

Stronger Communities

Committee Meeting of Witney Town Council



Monday, 2nd June, 2025 at 6.00 pm

To members of the Stronger Communities Committee - T Ashby, R Smith, G Meadows, A Bailey, D Edwards-Hughes, D Enright, A Mubin and J Treloar (and all other Town Councillors for information).

You are hereby summonsed to the above meeting to be held in the **Gallery Room, The Corn Exchange, Witney** for the transaction of the business stated in the agenda below.

Admission to Meetings

All Council meetings are open to the public and press unless otherwise stated.

Numbers of the public will be limited, with priority given to those who have registered to speak on an item on the agenda. Any member of the public wishing to attend the meeting should contact the Committee Clerk derek.mackenzie@witney-tc.gov.uk in advance.

Recording of Meetings

Under the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 the council's public meetings may be recorded, which includes filming, audio-recording as well as photography.

As a matter of courtesy, if you intend to record any part of the proceedings, please let the Deputy Town Clerk or Committee Clerk know before the start of the meeting.

Agenda

1. Apologies for absence

To consider apologies and reasons for absence.

Committee members who are unable to attend the meeting should notify the Committee Clerk derek.mackenzie@witney-tc.gov.uk **prior to the meeting**, stating the reason for absence.

Standing Order 30(d)(v) permits the appointment of substitute Councillors to a Committee whose role is to replace ordinary Councillors at a meeting of a Committee if ordinary Councillors of the Committee have confirmed to the Proper Officer **before** the meeting that they are unable to attend.

2. Declarations of Interest

Members are reminded to declare any disclosable pecuniary interests in any items under consideration at this meeting in accordance with the Town Council's Code of Conduct.

3. Minutes (Pages 4 - 10)

a) To adopt and sign as a correct record the minutes of the Stronger Communities Committee held on 24 March 2025;

b) Matters arising from the minutes not covered elsewhere on the agenda (Questions on the progress on any item).

4. **Public Participation**

The meeting will adjourn for this item.

Members of the public may speak for a maximum of **five minutes** each during the period of public participation, in line with Standing Order 42. Matters raised shall relate to the following items on the agenda.

5. **Election of Vice-Chair**

To elect a Vice-Chair of the Committee for the 2025/26 Municipal Year.

6. **Committee Terms of Reference** (Pages 11 - 13)

To review the report of the Deputy Town Clerk in respect of the Committee Terms of Reference (TOR).

7. **Committee Objectives & Work Programme for the Municipal Year** (Pages 14 - 18)

To receive and consider the report of the Town Clerk/C.E.O concerning the priorities of this Committee during 2025/26.

Communications & Community Engagement

8. **Communications Report** (Pages 19 - 22)

To receive and consider the report of the Communications & Community Engagement Officer.

9. **Community Engagement Report** (Pages 23 - 31)

To receive and consider the report of the Communications & Community Engagement Officer.

a) **Community Engagement Strategy** (Pages 32 - 52)

To receive the final draft of a Community Engagement Strategy for the Town Council, prepared by the Communications & Community Engagement Officer.

b) **Annual Satisfaction Survey Results** (Pages 53 - 56)

To receive analysis of the 2025 resident's annual satisfaction survey, prepared by the Administrative Support Assistant – Communities & Planning.

c) **Witney Forum Notes** (Pages 57 - 60)

To receive the minutes of the meeting of the Witney Forum held on 25 March 2025.

10. **Youth Council** (Pages 61 - 62)

To receive and note the minutes of the Witney Youth Council meeting held on 28th April 2025.



Town Clerk

**STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE
WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL**

Held on Monday, 24 March 2025

At 6.02 pm in the Gallery Room, The Corn Exchange, Witney

Present:

Councillor R Smith (Chair)

Councillors:	G Meadows	S Simpson
	O Collins	J Aitman
	T Ashby	J Doughty (In place of D Temple)
	A Bailey	
Officers:	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
Others:	Two members of the public.	

SC157 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor D Temple with Cllr J Doughty attending as substitute.

SC158 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor R Smith declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 8 as she was a member of the church which provided the Detached Youth Service.

During the discussion of Agenda Item 8, Councillor O Collins declared a personal interest due to APCAM being one of the nominated charities for his current term as Mayor.

There were no other declarations from Members or Officers.

SC159 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Stronger Communities Committee held on 27 January 2025 were received.

There were no matters arising from the minutes which were not covered in items on the agenda.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Stronger Communities Committee held 27 January 2025 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the chair.

SC160 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Committee adjourned for this item.

The committee received representations from The Station Detached Youth concerning Agenda Item 8. Representatives provided a report outlining the work of the group, funded by the Town Council, during the last year and answered questions from Members.

The Committee reconvened.

SC161 **YOUTH SERVICES**

With the permission of the Chair, the Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk next in the meeting concerning the provision of youth services by the town council.

As members of The Station were in attendance, Members thanked them for the service provided during the last year. The figures provided in their report were very helpful and were testament to why it was required. The Council had committed to funding for a second year which was less than previously anticipated, however The Station would need to forward a 3-5 year plan to a future meeting to agree further funding beyond 2025-26.

Members also discussed the re-establishment of the Youth Services Grant which had last run in 2022 and agreed amendments to the criteria for awarding. These included some minor word changes, removal of Covid-19 references, and bringing the time frame forward in the new fiscal year.

The Committee also considered correspondence from APCAM who were offering mental health drop-in sessions at the Corn Exchange during the school holidays. Members were favourable to what was proposed, funded from an underspend in other grant budgets in 2024-25.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and;
2. That, Council considers future funding for The Station on submission of a 3-5 year plan during 2025 and;
3. That, the Youth Services Grant opens for applications between April and June 2025 based on the agreed updated criteria and;
4. That, the Committee recommends that underspends in the discretionary grants budget fund APCAM drop-in sessions and;
5. That, these funds be granted under the General Power of Competence.

Cllr G Meadows left the meeting briefly during the following item, between 6.45 – 6.50pm

SC162 **QUEEN EMMA'S DYKE COMMUNITY GARDEN**

With the permission of the Chair, the Committee received and considered the report of the Operations Manager next in the meeting concerning a request to create a community garden at Queen Emma's Dyke amenity spaces.

A Member provided a verbal update on the request and advised a change of location to the one in the agenda pack which was less open to the general public. The suggestion was to install three raised beds, built by the Witney Shed, which the group would maintain themselves. The group requesting the garden had already spoken to neighbours who had no objections.

It was agreed no trees would be allowed and they would likely qualify for a community gardening voucher once installed. Therefore, the Committee welcomed and approved the request but there would need to be an agreement advising it would be cleared if the garden went into disrepair and that no tree planting was permitted.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and;
2. That, the request for a community garden at Queen Emma's Dyke be approved and;
3. That, the design of planters, detailing materials used in construction be subject to officer approval and;
4. That, the final location and number of planters be delegated to the Operations Manager and;
5. That, a basic agreement be provided outlining the above conditions.

Cllr R Crouch left the meeting at 6.53pm

Cllr A Bailey left the meeting briefly during the following item between 6.56 – 6.59pm

SC163 YOUTH COUNCIL MINUTES

With the permission of the Chair, the Committee received the minutes of the Youth Council meeting held on 10 March 2025 next in the meeting.

Members were pleased the group had become established, but agreed it needed to facilitate a successful event or project soon and that further training and confidence building was required.

With regard to events, it was suggested a cultural festival across Witney encompassing smaller events would be more achievable than a large stand-alone event at The Leys. This could mean potential free use of the Corn Exchange and or other venues, including Witney Carnival.

Resolved:

1. That, the minutes of the Youth Council meeting held on 10 March 2025 be noted and;
2. That, free use/subsidised hire of the Corn Exchange and attendance at the Carnival be considered as means to hold a cultural festival.

SC164 FINANCE REPORT

The Committee received and considered the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) detailing income and expenditure for budgets which were the responsibility of the Committee.

Members welcomed the report and noted spending was within parameters and straight forward at this point in the year.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and;
2. That, the management accounts of the Stronger Communities Committee for the period up to 31 January 2025 be approved.

SC165 COMMUNICATIONS REPORT

The Committee received and considered the report of the Communications & Community Engagement Officer (C&CEO).

Members received an update on the delivery of the Council's annual newsletter and were disappointed to learn there had been issues with delivery which could warrant a partial refund request. They were pleased to hear of a contrast checker to ensure WCAG AAA compliance on publications, on collaboration with the Witney Chamber of Commerce, and that a new corporate Social Media Policy was being prepared.

The Committee also viewed a Welcome to Witney guide document and asked if walks and/or trails could be included in the final document.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and;
2. That, officers consider the inclusion of trails and/or walks in the Welcome to Witney Guide.

SC166 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT

The Committee received and considered the report of the Communications & Community Engagement Officer (C&CEO).

Members were provided with updates on Great Big Green Week, the resident's satisfaction survey and Witney Carnival, the latter for which they were asked to consider a musical theme for this year's float entry.

