

WITHAM LOCAL COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: 26th February 2008

Time of Meeting: 7:15pm – 10:15pm

Venue: Public Hall, Collingwood Road, Witham

Local Chairman: Cllr T J W Foster

Contact Point for further information: David Triggs, Locality Co-Ordinator

Membership Present:

Councillor J E Abbott	Yes	Councillor Mrs S A Howell	Yes
Councillor Ms L Barlow	Yes	Councillor P J Hughes	Yes
Councillor D L Bebb	Yes	Councillor M C M Lager	Apologies
Councillor K E Bigden	Apologies	Councillor S J Lambourne	No
Councillor J G J Elliott	Yes (from item 1.6)	Councillor A M Meyer	Yes
Councillor Dr R L Evans	Apologies	Councillor R G S Mitchell	Yes
Councillor T J W Foster	Yes	Councillor Mrs J M Money	Yes
Councillor Mrs M E Galione	Yes	Councillor R Ramage	Yes
Councillor J E B Gyford	Yes	Councillor W Rose	Yes

Also Present:

Sam Miller	Witham Youth Council
Liz Stirrat	Essex County Council TASC Manager for Witham
Stuart Kay	Planning Consultant, Braintree District Council
Simon Taylor	Street Facilities Manager, Braintree District Council
Alan Massow	Senior Policy Planner, Braintree District Council
Karen Fielder	Field Officer, Essex County Council
Eleanor Dash	Planning Policy Manager, Braintree District Council
Juliet Strathern	Planning Policy, Braintree District Council
Tim Lucas	Housing Research & Development Manager, BDC
Jenny Claydon	Landscape Architect & Project Manager, Braintree District Council
Nick Day	Parks and Open Spaces Manager, Environmental Services, BDC
Paul Munson	Deputy Director District Development, Braintree District Council
Sharon Lowe	Head of Law & Governance, Braintree District Council
David Triggs	Locality Coordinator, Braintree District Council
Melanie Ward	Locality Support Officer, Braintree District Council

Representatives of the Witham Local Community also in attendance: -

Representative	Address / Representing
John Palombi	Witham and Countryside Society
Tony Stote	Sycamore Close Resident
Barry Fleet	Witham Town Council
Barry Keeble	Witham Park Trustees
Nick Ezra	Kelvedon Parish Council

Additional attendees: -

P. Northfield - Witham Voice, Ian Cass – Federation of Small Business, J. Wilson – Witham Park Trustees, J. Hodgkin – Witham Rotary, Brian Simpson, Graham & Linda Orr, B. McPhesson, Ann Anderson – Terling & Fairstead Parish Council, E Willsher, B Rice, P Ward, J & P Richmond, Rod Bray, John Perfect – Essex Chronicle, Ryan McCarthy – Witham & Braintree Times.

1.2 Declarations of Interest

- Councillor John Gyford declared a personal interest in items 2.3 (the Newland Street Conservation Area Appraisal) and 2.7 (the Witham Public Park) as his wife had provided background historical information on both of these projects.
- Councillors James Abbott and Mrs Margaret Galione declared a personal interest in any matters that may arise concerning the Witham & District Countryside Society, as they are members of the Society.
- Councillor Lucy Barlow declared a personal interest in item 1.5 concerning the Witham Skateboard Project as she had been discussing the Skateboard Project with Sam Miller.

In accordance with the Code of Conduct all the above Councillors remained in the meeting during the discussion of the items referred to.

1.3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 10th January 2008 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to changing a yes to apologies against Councillor Mrs Margaret Galione's name to show that she did not attend the meeting.

1.4 Public Question Time

Members of the public were invited to address the Committee: -

(a) Denise Sullens Smith, Silver End South Tenants & Residents Assoc.

Ms Sullens Smith addressed the Committee via an email read out on her behalf.

The email related to item 2.2 of the agenda, parking on grass verges.

