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NOTICE OF

WITNEY ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

WEDNESDAY, 11TH MARCH, 2020

MAIN HALL, THE CORN EXCHANGE, WITNEY

7.30 PM

[Refreshments available from 6.45pm]

AGENDA

1. **Introductions and Welcome from the Mayor of Witney, Cllr Duncan Enright**
2. **Official Noting of the Town Councillor apologies for Absence**
3. **To receive and approve the Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting of 13 March 2019** (Pages 3 - 12)
(copies available at the meeting or from the Town Hall). Matters Arising from the minutes not covered by other agenda items.
4. **Thames Valley Police**
A Local Police Officer will attend the meeting to give a brief report and answer questions on any relevant matters raised at the meeting.
5. **To receive Reports from Each of the Council's Standing Committees** (Pages 13 - 26)
6. **Open Forum to discuss matters raised by the general public at the Meeting**
(Notice of such matters would be appreciated and should be sent to the Town Clerk).
7. **Town Mayor's closing remarks and thanks**

COUNCILLOR D S T ENRIGHT
Town Mayor, Witney Town Council

Such persons only as registered as local government electors for the town will be entitled to vote at the meeting but the meeting will be open to the public during the proceedings unless the Town Meeting by resolution otherwise directs. **Before speaking it will be necessary to give your name and address.**

After the formal business of the meeting you are invited to meet local Councillors to participate in a youth provision focus group and discuss the work of the Town Council and town issues.

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WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL

Wednesday 13 March 2019

At the Forty-Sixth ANNUAL TOWN MEETING held in the Corn Exchange, Witney at 7.30pm on the above date

Present

Town Mayor: Councillor Brenda Churchill

Councillors:	A K Beames	D S T Enright
	C Brown	A D Harvey
	H W Chirgwin	L M Price
	H B Eaglestone	

Officers:	Town Clerk	Democratic Services Officer
	Office Manager	Operations & Estates Officer
	Communications Officer	Project and Cemeteries Officer
	Administrative Assistant	Public Halls Officer

CLlr Alvin Adams – West Oxfordshire District Council
CLlr Jeanette Baker – West Oxfordshire District Council
CLlr Rosa Bolger – West Oxfordshire District Council
CLlr A Coles – West Oxfordshire District Council

Representing Thames Valley Police: Insp Steve Hookham & Sgt Philippa Payne

Representatives from the following organisations:

Witney Model Club
Lower Windrush Choral Society
Witney Talking News
Windrush Bike Project
Lunchtime Recitals
Witney Woodland Volunteers
West Oxfordshire Community Transport

74 Members of the public

1. INTRODUCTION

The Town Mayor welcomed the public to the meeting and thanked everyone for coming.

She proceeded to give a report of her year as Mayor, the highlight of which had been the Armistice Centenary Commemorations.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for their absence from Witney Town Councillors were received from Cllrs Dorward, Doughty, King, Morris, Temple and Woodward.

3. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 March 2018, copies of which were available at the meeting, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4. **MATTERS ARISING**

There were no matters arising from the minutes of the meeting held on 14 March 2018 to be discussed at the meeting.

5. **THAMES VALLEY POLICE**

The Mayor welcomed Inspector Hookham and Sergeant Payne to the meeting. Inspector Hookham explained that he was the Neighbourhood Inspector for the area, and would give an overview of current work and priorities.

The current local priorities were domestic violence, child drug exploitation, child sex exploitation and burglaries. They were working in partnership with other areas. The biggest priority was child drug exploitation. "County Lines" came out of the main cities and Oxford and Witney had good access from London. Initially the organisers had been easy to pick up but it was becoming increasingly harder. Young males and even the elderly were being exploited. The Police worked with social landlords and social services and schools, but this was still a big problem. Child exploitation linked in to this.

The trend for burglaries was upwards in the area. Again this was difficult to manage as offenders were coming across borders.

Witney officers had taken a lead in identifying offenders in the County Lines; however this was not a finished piece of work. Arrests left a gap in the market which would be filled by someone. The police were conscious of what came with this issue such as carrying weapons; the police did have stop and search powers and currently were running a knife amnesty.

In terms of crime figures, last year there had been 8 weapons offences, and 13 this year. Violence against the person had increased to 80% (Including domestic violence) and domestic burglaries had increased from 43 last year to 50 this year. There had also been a spate of commercial burglaries. These were the challenges that the police were facing.

Once again there had been some restructuring and Kidlington had gone back to the Cherwell Team. There were now 2 problem solving teams in West Oxfordshire. There were a few vacancies in the teams and 2 new PCSOs were about to start work. The teams also had increased presence in the high time economy.

Inspector Hookham invited questions.