The Committee was also provided with details of a Twinning Anniversary reception at the Corn Exchange on 2 May 2025 and were asked to consider who should be able to utilise the Gallery Room at the Corn Exchange for the Christmas Lights Switch-on event. Members agreed there was a need to allow as many residents as possible the opportunity and felt the Youth Council were excellent hosts in 2024.

Members also discussed further proposals from APCAM to hold WeGame sessions for young people in the Corn Exchange during the summer. There was no budget for this or any VR/Arcade day this year but there was an underspend in the £50 for fifty grants budget which could be carried forward to fund this opportunity which all agreed should not be missed.

Finally, the Committee agreed the Inclusivity and Diversity panel should be reformed under a temporary new name, and that the Council should enter Witney Lake & Country Park into the 2025 Thames & Chilterns In Bloom competition. A range of enhancements had taken place there in the last year and all of the suggested engagement ideas were worthy of taking forward.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and;
2. That, APCAM WeGame sessions should be held during the summer in the Corn Exchange, funded from an underspend in the £50 for fifty grants fund and;
3. That, these funds be granted under the General Power of Competence and;
4. That, a musical theme for this year's Carnival be agreed by Councillors ahead of Full Council on 14th April and;

5. That, Friday 28th November be noted as the Christmas Lights Switch-on date and;
6. That, officers contact care facilities to gauge interest in the use of the Gallery Room for the Christmas Lights Switch-on event before a decision on who to provide use to is considered and;
7. That, Big Green Week be marked by a book swap in the 1863 Café and publication of recipes for leftover food, these could include cultural recipes in conjunction with the Youth Council's cultural festival and;
8. That, the inclusivity and diversity panel be temporarily branded with the name Community Voices Forum and relaunched and;
9. That, the Council enters Witney Lake & Country Park into the Thames & Chilterns In Bloom competition for 2025 and;
10. That, the updates from the VE&VJ Day 80th Anniversary task and finish group and Witney Forum be noted.

SC167 VE & VJ DAY 80TH ANNIVERSARY TASK & FINISH GROUP NOTES

The Committee received the notes of the VE & VJ Day 80th Anniversary task and finish group meeting held on 13 March 2025.

Members were pleased plans had progressed and to hear the local BBC news team would be attending during the day. It promised to be another successful community event for the town.

Resolved:

1. That, the minutes of the VE & VJ Day 80th Anniversary Task and Finish Group meeting held on 13 March 2025 be noted.

SC168 WITNEY FORUM MINUTES

The Committee received the notes of the Witney Forum meeting held on 28 January 2025.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Witney Forum meeting held on 28 January be noted.

SC169 WITNEY CENTRAL COMMUNITY INSIGHT PROFILE REPORT

The Committee received notice of the Witney Central Community Insight Profile, produced by Community First Oxfordshire in association with Oxfordshire County & West Oxfordshire District Councils.

Members welcomed such a comprehensive report which clearly set out social issues, concerns and solutions in the Witney central ward. It was comforting to know The Station were already working in this area and other community initiatives were already taking place there.

The Chair asked Members to all read the document and to consider the contents in future Council discussions.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and;
2. That, the Council considers the subject matter in any future decision making.

SC170 **TOWN CENTRE ISSUES RAISED BY THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE: WAYFINDING, MAPPING, VISITORS, PUBLIC REALM AND TRAFFIC FLOWS**

The Committee received the report of the Town Clerk/C.E.O concerning items raised by Witney Chamber of Commerce during a meeting in February.

Members welcomed the collaboration with Witney Chamber of Commerce and that the majority of items were already being progressed by officers.

Resolved:

That, the report be noted.

SC171 **AMENITY LAND AREAS MIS-USE - INSTALLATION OF BOLLARDS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Operations Manager concerning misuse of amenity land in Manor Road.

Members were disappointed amenity land was being parked on in this area and discussed various ways to prevent it. A sign would likely be ineffective, leaving the suggestion of bollards, knee rail or metal fence. Each of the latter, however, was likely to be more expensive than wooden bollards.

The Committee agreed the most cost-effective solution should be trialled in the area to see whether it was a success before agreeing to installing at other areas with similar issues in the future.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and;
2. That, preventative measures be taken at this site with the most cost-effective solution being delegated to officers and;
3. That, the installation be reviewed and that similar sites are considered on a case-by-case basis in the meantime.

SC172 **EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

Resolved:

That in accordance with section (1(2) of the Public Bodies (admission to Meetings) Act 1960, and as extended by Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public, including the press, be excluded from the meeting because of the confidential nature of the following business to be transacted.

SC173 **THIRD PARTY EVENTS - WILSONS FUNFAIR LETTING AGREEMENT**

The Deputy Town Clerk provided a confidential verbal update concerning negotiations with Wilson's Funfairs on a renewal of their letting agreement.

Members welcomed the update and were pleased negotiations were proceeding well, recommending endorsement of the proposal presented which appeared to be acceptable to both parties.

Recommended:

1. That, the confidential verbal update be noted and;
2. That, the current proposal for the letting agreement between Witney Town Council and Bob Wilson's Funfairs be recommended for approval.

The meeting closed at: 8.00 pm

Chair

STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE



Agenda Item:	Terms of Reference
Meeting Date:	Monday, 2 June 2025
Contact Officer:	Deputy Town Clerk

The purpose of this report is for Members to review and recommend terms of reference for the Committee for the forthcoming municipal year.

Background

At the Annual Council Meeting held on 7th May 2025, it was resolved that terms of reference for each Committee would be reviewed at each meeting in the current meeting cycle.

Current Situation

The current terms of reference for this Committee are:

- a) To recognise the value and benefit of voluntary groups and endeavours within our community, including provision of youth services, supporting and helping to facilitate where possible;
- b) To maintain infrastructure in the Town Council's ownership such as trees, floral displays, town centre street furniture (seats, litter bins), bus shelters, CCTV, noticeboards and Christmas Lights displays;
- c) To organise special events such as Freedom Parades, Remembrance Sunday and other Civic events within the programme and the budget agreed by the Council;
- d) To work in collaboration with other partnerships on town wide events such as the Christmas Lights switch-on and others that may arise from time to time;
- e) To oversee the Council's communication and publications – such as the website and quarterly newsletter;
- f) To oversee the local Schools in Bloom competition and the Council's entry into the regional In Bloom Competition;
- g) The Membership of the Committee shall consist of 6 Members plus the Town Mayor and The Leader of the Council ex officio with voting rights
- h) The quorum of the Committee shall be 4 Members.

The Committee is asked if it would like to make any amendments to the terms for the forthcoming municipal year. The Committee may like to consider the following changes/additions:

- (a) To acknowledge and promote the value and contributions of voluntary groups, local organisations, and community interest companies that deliver social value to our community—supporting and facilitating services, whether through partnerships or ad hoc arrangements, in accordance with relevant policies and legislation;
- (b) To oversee and maintain the infrastructure owned by the Town Council, including street furniture in the town centre (e.g. seating, litter bins, and salt bins), bus shelters, CCTV, noticeboards, and Christmas light displays.*;
- (c) To organise and deliver civic events, such as Remembrance, in line with the approved programme and within the budget set by the Council;
- To co-ordinate national commemorations, special community events, and initiatives in accordance with the Council’s agreed programme and budget;
- To oversee the Council’s communications and publications, including the website, newsletter, and social media platforms.

And,

- To recognise the importance of inclusivity by ensuring all voices in the community are heard and represented, advocating for underrepresented groups in line with equality legislation;
- To oversee community engagement with all residents of Witney, relevant stake holders and businesses, including, but not limited to conducting an annual resident satisfaction survey to gauge feedback;
- To engage proactively with young people, supporting and promoting youth services where possible, and to oversee the operations of the Witney Youth Council;
- To administer the Children & Young People Grant funds, considering applications and/or funding on an annual basis and making recommendations to the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee;
- Within all its decision making ensure that the green environment and biodiversity is protected and enhanced in line with the Council’s Climate Emergency aspirations.

*NB: trees, floral displays and hanging baskets are proposed to be under the remit of the new Climate & Biodiversity Committee.

Impact Assessments

The Town Council has a duty to consider the effects of its decisions, functions and activities on equality, biodiversity, and crime & disorder. Consideration should also be given to effects on the environment, given the Council’s Climate Emergency declaration in 2019.

- a) Equality – By explicitly incorporating inclusivity into its Terms of Reference, the Council would show its commitment to ensuring that all individuals feel valued, heard, and represented. It affirms that inclusivity is not an afterthought, but a guiding principle embedded in the Council’s decision-making.
- b) Biodiversity – see text above.
- c) Crime & Disorder – The Council’s work to provide a voice and positive activities for young people plays a crucial role in its efforts to prevent crime and disorder within the community. By engaging with youth through supportive services and initiatives—such as the Witney Youth Council—the Council offers meaningful alternatives to antisocial behaviour and helps build a sense of purpose and belonging. These efforts contribute to early intervention, promote positive peer relationships, and encourage young people to become active, responsible members of the community, thereby strengthening local safety and cohesion.
- d) Environment & Climate Emergency – see text above.

Risk

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

Social Value

Social value is the positive change the Council creates in the local community within which it operates.