The Association had been fighting for 5 years to get environmental improvements within School Road/Valentine Way and the 3 Courts, all of which fall within a Conservation Area. The lack of rear access for parking had resulted in vehicles parking on the grass verges, which in turn had caused unsightly deep ruts, which were becoming a hazard. Parking enforcement had been rejected on the grounds that there were no alternative areas for residents to park. She suggested that grasscrete or a similar material be used to enable vehicles to park on the verges without churning them up, but still allow the greenswards to look and conform to Conservation Area guidelines and return the area to its "garden village" status?

Action: *That the Locality Coordinator respond to the email.*

(b) Tony Stote from Sycamore Close in Witham

Mr Stote highlighted the problems of vehicles parking on the grass verges in the Rickstones Road area of the Town. He felt that the parking was causing significant damage and the parking on a blind bend was causing a highway danger.

Response: The Locality Coordinator commented that this matter was linked to agenda item 2.2 and if appropriate this area could be listed as a potential hot spot.

(c) John Palombi of the Witham and Countryside Society.

Mr Palombi extended his congratulations to those responsible for putting forward the Draft Witham Town Centre Newland Street, Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan as set out in item 2.3 of the agenda. Mr Palombi supported the recommendations and asked that Councillors consider commissioning a survey of heavy goods vehicles in Chipping Hill as he believed that drivers were using this area as a short cut.

Action: *That the Roads & Traffic Action Group consider the request for a survey at its next meeting.*

(d) Barry Fleet, Witham Town Council

Mr Fleet wished to support the recommendations in agenda item 2.3 concerning the proposed extension to the Conservation Area. He felt this would help to retain the character of the Town.

1.5 Urgent Item – Little Elms Pre-School

Councillor John Gyford, Member for Witham North Ward, referred to the unexpected costs being incurred by Little Elms Pre-School following the closure of Rickstones Pavilion and its relocation to Spring Lodge Community Centre.

Councillor Gyford referred to the additional costs details of which had been provided by Little Elms Pre-School and a summary of which had been circulated at the meeting. The Pre-School had put forward a request for these additional costs totalling just over £1,500 to be met from the Witham Local Committee budget and Councillor Gyford commented that both Councillor Dr Evans and himself as the Ward Members supported this urgent request for funding.

Councillor Gyford requested that a position statement be given at the next Committee meeting on the future of Rickstones Pavilion and Forest Road Community Hall and implications for groups such as the Pre School using other facilities on a temporary/permanent basis. Councillor Jo Beavis, Cabinet Member for Community Support and Engagement advised the Committee that she was meeting with the Leader, representatives of the Pre-School and Spring Lodge Community Centre later in the week to discuss future plans and will submit a report to the Members in due course.

Decision:

1. That the funding of £1,575.43 be made to Little Elms Pre-School for additional costs incurred in its relocation to Spring Lodge.
2. That Councillor Jo Beavis be requested to present a position statement on the future funding/costing of the pre-school and the future of Rickstones Pavilion/Forest Road community Hall at the next meeting.

Action: The Locality Coordinator to seek a progress report on the above.

1.5 Witham Skateboard Project.

Sam Miller of the Witham Youth Council gave a presentation on a proposed extension to the Spa Road Skate Park.

The main aim for the project is to get enough funding for the addition of a “Key Hole Bowl” measuring 20m(L) x 10m(W) to enhance existing facilities and increase the use of equipment in the park. Ideas for fundraising have already been implemented with support coming from local schools and businesses to be used as venues for some of the planned events. The cost of the installing the “Bowl” is £80,000, but they are looking for funding up to £110,000 to cover extras. The Witham Youth Council had allocated £500 as an indication of its support. Witham Town Council had agreed to fund £49,000 and suggested that an application be made for funding from Awards for All – leaving a shortfall of £21,000 which it was hoped could be funded from the Local Committee budget. The Council’s Street Scene department had been consulted and had raised no objections to the proposed extension.