Cllr Harvey raised the following question on behalf of a resident:

Q1: Is there going to be any extra policing in Witney? The police are already overstretched. I had reason to try and use the outside phone of the Police station in Witney recently which I was later told did not work! Also there are no cells at Witney and the police station closes at an early hour. The population of Witney is increasing & yet our

public services are decreasing, particularly the Police. I predict there will be a 'free for all of crime if nothing is done to increase Police presence & the time it takes them to attend improved. There should be a proper police presence over Friday/Saturday nights in Witney town centre.

Inspector Hookham replied that there were no plans to increase police numbers. His team was the Neighbourhood Team and not Armed Response and they were trying to direct their targets correctly. In terms of custody at the station, this had been closed for a number of years. People requiring custody would be taken to Abingdon or Banbury. There were always Officers at the front desk. There had not been a decrease in police numbers.

In terms of the night time economy, the police were working with licence holders to manage issues but ultimately it was the licence holders' responsibilities.

Q2. Can members of the public go to the police station?

Inspector Hookham replied yes. There were officers in the station and the public could also call via 101 and e-mail too.

Q3. I see a lot of speeding at night time but not any mobile speed cameras outside of office hours?

[Inspector Hookham also took a question on speeding at Burwell Drive at the same time.]

Inspector Hookham stated that when they engaged with the public, speeding and parking were always top of the list. The police took speeding seriously and asked the community to help via community speed watch. The police provided training and loaned their equipment and the volunteers fed back information to the police. Persistent offenders would receive a visit and the police would then carry out an enforcement exercise in the area.

60% of people speeding in a certain area were in fact residents of that area. If residents curbed their speed, generally speeding would drop. He encouraged the community to do data gathering.

Q4. People still drove too fast on Curbridge Road where there had been a tragic accident a few years ago. The speed indicator was on all of the time – did the police receive data from that?

Inspector Hookham replied that the speed indicators were just indicators.

Q5. As a young person I'm very concerned about drugs – can the police stop drugs coming into schools or is this something the schools should be doing?

Inspector Hookham replied that the police always tried to support schools. He stressed that the offenders were the small minority. However, the police needed to talk to the peers in the community as they didn't talk the same language as young males. He strongly encouraged young people to come and talk to the police and engage with them. The drug pushers were very good at spotting vulnerability in young males and the police were tying with the schools to put intervention in before this happened.

Q6. I would like to thank the Inspector and his team for their excellent work in what must often seem a pretty thankless and difficult job.

Inspector Hookham said that he would take this back to the Neighbourhood team.

6. **REPORTS FROM EACH OF THE COUNCIL'S STANDING COMMITTEES**

A) Planning and Development Committee – Cllr Alan Beames

Cllr Beames presented his overview of the year to the public. Whilst the Planning Committee had dealt with a significant number of household applications, he wanted to draw people's attention to wider issues such as housing and infrastructure, in particular the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, which was currently running several consultations.

Cllr Beames also highlighted longer term projects such as link roads and the Shores Green junction, which he hoped would take some pollution out of the town.

He invited questions from the public.

Q1. When Hailey Road had been closed, it highlighted just how much it was used and Dry Lane was very congested. Could we focus on these external links and also Shores Green?

Cllr Beames agreed that Shores Green would take traffic out of the town and if a West End Link road was built a lot of the traffic would also be taken out of the town.

Q2. I'm Cllr Rosa Bolger, District Councillor for Witney East. I'm glad you mentioned pollution. We've launched a petition to get Shores Green done. As Chair of the Planning Committee, what can you do to put pressure on this?

Cllr Beames explained that he felt the best mechanism for this was via the Witney Traffic Advisory Committee which reported into the Planning Committee.

Q3: As a resident, in the 20 years I've lived in Witney, the commute has got longer and longer. Does the Council have any power to make things such as a park and ride and Shores Green happen?

Cllr Beames explained that the Town Council did not have direct power but the Traffic Advisory Committee could lobby WODC and OCC.

B) Estates Management Committee – Cllr Jim King

The Mayor explained that due to ill health, Cllr King could not be present and she would therefore present the report on his behalf. The report covered the public halls, phase 2 development of the Corn Exchange, West Witney Sports and Social Club and the Cemeteries. She invited questions from the public.

Q1. I'm here on behalf of the ICE Centre and there are issues with parking outside to collect my son.

The Town Clerk replied that this matter was being dealt with by the Council's and ICE Centre's solicitors and she could not comment more at this time.

Q2. Is there any possibility that we can have a theatre in this building again? There is a serious lack of a good stage. The only other place is the Methodist Church which has restrictions on what can be performed.

The Mayor replied that a working party was being set up in May after the elections and they would invite all former users.

Cllr Enright stated that this in his view was what phase 2 was about: a stage! He also invited everyone along to the next "Friends of the Cemeteries Group" meeting on 19 March at 10am in the Corn Exchange.