The Council holds a unique position as a leading local organisation with the ability to fund and publicly support initiatives that deliver social value across all demographics of the community. It also has the capacity to lead in advocating for inclusivity and equality—both of which foster a stronger sense of belonging among residents.

Financial Implications

There are no direct implications from this report. Financial support and budgets for assistance will be considered on a case-by case basis if not already approved in the year.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and,

1. Review the terms of reference; and
2. Consider any changes to the terms of reference; and
3. Recommend such changes be made to Full Council on 23rd June 2025.

STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE



Agenda Item: Committee Objectives & Work Programme for the Municipal Year

Meeting Date: Monday, 2nd June 2025

Contact Officer: Town Clerk/CEO

The purpose of this report is to set out this Committee's objectives and priorities for the 2025/26 municipal year. This will enable the Town Clerk and her Officers to draw up a manageable programme of works, ensuring necessary resources are available and can be deployed appropriately, particularly bearing in mind the workload of other Committees.

Background

This Committee's priorities differ from others in that several budget lines are allocated to provide grants to local organisations, enabling them to deliver key services in the town such as detached youth work and community transport. The Committee also oversees ongoing infrastructure projects, community engagement initiatives, and civic events that strengthen community cohesion.

The current terms of reference encompass supporting voluntary groups, maintaining town infrastructure and public realm, organising civic events and commemorations such as VE Day 80th Anniversary, overseeing communications, and managing community competitions. The proposed expanded terms of reference would enhance the Committee's role in community engagement, inclusivity, youth services, and environmental considerations, reflecting the Council's evolving priorities and statutory duties.

Over recent years, funding has been accumulated within the Council's Earmarked Reserve - Infrastructure (a/c 369) - primarily for street furniture and the ongoing rolling programme of replacements. The Committee continues to build upon the success of previous initiatives while identifying new opportunities to strengthen community provision in line with its broadened remit.

Current Situation

The Committee has successfully delivered numerous projects during 2024/25, demonstrating strong community impact and value for money. Key achievements include the continuation of vital youth services, enhancement of infrastructure particularly the successful Christmas Lights display, and support for community events that bring residents together.

As part of the current meeting cycle, the Committee is reviewing its terms of reference to ensure they remain fit for purpose and reflect the Council's current priorities. The proposed enhanced terms of reference would strengthen the Committee's focus on inclusivity, community engagement, youth services, and environmental considerations, while

maintaining its core functions around infrastructure, civic events, and voluntary sector support.

Several projects remain in progress and will continue into the new municipal year, including ongoing infrastructure improvements and community partnerships. The Committee must now consider its priorities for 2025/26, balancing ambitious new initiatives with the completion of existing commitments, and ensuring alignment with any revised terms of reference.

Budget allocations from previous years remain available through Earmarked Reserves for specific infrastructure projects, providing flexibility in programme delivery while ensuring financial sustainability. Note that responsibility for trees, floral displays and hanging baskets, will transfer to the new Climate & Biodiversity Committee, subject to full Council approval on 23rd June 2025

Proposed Priorities for 2025/26

Core Service Provision

- Continue core grant funding for community transport (£23,500) and youth services (£40,000) as essential community services, in addition to funding The Station – detached youth work
- Develop enhanced youth engagement initiatives including potential expansion of Witney Youth Council activities

Infrastructure and Public Realm Enhancement

- Prioritise the infrastructure replacement programme using available Earmarked Reserves, focusing on safety-critical items and those with greatest community benefit
- Monitor and support the High Street upgrades project, continuing to work closely with Oxfordshire County Council to ensure that new public space enhancements align with the Council's standards for infrastructure and planting schemes
- Consider allocating resources to upgrade key elements such as the town centre bus shelters outside Barclays Bank and the Town Hall, which are essential for creating a more visually attractive and welcoming town centre environment
- Address bin provision and placement issues in the town centre, working with West Oxfordshire District Council to resolve concerns about removed bins near Mountain Warehouse and Part'n'Parcel that have negatively impacted the town's appearance

Wayfinding and Visitor Experience

- Oversee the West Oxfordshire District Council's wayfinding signage project, recognising that the Council will likely assume responsibility for maintaining this infrastructure once installed

- Possible partnership working with the Chamber of Commerce to support initiatives to:
 - improve the Welcome to Witney web pages and information resources to better guide visitors
 - Explore opportunities to enhance data collection on visitor insights to understand what draws people to Witney and inform future strategy development
 - Consider coach parking and drop-off solutions as part of broader visitor accessibility improvements

Community Engagement and Communications

- Establish enhanced community engagement frameworks to ensure resident input into project selection and delivery, potentially including annual satisfaction surveys
- Explore opportunities for collaborative projects with local businesses and the Chamber of Commerce to strengthen the town's economic vitality
- Continue to utilise the Town Council's communication channels, including newsletters, to gather community feedback through initiatives such as QR code surveys

Strategic Planning and Partnership Working

- Begin strategic planning for the implications of local government reorganisation, particularly assessing what additional assets the Town Council may need to take on for future maintenance and management
- Strengthen partnership working between different tiers of local government to maximise the benefits of funding opportunities such as Section 106 contributions
- Support local businesses by advocating for continued cash payment acceptance where appropriate

Inclusivity and Environmental Sustainability

- Embed inclusivity and environmental sustainability as key criteria for all project approvals, supporting the Council's equality duties and Climate Emergency commitments
- Ensure all infrastructure improvements incorporate environmental considerations and support biodiversity where possible

Impact Assessments

The Town Council has a duty to consider the effects of its decisions, functions and activities on equality, biodiversity, and crime & disorder. Consideration should also be given to effects on the environment, given the Council's Climate Emergency declaration in 2019.

a) **Equality** - The Committee's work programme promotes inclusive community access through infrastructure improvements, youth services, and events that serve all demographics. If the proposed enhanced terms of reference are adopted, the Committee would have an explicit mandate to ensure inclusivity and advocate for underrepresented groups, strengthening its equality impact. Defibrillator installations and bus shelter improvements particularly benefit elderly and vulnerable residents.

b) **Biodiversity** - Infrastructure projects incorporate environmental considerations where possible, including sedum roofs on bus shelters and consideration of wildlife-friendly materials. The In Bloom programme supports local biodiversity, though this may transfer to the Climate & Biodiversity Committee. The proposed enhanced terms would embed environmental protection as a decision-making criterion.

c) **Crime & Disorder** - Youth services funding and community engagement activities contribute to crime prevention. The proposed enhanced terms of reference specifically recognise the role of youth engagement and the Witney Youth Council in preventing antisocial behaviour. Well-maintained infrastructure and lighting improvements enhance community safety and reduce anti-social behaviour opportunities.

d) **Environment & Climate Emergency** - All projects are assessed for environmental impact. The proposed enhanced terms would explicitly require environmental and biodiversity considerations in all decision-making, strengthening the Committee's contribution to the Council's 2019 Climate Emergency declaration. The Committee prioritises sustainable materials, energy-efficient solutions, and projects that reduce carbon footprint where feasible.

Risk

When considering priorities, the Committee should be mindful of all resources - financial and human - and competing demands from other Committees. Key risks include:

- Over-commitment leading to undeliverable projects and reputational damage
- Insufficient resource allocation resulting in incomplete initiatives
- External partner dependencies affecting project delivery timelines
- Inflation impacts on previously budgeted infrastructure costs
- Community expectations exceeding available resources
- Partnership risks from ineffective coordination between local government tiers
- Reputational risks if public realm and wayfinding projects fail to meet community expectations

Mitigation strategies include realistic project phasing, regular budget monitoring, strong partner agreements, clear communication with residents about project timelines and constraints, and maintaining regular dialogue with partner organisations and businesses.

Social Value

Social value is the positive change the Council creates in the local community within which it operates.

The Committee's work programme delivers significant social value through:

- Youth services supporting personal development and community cohesion, with potential expansion through enhanced Youth Council oversight
- Infrastructure improvements enhancing accessibility and community pride
- Event programming fostering local identity and social connections
- Grant funding enabling third-sector organisations to expand their community impact
- Skills development and employment opportunities through local procurement
- Enhanced community engagement initiatives, including potential annual resident satisfaction surveys if the revised terms of reference are adopted
- Explicit advocacy for inclusivity and equality, fostering stronger community belonging

Financial implications

- Infrastructure Earmarked Reserve (a/c 369) contains accumulated funding for ongoing replacement programmes
- Annual grant commitments of approximately £74,500 for community transport and youth services
- Capital expenditure requirements for infrastructure improvements to be phased across multiple years

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and consider the Committee's objectives and priorities for the 2025/26 municipal year.

STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE



Agenda Item:	Communications Report
Meeting Date:	Monday, 2 June 2025
Contact Officer:	Communications & Community Engagement Officer

The purpose of this report is to update Members on various communication matters.

Current Situation

June Newsletter

This will be issued on or around 30th June 2025 and will contain news items from the last quarter. It will be online and A5 printed copies will be available in 1863 and officers will deliver some to the Care Homes as one of the proposed Community Engagement Strategy suggested elements.