The Committee wished to extend its thanks to Sam Miller for his proposal and for acting as an excellent ambassador for the Youth Council.

The Committee wished to give its support to the proposal for a start to be made on the project, but wanted to make it clear that their support was as a landowner and any planning permission required would still need to be requested through the normal planning process as this was not part of the Local Committee's remit.

Decision:

1. That the Committee’s support be given for the Skateboard Project to move ahead to include permission from the Council as landowner.
NB: Members underlined that planning advice including an application for planning permission was still required from the District Council.
2. That a request for funding be made and considered at the next meeting of the Committee once an application for planning permission has been made.

1.6 Team Around the School Child and Community (TASCC).

Liz Stirrat, Essex County Council TASCC Manager for Witham gave a presentation

TASCC will be working alongside 3 Children’s Centres coming to Witham, which will provide a drop in centre, for parents once up a running to run along side the parent help line. Other partnership links are via schools, practitioners and the PCT, Police Authorities and BDC. Rural areas are overseen by local delivery groups of Head Teachers in the school’s area. The Director of the Service under Essex County Council is responsible for the overall outcome of the interviewing process.

In discussing the presentation Members made reference to the complex linkages, which existed. Liz indicated that she was a member of the Local Delivery Group, which were central to the success of the TASCC.

In responding to a question from Sam Miller about how TASCC could help with the Skateboard Project, Liz felt that the key contacts would be the staff based at Parkside Youth Centre. She agreed to make contact with Councillor Barlow and Sam after the meeting.

Action: The Locality Coordinator to email Councillor Lucy Barlow’s details to Liz Stirrat to enable liaison over the Skateboard Project.

2 Local Decisions

2.1 Draft Green Spaces Strategy

Stuart Kay gave an outline of the Report on the Audit of Open Spaces within the Witham District.

The Witham Green Spaces Strategy (WGSS) aim is to provide accessible high quality green spaces and outdoor sports facilities, to raise their profile and to promote their benefit to the District. The draft Strategy makes recommendations for the provision and improvement of green spaces, and provides a basis for developing planning policies and proposals for improving the management and maintenance of green spaces.

The WGSS was mainly derived from household and user surveys. The mechanism for public consultation in rural areas came directly from Parish Councils, community organisations and local media. The report highlighted the relative shortfalls in green space provision when set against a standard for the Witham Area both in urban and rural locations.

In response to concerns about the provision within the new Maltings Lane development Paul Munson explained that on completion of the Section 106 agreement, now in its final stages, details would be presented to the Planning Committee where it would be addressed and the planned list of play areas implemented.

Councillor Bebb, Chairman of the Allotments Scrutiny Task Group put forward a proposal that the findings of the Allotments Group be considered as part of the Green Spaces Strategy. It was noted that these findings indicated a shortage of allotment land.

The Committee was informed that Draft Strategy would now be the subject of public consultation, following which, it would be considered by the Local Development Framework Panel. Members were therefore invited to send comments to the Planning Consultant before 11th March or to comment as part of the public consultation process.

Decision:

1. That the draft Braintree Green Spaces Strategy be endorsed for the purposes of public consultation.
2. That officers ensure that the outcomes and information obtained from the recent Allotment Study be linked to the Strategy.

2.2 Trial of Enforcing “No Parking” on Grass Verges

Simon Taylor, Street Facilities Manager gave a brief outline of his report on the potential for introducing and enforcing ‘no parking on the grass verge’ restrictions by introducing bye-laws to cover specific hot spots across the Witham Area

Councillor Abbott re-affirmed the comments and concerns expressed by Denise Sullens Smith in Public Question Time. He felt that the situation in Silver End could not be dealt with by way of a bye-law but needed a separate solution. The Locality Coordinator agreed to liaise with the Street Facilities Manager to set up a separate meeting to discuss these issues.