C) Sports and Recreation Committee – Cllr Howard Chirgwin

Cllr Chirgwin presented his report to the public. This covered recreation areas, play areas, allotments, the Lake and Country Park and future plans. He invited any questions.

Q1. I'm a member of the fire service. Regarding Langel common, the wet meadows and the lake and country park, last year we had a very good summer but there was a huge spike in fires from undesignated barbecues. Could there be dedicated barbecue areas set up to stop the fire service having to go and put fires out?

Cllr Chirgwin replied that this is why a working party had been set up and the Fire Service could be invited.

Q2. Park Run was a great initiative but I also want to thank the Witney Woodland Volunteers for their work keeping the area tidy. Do you have a time frame for when the issues with Park Road Play area will be resolved, as you are right, it has been going on far too long?

Cllr Chirgwin replied that the Council was pushing the solicitors as hard as possible to get this sorted but he could not give an exact time frame.

D) Community Services Committee – Cllr Craig Brown

Cllr Brown presented his report to the public. This covered events, including the Armistice Centenary Commemorations, the In Bloom competition, benches, bus shelters, communication (including the Town Council app) and the Youth Council.

Q1. Not all of us have apps. Where else can we get information?

Cllr Brown replied that this was just one way of communication on offer, people could ring or visit the Town hall at any time.

Q2: I have given my e-mail address to the Council and I have the app – which I find hard to use- but I am not getting any communication from the Council.

Cllr Brown acknowledged this and promised that this would be looked into.

E) Policy and Resources Committee – Cllr David Harvey

Cllr Harvey explained that he was not going to read his report as he was sure that people had already looked at the copies on the tables. Broadly speaking, this Committee took reports from all of the other committees and looked at how the Council could fund things. It was not the Town Council's money; it was the taxpayer's money.

However, spending had to be balanced and therefore the budget was set annually. This year the Town Council had raised the precept by 5 pence per week. The Town Council tried very hard to use the money wisely. One major grant funded project had been the West Oxfordshire Community Transport buses of which the Town Council was very proud.

The Council received no funding from central government, so it was all about getting the balance right. The Council was under pressure all of the time from other tiers of government to take on services which would mean spending more money. The Council therefore had to say no as it was the public's money not the Council's.

Cllr Harvey opened the floor to questions.

Q1. It was reported in the Witney Gazette that the Town Council would help the Muzo Academy find new premises when they lost their old one. What happened?

The Mayor advised that they had found a place on their own. She had offered to help and had given them telephone numbers and had done everything she could.

Q2. The new premises is only temporary.

The Mayor said that she had been very supportive.

Q3. The people who are using the WOCT bus service are very appreciative of the service and the Town Council should be proud of this.

7. OPEN FORUM TO DISCUSS MATTERS RAISED BY THE GENERAL PUBLIC AT THE MEETING

Cllr Harvey as the Leader of the Council read out questions that had been received before the meeting and that had not already been covered, and provided answers as detailed below:

Q1. Please can you provide more information on what constitutes the "Corn Exchange Phase II Redevelopment" - more specifically, will this redevelopment allow for provision of a more traditional stage (not the existing platform) that will enable the Corn Exchange to be used by community theatre groups.

Whilst this had already been discussed, Cllr Harvey stated that if he was re-elected in May he would push for a stage at the Corn Exchange.

Q2. The bus shelter in Newland: why has this bus shelter been equipped with such an excruciatingly dysfunctional seat? It is impossible for anyone either to sit on it or to rest their

backside upon it. If Councillors have not experienced this seat, I recommend a visit, when they are feeling strong enough to cope with it. There are much better seats in other bus shelters in the town. Are there any plans to replace it? If not, I urge such a plan upon the Town Council.

Cllr Harvey explained that this matter had been considered by the Community Services Committee on 19 November extract and the seat could not be changed as it would cause other issues.

Q3. Why are there so many shops closing on the Witney High Street and what is the Town Council doing to try to stem / overcome this very visible decline?

Cllr Harvey stated that Witney was fortunate as it had fewer shop closures than most other towns. There was not anything that could be done by the Town Council, but the District Council could do more.

Q4. How is Witney Town Council preparing for Brexit? What is Brexit likely to mean for the residents in the short term?

Cllr Harvey stated that the Town Council did not involve itself in international politics.

Q5. More and more houses are being built in and around the outskirts of Witney it would appear no extra infrastructure is being put in to accommodate all these people for example the doctor surgeries have waiting times of over three weeks before I can get an appointment. This is not acceptable.

Cllr Harvey explained that the Planning and Development Committee was consistently pushing for infrastructure before housing development and for it to be put in as early as possible. The Mayor added that the campaign to re-open Deer Park Medical Centre was still running if anyone wanted to join.