Welcome to Witney Guide

The guide has been on hold over a busy few months but will now be scheduled in as tasks for the Communication and Community Engagement Officer, Administrative Support Assistant Communities and Planning and Administration Assistant – Communications & Engagement.

Social Media Policy Review

This item is pending due to the time taken for arrangements for the VE Day 80th Anniversary.

Press Coverage

Latest press coverage information from January 2025 has been prepared by the Administrative Assistant – Communications and Engagement and is attached as **Appendix A**.

The CCEO has noted that the town's VE Day 80th Anniversary celebrations were not covered by the local newspaper.

Impact Assessments

The Town Council has a duty to consider the effects of its decisions, functions and activities on equality, biodiversity, and crime & disorder. Consideration should also be given to effects on the environment, given the Council's Climate Emergency declaration in 2019.

- a) Equality – providing a hard copy of the newsletter on addition to the digital format provides an opportunity for those not online to read the information.
- b) Biodiversity – no direct implications.
- c) Crime & Disorder – no direct implications.
- d) Environment & Climate Emergency – no direct implications.

Risk

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

Social Value

Social value is the positive change the Council creates in the local community within which it operates.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and press coverage.

Date	Story	Reported in	Positive	Negative	Neutral	PR Issued	Social Media Post	Enquiry Response
1.1.25	Review of the Year: Storms and Car Park with no road	Witney Gazette	Yes			No		
1.1.25	Nearly 60kg of Items Donated to Foodbank	Witney Gazette	Yes			No		
8.1.25	Witney Town Council to increase precept for 2025/26	Oxford Mail			Yes	No	https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/24839956.witney-town-council-increase-precept-2025-26/	
22.1.25	Unsafe' Pitch Playable Again	Witney Gazette			Yes	No	https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/24857630.oxfordshire-football-pitch-declared-safe-4-years/	
19.2.25	Upgrades to Town's Splash Park Due 'Soon'	Witney Gazette, Oxford Mail	Yes			No	https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/24940283.refurbishment-witney-splash-park-begin-soon/	
16.3.25	Dragonfly area in Witney Lake and Country Park restored	Oxford Mail	Yes			No	https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/25003217.dragonfly-area-witney-lake-country-park-restored/	
2.4.25	Citizens of the Year Celebrated by Council	Witney Gazette, Oxford Mail	Yes			No	https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/25036590.winners-witney-citizens-year-2024-awards-announced/	
2.4.25	Work to upgrade splash park begins	Witney Gazette	Yes			Yes	https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/25037749.work-upgrade-splash-park-oxfordshire-town-begins/	
8.5.25	Don't forget... BBC South Today live from Witney (VE DAY)	BBC South Today	Yes			No	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/live/c62xp202006t	
10.5.25	Witney Town Council to fund initiatives for young people	Oxford Mail	Yes			Yes	https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/25144161.witney-town-council-fund-initiatives-benefitting-young-people/	

Date	Story	Reported in	Positive	Negative	Neutral	PR Issued	Social Media Post	Enquiry Response
21.5.25	Twin Town Relationships Celebrated by Officials	Witney Gazette, Oxford Mail	Yes			No	https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/25145564.witney-celebrates-partnerships-french-german-towns/	
24.5.25	Witney splash park reopens for summer after upgrades	Oxford Mail	Yes			Yes	https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/25186037.oxfordshire-splash-park-reopens-summer-upgrades/	
28.5.25	Football Club Partnership Supporting Health	Witney Gazette, Oxford Mail	Yes			Yes	https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/25185174.witney-town-council-announces-witney-town-fc-partnership/	
28.5.25	Twin Town's Airport Honours Late Queen	Witney Gazette			Yes	No	https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/25179244.witneys-french-twin-renames-airport-queen-elizabeth-ii/	

Oxford Mail
Witney Gazette

STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE



Agenda Item:	Community Engagement Report
Meeting Date:	Monday, 2 June 2025
Contact Officer:	Communications & Community Engagement Officer

The purpose of this report is to update councillors on general communication matters and progress made since the last meeting of the Stronger Communities Committee.

Current Situation

VE Day 80th Anniversary – 8th May 2025

The events held during the day all ran as planned and expected with overwhelmingly positive feedback received. The BBC South Today team were very complimentary and thanked everyone for their support, apologising for any intrusiveness which occurred. Officers have held a wash-up meeting and will report verbally at the meeting, but any comments from members are welcome.

VJ Day 80th Anniversary – 15th August 2025

The task and finish group has agreed smaller plans from VE Day and felt this should be more of a remembrance, rather than a large celebration. The Corn Exchange has been booked in its entirety for the whole of the day. There are no other events booked in, and councillors should consider whether plans suggest that the café needs to operate as usual or be closed at any point.

A verbal update from the next T&F Group meeting on 29th May will be provided. Feedback from some who attended the VE Day celebrations indicated they hoped for something more substantial for VJ Day too. Planned events could include:

- Voices of War stories as part of a display of Arthur Titherington items with Witney Museum
- Vintage vehicles on the Market Square
- Poppy sellers
- Each of the town's memorials to be cleaned in the weeks ahead by groups such as air and army cadets and another group to plan litter pick and clean, spot plant any bare patches and decorate each memorial as they see fit and within a budget. (poppies, ribbons, wreaths etc). Cadets would be tasked with Leys and Newland so they are not working in the road and officers will take volunteer picnics to them as a reward and to the third group at the main Market Square memorial.
- Bonfire beacon on the Leys
- Film Screening
- Repost our self-led walk of our Commonwealth War Graves

- Civic Service at St Mary's – invite leaders from, Sikh, Hindu and Muslim communities as they fought in considerable numbers in the Far East
- Repair Mr Titherington's Bench on Church Green
- Promote CWCG virtual tours app
- Will there be an official cry?
- Open the chapel in Tower Hill for the day?
- CWGC do talks and will visit and talk about its cemeteries – book one for Corn Exchange (may not be possible on the day as likely to be very busy)

The budget for the two events was reduced when the budget/precept were set, so there are less funds remaining to hold anything more substantial than the initially agreed items. The Communications and Community Engagement Officer is on leave that week, so there will be less of an officer resource.

Dates for the remaining task and finish group meetings are:

29th May – Initial discussion – this is ahead of the 2 June SC Committee where we could give a verbal update (PGF for initial agreement to budget 9th June)

3rd July – Final sign off of plans ahead of SC on 14th July – which can be a written report/summary (PGF for budget agreement 21st July)

The Station Detached Youth – BREAK & KICK

The Station detached youth group held three afternoons of activities at The Leys during the May half-term week and are intending to run KICK again at the ATP during the summer holidays. Two days in the Station report around 50 young people turning up for the events at the Leys.

Witney Carnival – 12th July 2025

The Council's stall will focus on promoting the Youth Council and further recruitment and there will be a craft stall run by the Youth Council, supported by officers that will include painted rocks and making wooden bead bracelets. Members are invited to attend as a community engagement exercise.

Members are also asked to confirm if they are taking part in the parade.

Schools In Bloom

The wheelbarrows are in schools and will be collected shortly before the carnival for voting. They have all been offered out to Care Homes. The Ice Centre is the Council's Guest barrow this year.

Upcoming Community Engagement Initiatives

- Climate roadshow is under discussion with officers (proposed by the Climate & Biodiversity Committee).
- Volunteer picnics there are plans for one to reward the L&CP volunteers plus the VJ day ones.
- Car Free Day – recommended online only again.

- Heritage Open Day falls just a month after VJ Day so unless it fits with something the Council is already doing it will be difficult to arrange another event unless in partnership with someone else.

Notes from the Community Insight Profile Group held on 6th May are attached as **Appendix A**.

Community Engagement Strategy

An updated and final draft of the Council's Community Engagement Strategy follows as Part A to this report in the agenda pack.

The updated draft encompasses the point raised by the Committee at the meeting held earlier in the year.

Annual Satisfaction Survey 2025

A summary of the results of the survey which ran until May 1st prepared by the Administrative Support Assistant Communities & Planning follows as Part B to this report in the agenda pack.

Individual comments will be issued to individual committees during the next cycle of meetings.

Witney Forum

The confidential notes of the Forum meeting held on 25th March 2025 follow as a Part C to this report.

Impact Assessments

The Town Council has a duty to consider the effects of its decisions, functions and activities on equality, biodiversity, and crime & disorder. Consideration should also be given to effects on the environment, given the Council's Climate Emergency declaration in 2019.

- a) Equality – the provision of free, accessible community initiatives ensures all residents are all able to enjoy these opportunities. The feedback survey provides a platform to hear the voices of those who may be harder to reach and the community engagement strategy will enshrine this in the work of the Council.
- b) Biodiversity – Schools In Bloom helps promote biodiversity in schools.
- c) Crime & Disorder – no direct implications.
- d) Environment & Climate Emergency – no direct implications.

Risk

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

Social Value

Social value is the positive change the Council creates in the local community within which it operates.

There is social value to the community from all initiatives in the report for all age ranges in Witney which celebrate heritage, barriers to services and biodiversity. They provide a broad appeal to all demographics in leading more fulfilling lives.