Decision:

1. That Members note the report.
2. That Members and the public directly contact Simon Taylor, Street Facilities Manager, to suggest hot-spot areas where it would be appropriate to introduce such a bye-law for a trial period.
3. That the Locality Coordinator set up a separate meeting to consider the parking problems in Silver End.

Action: The Locality Coordinator to set up a meeting to consider the parking problems in Silver End.

2.3 Witham Newland Street Conservation Area Appraisal

Alan Massow, Senior Policy Planner outlined proposals in his report, which set to recommend extending the Conservation Area boundaries in Newland Street, Witham along with details for a proposed management plan.

Councillor Abbott congratulated officers on an excellent report. He went on to request that point 1 of "Other recommendations" be extended to include the design, efficiency and environmental impact of street lighting.

Barry Keeble, of the Witham Park Trustees, referred to his representation, a copy of which had been circulated to all Councillors, in which he expressed concern as to the proposed inclusion of the Park in the extended Conservation Area and the impact that this would have in undertaking maintenance of the park and its trees. The Senior Policy Planner agreed to set up a meeting with one of the Council's Landscape Services Officers to discuss matters further.

Decision:

1. That the amendment to the Conservation Area boundary, as set out in the appraisal, be approved.
2. That the Appraisal and Management Plan be approved as a material planning consideration.
3. That further investigations be carried out on the scope for additional planning controls.
4. That point 1 under "Other recommendations" be amended to include the design, efficiency and environmental impact of street lighting.
5. That the Senior Policy Planner arranges a meeting with the Witham Park Trustees and the Council's Landscape Services Officer to discuss their concerns.

Action: Senior Policy Planner to set up a meeting on site with the Witham Park Trustees.

2.4 Improvements to the Blackwater Rail Trail

Eleanor Dash, Planning Policy Manager and Juliet Strathern, Planning Policy Officer outlined details of proposed improvements to the Blackwater Rail Trail from Blue Mills Hill to Constance Close, Witham to provide a cycle/pedestrian path.

Councillors expressed concern at the proposed width of the path, feeling that 3 metres for its whole length was unnecessary and this should be reduced to 2.5 metres. Concern was also expressed at the potential for motorised traffic using the path and members requested that adequate restrictions be put in place to limit access similar to those in place on the Flich Way in Braintree.

The Planning Policy Manager informed that Committee that the width was a minimum stipulated by Essex County Council under its guidance. Members were also advised that the surface would be compacted shingle and it would therefore fit in with the surrounding landscape.

Officers agreed to further clarify issues about the width with the view to reducing this if agreement could be reached with the County Council.

Decision:

That the construction of an unsegregated cycleway from Blue Mills to Constance Close in Witham be approved subject to: -

1. Adequate restrictions being installed to prevent access by motorised vehicle.
2. Further discussions with Essex County Council with the view to reducing the proposed 3 metre width cycle path.

Action: *The Planning Policy Manager to raise the above issues with Essex County Council.*

2.5 Proposed cycle/pedestrian link from Cypress Road to Cut Throat Lane

Eleanor Dash, Planning Policy Manager and Juliet Strathern, Planning Policy Officer outlined details of the proposed construction of a 3 metre wide segregated cycle/footpath from Cypress Road to Cut Throat Lane/Motts Lane with improved non-polluting lighting. This proposed link would provide direct access for pedestrians and cyclists.

Councillor Gyford asked for clarification of the proposed route of the path where it joins the Motts Lane junction as the desire line on the ground indicated a straighter route. He felt that traffic would not use the new route at this end. The Planning Policy Manager explained that the proposed junction with Motts Lane had been located here in order to maximise visibility at its exit onto the road at this point. She agreed to discuss this detail with the County Council's officers and if necessary to amend this section of the proposed path.

Decision: That the construction of a cycle/footpath with improved non-polluting lighting be approved subject to clarification of the route of the path where it meets the Motts Lane junction.

Action: The Planning Policy Manager to raise issues noted in the decision with Essex County Council.

