skills and concentrate on thinning out the trees, the trunks could be stored and sold off for logs, with the popularity for residential log burners.

With the amount of acreage, density and the heavy work involved this would probably take the estimated time of delivery, 2-4 years with regular maintenance of light groundwork throughout the seasons

2. To obtain quotations from forestry contractors to carry out the necessary work to as above.
 - (a) The excess wood could offset part of the cost if the contractor purchased and cleared the site,
 - (b) WTC stored and sold off for logs, for residential log burners. The cost could be considerable; however, the initial project would be completed and allow WTC to further the use of the space.

3. Writtle University College

The College has 3 courses Arboriculture, Machinery Use & Maintenance and Horticulture & Landscaping which could be of interest in maintaining James Cooke Wood.

It is worth contacting the college to offer the wood as a training resource, the courses mentioned cover all that needs to be done to open up the wood.

Thereafter, WTC and the College could consider enter into a partnership to maintain the wood as a training facility throughout the seasons. An Information board could be erected advertising the College and its work with WTC including the history and current maintenance plan. If this could be achieved the future of the wood would secure with very little cost.

Accessibility

This is only by road and a considerable distance from Witham Community, there is no path or cycleway, therefore to make use of the green area a car is essential.

The Blackwater trail runs close by but the trackway directly stops a few metres from the Maldon - Wickham Bishops junction, the trail continues via a footpath through Benton Hall

Golf Club and meets the Blackwater River further up the rail track is picked up at the wooden viaduct bridge.

The original rail track runs directly across from the Maldon - Wickham Bishops junction, this can be seen as a linear hedge row running along the west boundary of the Golf Club and East boundary of Oliver's Nursery and continues to meet up with the track which is the access to Oliver's Lakes.

The suggestion is that along the hedge row mentioned a strip of land be purchased to continue the Blackwater Trail to meet up with the lake track. This would be made into a footpath/ cycleway making it a safer way to access the wood and attracting the community in do so. There could be some scope to approach Oliver's Nursery as they seem to be including in their site child activities and have a café, we could provide a link to these!

Activities

1. Create a small natural classroom of log benches to hold school holiday displays, hawks, owls and others and audience participation activities building structures of different woodland material.
2. Small overnight camp area and fire pit for local youth organisations (Scouts, Guides Cubs Brownies, Beavers etc.) (WC needed).
3. Create a low rope walkway involving log walks, log stepping stones, rope swing plank, monkey bars etc.
4. Create a discovery wildlife pond
5. Nature trail with woodland carvings to find
6. Nature trail completion, Q sheet to be collected from Info Centre and returned on completion to be awarded pre-printed certificate and badge. This could also be taken on site in the school holidays involving Councillors on select day/time.
7. Summer sand pit

Facilities

1. Selected periods of the year a mobile kiosk for beverages, food and ice cream etc.
2. Mobile WC kiosks from May until September
3. Emergency contact telephone numbers
4. Part-time Ranger May- September
5. Car parking
6. Dog bins
7. CCTV as used by ECC on fly-tipping sites, on selected areas.

Summary

This paper is merely a signpost to what possibly could be achieved on the site even impart, others may have other visions.

When it was first commissioned the site was designated as, Witham's Community Wood, WTC has a commitment to make it so, it has been neglected for far too long and we need no honourer what was first envisaged in 1994/95.

Within this administration we need put a 3-year plan together and apply a reasonable budget to achieve the desired outcome. But there is no doubt there is much that could be done to improve the wood/ green space.

Councillor Tom Pleasance

Tom Pleasance

Environment Committee Chairman

30/12/19