Financial Implications

- The Council budgeted £1,500 towards both VE & VJ Day 80th Anniversaries. There is approximately £500 remaining for VJ Day.
- All other items can be funded from existing budgets if pursued.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and,

1. Note the updates concerning the VE Day 80th Anniversary, the Station activities, and Schools In Bloom.
2. Consider the proposals for the 80th Anniversary of VJ Day (taking into account the verbal update from the task and finish group meeting on 29th May).
3. Confirm involvement at Witney Carnival.
4. Consider the upcoming community engagement initiatives and plans.

Document is Restricted

Witney Town Council



WITNEY
TOWN COUNCIL

**Community
Engagement Strategy
2024**

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Introduction

The purpose of Witney Town Council's Community Engagement Strategy is to assess and enhance the quality and effectiveness of our interactions with the local community. By seeking feedback and encouraging open dialogue, participation and inclusion we will build stronger trust-based relationships with our community, leading to an improved reputation and better understanding of what Witney Town Council does.

Actively engaging with and listening to the views and aspirations of our community members, ensures that the council's actions align with the genuine needs and concerns of those within our town. This approach enables the provision of appropriate activities, facilities, and services that effectively promote the overall well-being and priorities of all our residents.

We are starting from a strong position. As a council, we create lots of opportunities for community engagement, but we need to ensure that as a body and as individuals we are making the most of all of them. While we are looking at innovation and finding new ways to reach people, Witney was identified as an ageing town ([Oxfordshire Data Hub](#)) and this needs to be taken in to account to ensure that no one is 'left behind'.

What is Community Engagement?

Quite simply, Community Engagement is about getting to know the people in a community and building meaningful relationships and connections. It involves, sharing information in a two-way exchange and working together in different ways to bring about change. Good Community Engagement is an ongoing thing and needs to be flexible and agile to adapt in response to new initiatives and opportunities. It is the process by which we get people to have an active involvement in council business and encourage them to influence decision making and services.

There are five levels at which engagement occurs, from minimal involvement to substantial participation. These levels include: Informing, Consulting, Involving, Collaborating and Empowering.





Aims

This Community Engagement Strategy aims to equip Witney Town Council to better cater to the needs of local residents, the following objectives are essential:

- **Understand and respond** effectively to the needs of the community.
- **Increase accountability** to local residents.
- **Plan and deliver** improved services.
- **Use public resources** more efficiently.
- **Make transparent decisions** grounded in strong evidence.
- **Build strong, positive relationships** within and across local communities.
- **Test ideas** and explore emerging issues.

The strategy will also aim to measure the Council's performance in service delivery.

The local community will benefit by:

- Having a **greater say** and more choices in designing and delivering services.
- Developing **new skills and expertise**.
- Becoming **better informed** about the Council's initiatives.
- Engaging in **accessible conversations** about important issues.
- Building **trust and confidence** with the Council.
- Understanding how their **participation** has influenced decision-making processes.

Objectives

The following objectives set out how we are going to make certain that our engagement activity is flexible, focused, and appropriate for the diverse needs of the community.

Together the council will:

1. **Plan and co-ordinate activities**, collaborate in partnerships whenever possible and make the most effective use of our resources.
2. **Encourage active participation involvement from all communities**, especially those from traditionally under-represented groups or areas.
3. **Be open and creative** in defining the most appropriate relevant, engaging and successful approaches to consultations.
4. **Promote transparency and build trust** by communicating results and ensuring they are used to inform the Council's policies, services and decision-making processes.
5. **Build relationships** with communities to establish and maintain sustained engagement.



Who Do We Want to Engage With?

Alongside maintaining the many successful channels of Community Engagement that we already have we also need to seek to hear from those in the community not already engaged and expand our reach still further.

Everything we do must be accessible and inclusive as far as possible. We must make particular efforts to engage those who may not usually get involved in dialogues with their local council.

To that end, we are fortunate to have counsellors that are working in the community with refugees and asylum seekers.

Councillors should be at the forefront of our community engagement. They have a unique perspective and understanding of what it's like to live in their ward and this equips them with specialist knowledge and equips them to represent and amplify the voices of their community.

Our ambition is to engage successfully with all of the following:

- young people
- older people
- service users
- all residents including minority groups
- people of differing abilities
- schools and colleges
- tourists and visitors
- people of different or no religion
- LGBT groups
- itinerant visitors
- local businesses
- community groups and organisations
- tenants and residents' associations and groups
- volunteers and voluntary groups
- neighbourhoods and wards
- public and private sector including other local councils

If we look at the source of most of the data we gather in our Annual Resident's Satisfaction Survey, the average age of those attending the Annual Town Meeting, the clientele at 1863 café, and many of the people that attend our events there is a heavy bias on older people. It would seem we are doing well at reaching them, but actually they are also the people who claim that they don't know what we do or what is going on unless it is in the Witney Gazette or they get a letter about it.



Below are some extracts from a recent report by **Centre For Towns**, an independent non-partisan organisation dedicated to providing research and analysis of our towns highlights that many young people are moving in to cities and larger towns leaving smaller towns and villages as 'ageing towns'. This should be taken into account when considering what we do and how we want to improve.

- **The Office for National Statistics currently projects that by 2046 there will be seven million more people aged 65 and over in the United Kingdom.**
- **Around three-quarters of the increase in 45 to 64-year olds and over 65s between 1981 and 2011 took place in villages, communities, small and medium sized towns.**



Barriers and Challenges

We must consider the collection of data gathered and ensure that any stored information complies with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

Often engagement opportunities are lost because of the difficulties of bringing people to our events. This could be due to the availability of people during the event times, such as working people (including volunteers) lack of transport to events or winter weather or shorter days affecting the willingness of some to travel or be out in poor weather or low light. This might also affect and those under or over a certain age.

Inaccessibility of buildings and some venues may highlight problems for those with physical or mental disabilities or mobility issues.

There may be technical barriers such as a lack of equipment or inability to purchase tickets using an online system. Affordability and financial constraints can be a problem, though most of our community and civic events are free. Apathy or lack of awareness about the events themselves may reduce the numbers attending.

There may be preconceived ideas about what a 'council' led event might be like.

Social barriers may exist for those that might experience a sense of 'not belonging' perhaps being new to the town, itinerant visitors, cultural differences, language barriers or those that are otherwise socially isolated.

Community Engagement may be stifled if we only engage with the same 'easy' demographic and don't make the effort to find new ways to reach out to groups who are experiencing barriers and provide information that they can and want to connect with.

Our Strategy - Ideas and Approaches

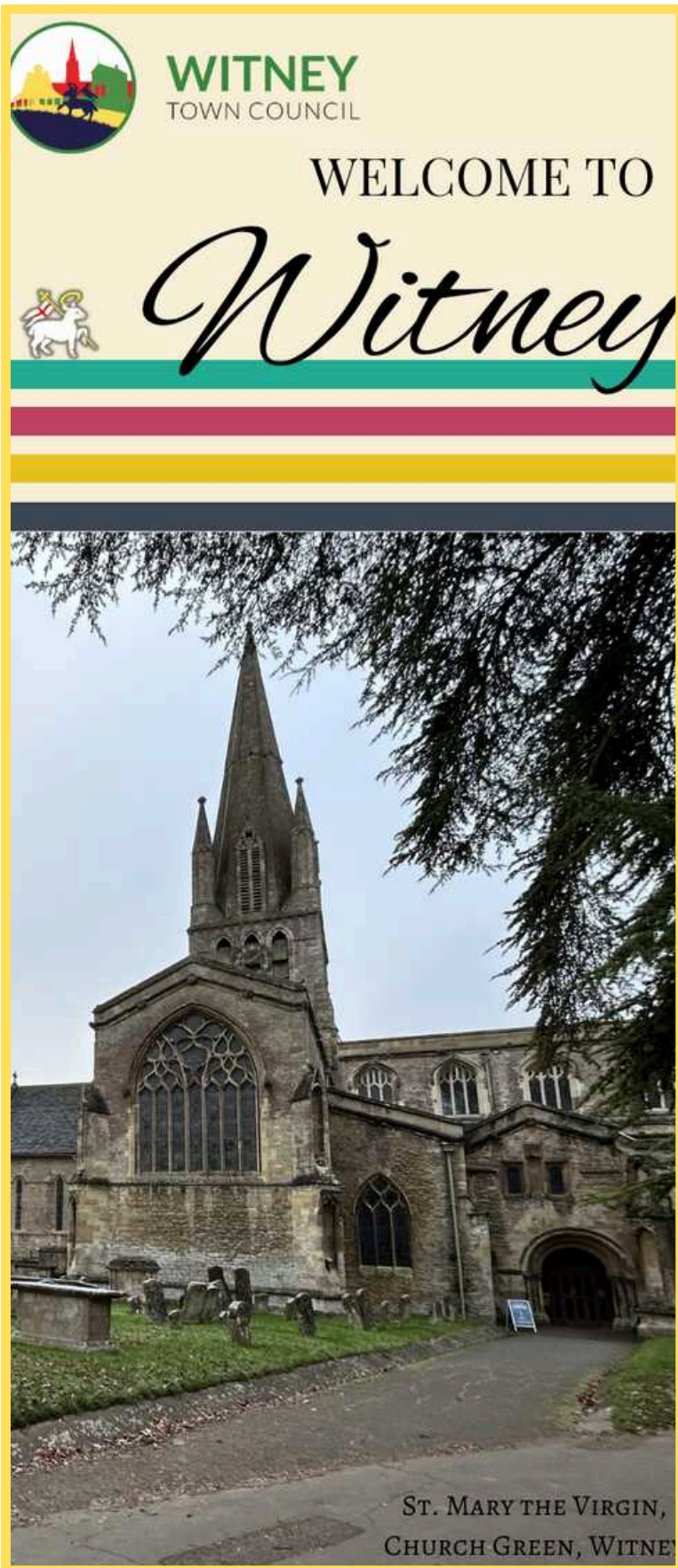
If people are not coming to events and meetings, we should explore ways to take more information out to them. We have previously considered roadshows and making information more mobile. We have held meet and greets with the Biodiversity and Green Spaces Officer at the Lake and Country Park and there may be ways we can expand on this.