2.6 Choice Based Lettings – Progress and Policy Changes.

Tim Lucas, Housing Research and Development Manager gave a brief outline of his report. He explained that to facilitate moving to Choice Based Lettings (CBL) all eight councils were in the process of changing their existing allocations policies to a common policy using a banding system based on housing need. In order to comply with recent Government Guidance, it had been agreed to include an additional band, which will provide a distinction between applicants with low housing need and those no housing need. Mr Lucas explained one or two further amendments including a change to enable a level of priority to be given to people returning to a village or living with parents in a village who currently had no priority. This would enable rural housing schemes to more easily consider local people for housing.

Decision:

1. That the consultation being undertaken on the Choice Based Lettings Draft Allocation Policy be noted.
2. That the changes to the current banding scheme be supported.
3. That the cross boundary mobility pilot scheme be approved.

2.7 Witham Public Park - Parks for People Programme.

Jenny Claydon, Landscape Architect & Project Manager presented a report to seek authority to finalise and present a Stage 1 bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund's 'Parks for People' programme for grant aid to restore and improve Witham Park. On completion of the restoration and improvement work, it will be a condition of the grant that the park is maintained to 'Green Flag' standards.

Mrs Claydon presented a revised recommendation to the Committee that included the provision of ongoing maintenance. Members discussed the provision of facilities to the park, including sufficient lighting (carefully designed to reduce light pollution to a minimum and probably limited to the path network) to allow the park to remain open to 10pm. Councillor Abbott expressed concern at the proposed provision of lighting whilst other Councillors accepted that some level of lighting was desirable but felt it should be appropriate and sustainable.

Decision:

1. That the submission of a Stage 1 bid for grant aid to the Heritage Lottery Fund's 'Parks for People' programme and maintain to 'Green Flag' standards be approved.
2. That it be a clear priority for any lighting used to be sustainable with a zero carbon impact.

3 Local Priorities**3.1 Action Plan**

The plan was noted.

3.2 Report from the Anti Social Behaviour Sub Group

Councillor Rose highlighted discussion points from the last meeting some of which had been discussed during the Skate Park presentation.

3.3 Report from the Roads and Traffic Action Group

Councillor Abbott highlighted the main points from the last meeting.

The Committee was then asked to consider recommendations that sought to address concerns about the different groups looking at car parking issues.

The Committee supported these recommendations.

Decision:

1. To note report.
2. That the terms of reference of the Witham Parking Group and its Membership be reviewed to ensure that;
 - (a) it looks at car parking issues across the Witham Area and not just in Witham Town (minute 39 of the Committee held on 6/11/07 refers);
 - (b) as far as possible meetings are attended by Councillor representatives from the Town and surrounding areas; and
 - (c) the Group reports back to the Witham Local Committee.

4.1 Local Committee Budgets

Sharon Lowe, Head of Law and Governance presented a report setting out proposed application guidelines for grants and a suggested structure on decision making for Local Committees to manage their budgets. This highlighted how the local Ward Member can support proposals and work with the community. It was agreed that the scheme should take effect from the 1st April 2008, and that both capital and revenue bids can be considered for funding.

The Committee welcomed the framework and guidance for bids and requested that a running total of the budget be issued after every meeting.

Decision: The Committee approved the framework and guidance for implementation with effect from the 1st April 2008.

4.2 Witham Sewage Works - February 2008.

The Committee received and noted a report from the Environmental Health Officer concerning the successful action taken in response to complaints about odour emanating from the Sewage Treatment Works.

Members thanked the officer and Councillor Michael Lager for their hard work in resolving the problems and noted that the Environmental Health officers would continue to monitor the situation.

Decision: To note the report.

5 Future Items

The Committee noted the list of items for the next meeting and agreed that the following issues had now been added:

- An update on Rickstone's Pavilion.
- A follow up on the invitation for the PCT to attend a future meeting.

T J W FOSTER

(CHAIRMAN)