- Taking information about our events services and activities into council wards might reach additional people. Staff and relevant ward councillors could set up a small event in a local community centre or school. It would be along the lines of Councillors in the Café but with more leaflets, newsletters and general information that we want to share.
- Councillors in the Café, could also become more mobile with Councillors taking a ride on the local WOCT bus services. 'Councillors on the Bus' provides a perfect opportunity to chat about things that matter to small groups of bus users at a time. This might also serve as an opportunity to let them know that the service is something that the Town Council has been instrumental in funding. Since most (though not all) of the bus users are older people, this will go some way to addressing the report that identifies Witney as an ageing town.





- A member of the Customer services team has expressed a wish to learn sign language when communicating with hearing impaired customers. This would be a good opportunity for staff to learn and could form part of a training plan for those that would like to undertake it. These are small things for marginal groups, but vital to some.
- Suggestion Boxes are still a useful way to gather instant feedback at our various sites – Tell Us About Your Visit Today. It is worth considering extending this to strategic locations such as libraries, surgeries or community centres, allowing residents who may prefer not to engage digitally or in person, to submit comments or suggestions anonymously.
- Explore offering an interactive activity at the Annual Town Meeting, such as a budget setting exercise to make the meeting more engaging. The activity needs to be quick and simple but at the same time thought provoking and a conversation starter. We are also looking to increase our engagement with under 18-year-olds at the Annual Town Meeting. Voting apps are likely to be something they are familiar with and comfortable using. These and similar apps could encourage other less confident residents to ask questions and participate in polls.
- **Webinars and Workshops. Use our new conferencing system to host live interaction webinars that focus on topics of interest or concern. Discussions could include councillors, officers and visiting experts.**



- The travelling community seldom responds to written information but do come in to see officers when they have particular concerns or issues. They also encounter works team staff in the cemeteries. This may be the best opportunity to make contact or discuss with them any major or extended work taking place in the cemetery such as memorial testing, creation of new areas or other matters that will be of interest to them. The chapel would be an ideal place to have staff in place for a few hours on days when the work is taking place. We could offer refreshments and ensure that office staff that are particularly informed regarding cemeteries and burials are available there.
- Talking news could record our spring newsletter to ensure that visually impaired people have access to an audio copy. We do give them a grant and many residents are used to getting news from the Witney Gazette in this way.
- The convenience of our Admin Office in the town centre means that we pick up a lot of calls and visits that should be fielded by other councils or organisations.
- **Although we are a small team, we aspire to be the benchmark for helpful and caring customer services. Officers have produced a flyer with useful contacts and other regularly asked for information, for customers. We have a reputation for being polite and helpful and that is something we should acknowledge and take pride in.**

- The Town Council previously sent out meeting agendas to the local press – this might be worth doing again, though they are available on social media and that is where the Gazette gleans much of its information. It would increase the amount of messaging they receive from us and hopefully strengthen their awareness of us as reporters come and go.
- Extend the mailing list for our press releases and pass relevant news on to schools, community groups, youth organisations and housing associations to share via their own newsletters. It would be worthwhile ensuring that a handful of printed issues of all our quarterly letters are delivered to care homes as these may not be included as residential addresses for the issue that is usually mailed out.
- Invest in additional noticeboards. We no longer have a noticeboard at the Leys while the Courtside Construction is taking place so officers will request a budget for three new noticeboards at the Leys to capture the different demographics at the splash/skatepark, the new Coffee shed and along the path that connects Station Lane businesses with Church Green
- Live stream the Mayor's Carols for all that cannot attend.
- Councillors have expressed a wish to include greater focus on young people and work on consulting with care homes to ensure they are communicated with. Continue to survey ask our Youth Councillors to find out how they discover what is going on in and around Town, what their sources of news and events are, and how best to engage with other young people.



What We Already Do



- Police attend our meetings for an exchange of information
- The communication of the importance of consideration of Social Value and Biodiversity in our decision making (as in committee reports)
- Development of a Welcome to Witney Page with local information for newcomers to the town
- Digital signage
- Clear sign posting about TC services and responsibilities (Who Does What?)
- Clear and accessible website with reliable and up to date information
- Printed information in the form of newsletters, posters and other publications available to all. Last year we made the newsletter available on tables in 1863 in A5 format. The newsletter this year will be 8 pages A5 format and will be placed on tables again.
- Maps and leaflets of lake trails and emergency equipment such as defibrillators and life preservers.
- The admin office has leaflets containing useful information and contact numbers that they have compiled to hand out to customers.
- Annual Town Meeting
- Transparency- freely available minutes, agendas, policies and financial documents
- Broad range of Communications
 - o Press releases
 - o Newsletters
 - o Surveys
 - o Social media
 - o Posters
 - o In person events
- Staff and cross team meetings – to keep everyone informed and up to date so that they can confidently field enquiries and publicise reliable information
- Corporate branding and a recognisable logo. Building trust by highlighting that information is coming from a trustworthy and reliable source
- Employment of a Town Crier
- Custodianship of some historic civic artefacts and documents - .e.g older copies of local newspaper On the back of a Heritage Open Day event that showcased these, a member of the public who set up the Witney Memories Facebook page has asked if he can digitally scan all our old copies of gazettes to share on the page and in return he will provide us with digital copies too.

- Councillors in the café
- Attending third party events such as the carnival and using this as an opportunity to consult
- As a council take part in other consultations on matters that affect the town
- The Town Council is a consultee on Town planning applications
- Annual Residents' satisfaction survey has FREEPOST return to make sure anyone can reply for free.
- Survey responses are anonymous, because of the need for the protection of a large amount of personal data, but we can acknowledge and reply by creating You Said, We Did reports and posts
- Youth Council
- Consultations at all levels including simple consultations where appropriate- easy to take part - project specific consultations using stickers so children can select options for play equipment etc
- The Voice of Witney – opt-in feedback database
- Feedback cards and web surveys for Lake and Country Park and 1863 Café
- Parents of Young People feedback forms and Young People feedback forms



To Involve

- Witney flood prevention group have fed back how valued they felt. With the investment in desilting and sandbags and support of personal contact from officers, councillors and the works team. Again, this is resource intensive for a relatively small group, but of exceptional value to them. This is the case with some of our community engagement that perhaps does not reach a large number of people but the quality of that reach is hugely important to that target group.

An extract from their letter with some of the comments they made to us about their experience.

- o I wanted to thank you so much for your support in helping to improve our lives here and for making us feel more valued as a community.
 - o I have spoken at a full Town Council meeting and at two committee meetings and was always met with respect and friendliness. When you're out of your comfort zone and a little nervous, that means a lot!
 - o The residents were thrilled.
 - o Thank you for taking the time to do that as it makes residents feel seen and cared about. You're always welcome to visit us.
 - o The Town Operations team has helped to build sandbag walls in times of flooding and removed them when necessary, making residents feel less anxious.
 - o We're very fortunate!
- Friends of the cemeteries
 - Promoting community groups -Community Window
 - Inclusivity and diversity group
 - Mayor representing at events, openings and civic events





- Town Councillors represent the Council on outside bodies
- Attend Stakeholder and partner meetings – e.g. museum
- Officers attend area community, business and health forums
- We have working parties, task and finish groups and forum groups which can include members of the public.
- Encourage members of the public to attend and take part in meetings
- Apprentice scheme
- Work experience
- Our Admin Office is also registered as a WODC Safe Space (one of only 29 in Witney) which means that it offers a Safe Place for vulnerable people (such as those with dementia, learning disabilities or mental health needs) when they feel lost, worried or threatened while they're out and about in the town. The safe space is used by a very small minority but is absolutely crucial to those that do use it. It isn't just the elderly that use it. There have been interactions with other age groups that have needed to make use of it.
- Volunteers -Offer volunteer opportunities for community members to engage actively in council-led projects or events, fostering a sense of ownership and involvement
- Fairtrade Town
- Citizen of the Year Awards, acknowledging all the hard work that others do that benefit the town.
- Seasonal competitions –Christmas, Wild Witney etc.
- Cross generational events such as the Switch on event in the gallery room and Schools In Bloom wheelbarrows.
- The potential for resource sharing- such as our thermal camera
- Twinning Association support and promotion
- Collaboration and partnership working – a list of our partners is available on the website. Partnership working also includes initiatives such as Witney in Bloom, Schools in Bloom and the Tiny Forest.
- Although we have no direct business development remit, we do maintain a healthy relationship with local businesses and benefit from sponsorship by local businesses e.g. Christmas Trees and Lights. We have been invited to attend Town Centre forums which we previously facilitated and have recently been invited to the Chamber of Commerce meeting to explore the different services offered by Town and District Councils.
- Our events
- Civic events
- Community events
- 50th Anniversary events



- Promote democratic elections- ensure equal opportunities for people wanting to stand as councillors
- Encourage participation in elections, and in particular, voting in local elections
- Have a web page about what councillors do and how to become one. Promote recruitment of councillors and provide information for candidates
- Support new councillors with training and information that enables them to confidently represent and serve their communities as their elected
- Supporting local groups and events by providing grants and subsidised lettings such as the Music Festival. There has been some interest from the Music Festival and Youth Council in working together to support a 'Day of Culture'. This is a nice example of Community Engagement paying it forward.
- Subsidised Youth Services such as APCAM and The Station - Youth Outreach work to engage with young people we seldom hear from.
- The Mayor's Charities



Objectives

Actions

1. Plan and co-ordinate activities.

- Identify engagement opportunities across the council's activities and committees through internal comms meetings.
- Collaborate in partnerships whenever possible and make the most effective use of our resources
- Consider any possible collaboration/partnership and make the most effective use of our resources

2. Encourage active participation involvement from all communities.

- Ensure accessibility and inclusion are considered for all events
- Advertise events and other engagement in the areas where the target audience go
- Hold appropriate events to encourage attendance from traditionally under-represented groups or areas

3. Be open and creative when consulting.

- Tailor methods of consulting to meet the specific needs of communities – young people , seniors etc
- Define the most appropriate relevant, engaging and successful approaches to consultations.
- Go to where the target audience are and adopt their preferred platforms and formats.

4. Promote transparency and build trust.

- Communicate results from surveys and consultations and ensure they are used to inform the Council's policies, services and decision-making processes.
- Find ways to demonstrate and communicate the impact of responses on the decision-making process and actions taken – such as You Said – We Did
- Ensure our communications are truthful and the information we share is reliable

5. Build relationships.

- Continue to partner and support our community organisations
- Demonstrate support for local community and business where possible by using local suppliers and engaging in relevant forums.
- Continue to organise and attend our own and other community events and be visible and approachable at both

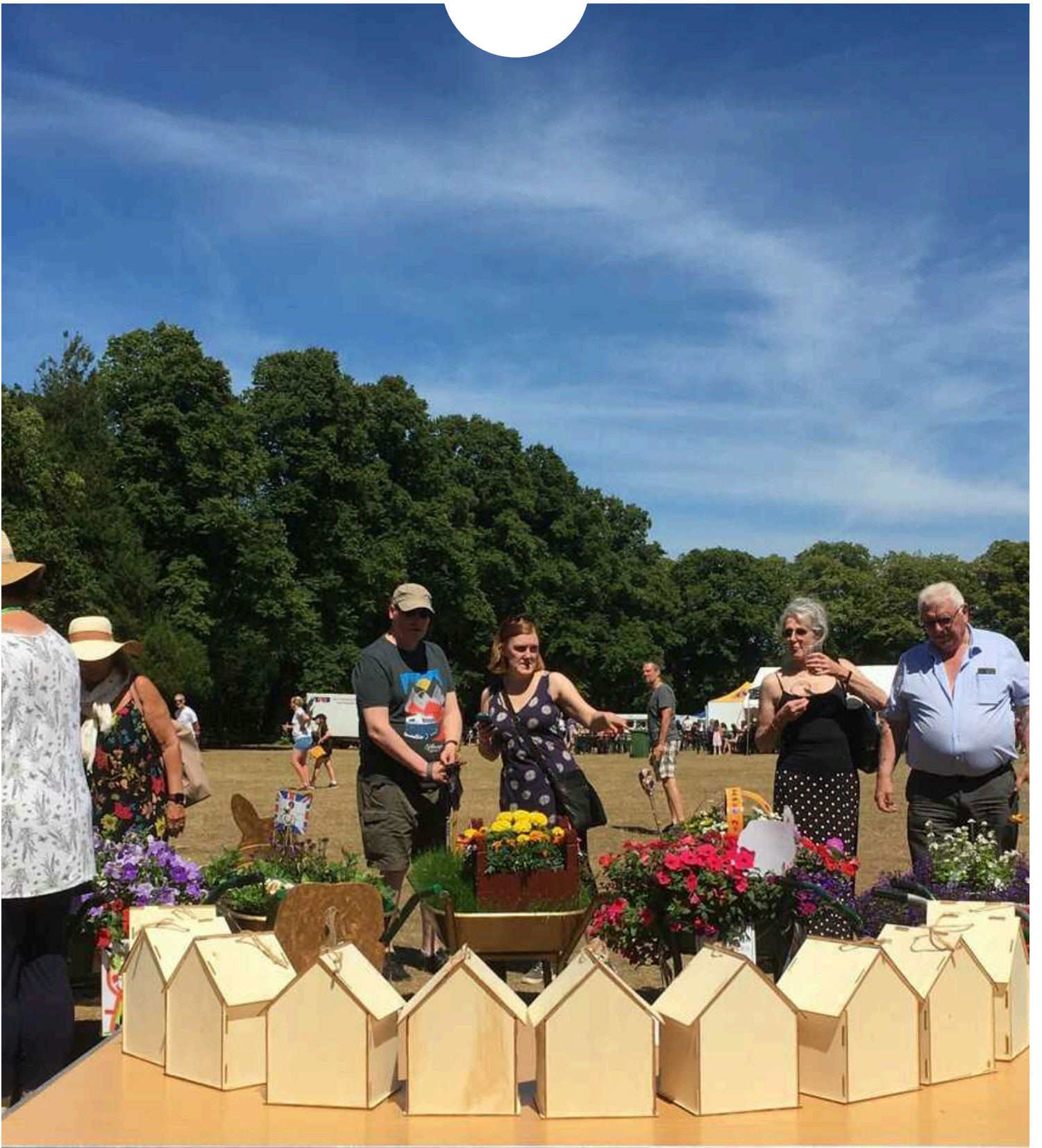
Evaluating and Measuring Success

We need to continuously review our Community Engagement activities and be prepared to be flexible and find new solutions and methods to improve Witney Town Council's relationships with residents.

It can be difficult to evaluate what works well and what approaches are less effective, but we can measure some success through tracking

- Attendance at meetings of the Council and the Annual Town Meeting.
- Number of responses received to surveys, the quality of those responses and diversity of the respondents – age, ethnicity etc.
- Metrics from the website and interactions on social media platforms
- Attendance at Witney Town Council events





WITNEY
TOWN COUNCIL

**Witney Town Council
Community Engagement Strategy 2024**

Summary Report for Committee

Prepared by: Administrative Support Assistant – Communities & Planning | Date: 22nd May 2025

Introduction

The 2025 Annual Satisfaction Survey gathered feedback from **344 residents**, including detailed age data and over 160 comments. The goal was to assess perceptions of services delivered by Witney Town Council, identify strengths, and inform areas for improvement.

Demographics: Who Responded?

Age Group Breakdown (334 responses):

Age Range	Count	Percentage
17 or younger	122	36.5%
60 or older	114	34.1%
50–59	33	9.9%
40–49	23	6.9%
30–39	26	7.8%
21–29	8	2.4%
18–20	8	2.4%

Key Insights:

The largest responding group was under 18, highlighting fantastically strong engagement from young people. There was also significant feedback from older residents (60+). Young adults (18–29) were underrepresented.

What the Council is Doing Well

Highest Rated Services:

Service	Avg. Score (out of 4)	Resident Feedback Highlights
Civic Events (e.g. Remembrance)	3.06	Praised as respectful and well-executed.
Corn Exchange	2.99	Community hub for music and activities.
Christmas Lights	2.92	Popular seasonal feature.
Community Events	2.80	Family-friendly and inclusive.
Recreation Grounds/Open Spaces	2.75	Enjoyed by families and walkers.

Positive Mentions in Comments:

- Floral displays continue to be appreciated.
- Witney Lake and the Country Park received praise for recent improvements.
- The printed newsletter was well received — residents requested a wider distribution.

Areas for Improvement

Area	Issue Type	Details
Communication	Awareness Gap	Residents reported being unaware of events and how to engage.
Street Furniture	Condition	Reports of poorly maintained benches, bins, and shelters.
Grass Cutting & Pitch Maintenance	Recreation Grounds	Multiple comments, including from youth sports participants and local football clubs, highlighted inconsistent or inadequate grass cutting on playing fields. Specific issues were raised about Burwell Field and The Leys, where long grass or poor conditions affected regular training and matches.
Youth Provision	Lack of structured spaces	High youth participation revealed a lack of safe, age-appropriate facilities.

Feedback Themes

Positive suggestions:

- More daytime events for older adults, including affordable meals, games, and community interaction.
- Affordable, regular evening events at the Corn Exchange (e.g. music, quizzes, bingo).
- Strong support for beautification efforts – (more flowers was a common request!)
- Desire to see more done with Marriotts Walk, such as creating a more of an evening culture. Note: *Marriotts Walk is the responsibility of WODC.*

Common concerns:

- Potholes and drainage issues were frequently mentioned. Although they are the responsibility of OCC, many residents still direct complaints to WTC, which highlights the need for clearer signposting on who is responsible for what.
- Confusion over council responsibilities remained a key theme with residents expressing frustration about issues that fall under WODC or OCC, such the High Street improvements, as well as public toilets being insufficient either in number or poorly maintained. They assume they are WTC matters and again reinforces the need for clearer public education on Council roles.
- Cleanliness and littering were also commonly mentioned and pointed to issues in both parks and public areas, with some expressing frustration at the perceived decline in tidiness, particularly in high-footfall areas.
- The pace of visible change or improvement was criticised, a few comments reflected the view that the Town Council is too slow to act on known issues, with some respondents feeling “consulted but not heard.”

Under 18 Feedback

With 122 youth respondents, common themes included:

- Calls for more youth spaces and places to meet.
- Requests for sports areas, music or entertainment venues, and food outlets.
- Feelings of being targeted or moved on unfairly by others when gathering socially.

The survey saw an impressive response from young people; their feedback offers a valuable window into how our younger residents experience Witney, both the opportunities and the limitations. A recurring theme in their comments was the need for more spaces to safely gather and socialise and many young people said they struggle to find places where they can simply “hang out” without having to spend money or feel unwelcome. Suggestions ranged from dedicated youth clubs and drop-in centres to ideas like under-16s events, indoor lounges, or even spaces for gaming and table sports. This desire for a social “third space” - somewhere that is neither home nor school, came through repeatedly.

Food and retail options featured prominently too. Fast food outlets were mentioned frequently, alongside requests for more teen-oriented retail outlets, but these aren’t just about consumption, they’re tied to a sense of independence, belonging, and participation in wider social life.

When it comes to activity and recreation, they were very clear: Witney’s current offering does not meet their needs. There were multiple requests for improved and more accessible sports facilities, particularly AstroTurf pitches, football goals with nets, and basketball courts, some also mentioned underused fields or poor maintenance of recreational grounds as barriers to participation. Larger ideas like an ice rink, bowling alley, and indoor leisure centre upgrades also appeared, showing an appetite for more ambitious, longer-term investment in youth infrastructure!

Several respondents also expressed frustration at being “moved on” or made to feel unwelcome in public spaces and expressed a desire for “people to be nicer to young people.” There were also concerns about the prevalence of litter, the lack of mental health support, and the easy access to energy drinks and vapes — which some suggested could be better controlled. A few responses revealed more awareness of community engagement and decision-making; one young person specifically called for the Youth Council to give teenagers a say in town matters.

Interestingly, there were also a few comments which also mentioned flowers, floral displays, and nice places around town, suggesting that they value aesthetics and would like more attractive public spaces — perhaps places they can be proud of, meet friends, or share on social media. This hints at a desire for visually engaging spots in Witney that help foster a sense of identity and belonging, particularly for teenagers who increasingly use digital spaces to connect with their surroundings.

Reflection and Next Steps

This feedback paints a clear picture: young people in Witney are looking for recognition, representation, and real spaces — both physical and social — in which they can thrive. They are asking to be seen as part of the community, not as an afterthought.

In response, there is a strong case for exploring the creation of a dedicated youth hub — a welcoming venue designed in collaboration with young people themselves. Finally, ongoing investment in all-weather sports pitches, creative programming for teenagers, and better communication around what is already available would go a long way in addressing the gaps they’ve identified.

Young people in Witney are asking for more than entertainment — they’re asking to be respected, included, and listened to. Their feedback highlights both immediate needs (safe, welcoming places to gather) and broader desires (to be taken seriously in decisions that affect them).

While certain requests — like high street shops etc — are outside the direct control of Witney Town Council, they still offer useful insight into how young people define a vibrant, youth-friendly town. What is within the Council’s remit is the potential to support inclusive community spaces, co-design youth events, and provide platforms for their voices — such as Witney Youth Council or regular youth forums.

Geographic Reach- Postcode Analysis

A total of 253 respondents (out of 344 total) provided postcodes. The purpose was to check geographic spread and ensure feedback was collected primarily from Witney residents.

Key Findings:

- The vast majority of respondents listed postcodes starting with OX28, which covers Witney town and its immediate neighbourhoods, and a small number of entries were from OX29 and OX18 postcodes.
- A few entries were clearly outside the Witney catchment (e.g. OX12, OX3) or were incomplete, and some participants wrote “I live in Witney but prefer not to say” or entered locations such as “Henry Box School” (suggesting student or family-based participation). Even one incredibly helpful response of “Ban scooter at SK8 park”.
- Approximately 85–90% of postcode responses appear to come from within Witney (OX28), and around 10–15% may be from adjacent areas or non-residents.

Recommendation:

- While responses from nearby areas still provide valuable context (many use Witney’s services), future communications could further clarify that the survey is intended for Witney town residents only.
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Conclusion

This year’s survey shows a positive public perception of core services, particularly events, venues, and green spaces. The response from under-18s was exceptionally high, showing that our younger population is eager to be heard. By improving communication, clarifying roles of each Council, and focusing on inclusivity, Witney Town Council can continue to build trust and engagement across all age groups.

Each Committee will receive detailed analysis and comments relating to their services during the next Committee meeting cycle.

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WITNEY
TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Witney Youth Council held at 4pm in the Gallery Room, The Corn Exchange, Witney on Monday 28th April 2025.

Youth Councillors Present:

Six Youth Councillors

Witney Town Council Mentors Present:

Cllr R Smith (Witney Town Council Leader)

Witney Town Council Officers Present:

P Inness – Communications and Community Engagement Officer

A Hathaway – Admin Assistant for Communities and Engagement

Minutes

1. **Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from 1 Youth Council mentor.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

Youth Councillors were advised that if anyone knew or had any involvement in any of the items being discussed at the meeting, they should say it at this point.

There were no declarations of interest.

3. **Minutes**

Members agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 10th March 2025 were correct.

4. **Guest Participation**

There were no participants at the meeting to speak with the Youth Council.

5. **Event Surveys**

The Youth Council viewed the amended draft made by the Witney Youth Council Administrator and confirmed the changes with one further amendment. This survey would be added as a QR code to the poster going to the schools for daily slides.

Resolved: That, the Witney Youth Council Administrator amends the survey and creates a daily slide example to be signed off.

6. **Youth-Led Cultural Festival**

Youth Councillors agreed to take part in the Witney Carnival (12th July) with bracelet making and rock painting. Materials for the crafts would be partly out of the Youth Council budget. Pre-made bracelet examples would be brought from previous activities carried out in school.

The Chair of the Youth Council added that the youth councillors could promote their stall by walking

around the carnival and talking to younger people. They encouraged youth councillors to spread the news to their younger siblings and families.

Youth Council members agreed to use the free 4-hour session at the Corn Exchange which had been agreed by the town council for use in their cultural event. Additionally, they asked whether this could be booked for Saturday 25 October instead of the Friday (United Nation's Day) as this may be more available for young people. Town Council Officers were to update whether this date is free.

For this 4-hour session, the youth councillors discussed either a Talent Show, a Disco, or a performance/production. Further details would be confirmed in future youth council meetings.

Resolved: That, the Youth Council join the Town Council at the Witney Carnival stall and help with crafts.

That, the Corn Exchange Main Hall be booked for a Youth Council Event in October and details be discussed in a future Youth Council meeting.

7. Youth Council Logo Survey

All attending Youth Councillors filled in the survey and the logo would be assembled by the Witney Youth Council Administrator based on their feedback.

Resolved: That, the logo made from the survey results be assembled by the Witney Youth Council Administrator and sent to all youth councillors.

8. 80th Anniversary of VE Day

Four youth councillors were interested in joining VE Day activities on the 8th of May 2025.

9. Big Green Week – Grandmother's Recipes

Youth Councillors were made aware of Big Green Week and invited to share recipes.

10. Items brought to members attention by the Town Clerk or Public

No items were raised for discussion by members of the public or the Town Clerk.

11. Items for Future Agenda

The Chair discussed contacting the nearest Youth Councils and inviting them to a meeting to build connections and ask questions. The Witney Youth Council Administrator was tasked with finding a list and bringing it to the next Youth Council meeting.

12. Date of the Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Youth Council was due in June 2025. The exact date and time would be conducted for a survey sent to all youth council members.



Town Clerk

The meeting closed at 17.12 pm.