Q 6. What is being done about the road systems? The horrendous A40 at any time of day carries too much traffic with over an hour to get to Oxford from Witney being normal, a distance of 12 miles.

It is not enough to just put a new roundabout on the A40 to carry traffic from the new housing estate (Downs Rd end of town) which has already caused 3 car accidents to my knowledge.

This is also putting pressure on the Woodstock Road going out of Witney through Long Hanborough as people are using it to avoid the A40. Coming out of Madley park onto the Woodstock Rd during rush hours is a nightmare with traffic going past the junction of Harvest Way (the main thoroughfare through Madley Park) on a regular basis.

This causes misery and pollution on a daily basis.

Why isn't re-opening the train station at Witney being considered?

Tiny places like Long Hanborough, Coombe, Finstock, Charlbury & Kingham all have train stations and, in my opinion, this is because it suits politicians and the wealthy pockets of Oxfordshire to keep these train stations. It would make perfect sense to re-open Witney train station but we are still considered the 'poor relation' so no politician is supporting such

a plan. When it suits this can be done. It suited to put a rail system in from Oxford Parkway to Marleybone London. Supporting new housing and presumably Bicester Village.

We in Witney have new housing by the bucket load.

Cllr Harvey explained that all of these issues were being dealt with by other tiers of council.

Q7. We are going to be paying the highest increase in council tax possible in our area and yet our services are not improving.

Cllr Harvey referred to his earlier comment that Council Tax was only increasing by 5 pence per week and the Council had increased costs.

Q8. What is being done about all the pot holes around Witney? It seems to be weeks on end before anything is done.

Cllr Harvey shared this frustration but this was a County Council issue. He encouraged everyone to report issues on the Fix My Street website or app.

Q9. What is being done about youth services in our area? What is the strategy?

Cllr Harvey replied that this issue had been raised by Cllr Laura Price in response to which a Youth Forum had been set up, and a very successful first meeting had been held.

Q10. Are there going to be more Doctors surgeries in Witney to accommodate a higher population due to all the new housing?

Cllr Harvey explained that the Town Council had no control over this but the Planning and development Committee would continue to push for such things.

Q11. I am generally pretty satisfied with life in Witney, but would like to raise the issue of the amount of rubbish that is thrown around our very pleasant town. Could the matter of rubbish bins, their numbers and locations, be addressed? In addition, could there be a discussion about organising more citizens' rubbish pick-ups, getting young people to use the bins, and involving local businesses (particular the shops that sell the goods whose packaging makes up a lot of the rubbish we see) in making our environment cleaner and tidier?

Cllr Harvey advised that there was a group called Witney Community Litter Pick and also Madley Park residents association did regular litter picks. The Town Council has a rolling system of replacement for bins in its own areas. Other authorities also had responsibilities – it was something that was shared between authorities.

Q12. I am generally pretty satisfied with life in Witney, but would like to raise the issue of the amount of rubbish that is thrown around our very pleasant town. Could the matter of rubbish bins, their numbers and locations, be addressed? In addition, could there be a discussion about organising more citizens' rubbish pick-ups, getting young people to use the bins, and involving local businesses (particular the shops that sell the goods whose packaging makes up a lot of the rubbish we see) in making our environment cleaner and tidier?

Cllr Harvey advised that this issue would be referred to the County Council at the next Witney Traffic Advisory Committee.

Cllr Harvey invited questions from the floor.

Q13. Is the Council going to do anything about wet wipes blocking pipes this summer?

Cllr Harvey commented that this was a national problem. The Town Council did not have an Environmental Department but it could be passed to the Environment and Scrutiny Committee at the District Council in due course.

Q14. Picking up on the earlier question about Newland bus shelters seat, could a councillor please come and try to sit on it and bring a first aider?

Cllr Harvey replied that he would happily come along to try it out if the resident spoke to him after the meeting.

8. **TOWN MAYOR'S CLOSING REMARKS AND THANKS**

The Mayor thanked the public for coming and also Richmond Villages for serving the refreshments and also the Town Hall staff for their work that evening.

The meeting closed at 9.14pm.

Chairman

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WITNEY ANNUAL TOWN MEETING 2020

REPORT TO THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING FROM YOUR MAYOR, DUNCAN ENRIGHT

Witney is a wonderful town, and it has been my privilege to serve as its mayor for most of the last year. I am grateful to the officers, former mayors and councillors, including my predecessor Cllr Churchill, and current councillors, for their support. I am particularly pleased to thank my Deputy Mayor Cllr Aitman for her help this year.

As this council has a new administration, which you elected for four years in 2019, we have had a chance to think again about our priorities. As the leader and committee chairs explain in their reports, our priorities are driven by asking everyone in Witney for their views and priorities, as part of a One Witney plan.

It seemed to me as Mayor, in a year that has brought so much to divide us, that my role should be to unite the town in the things we care about. That's why I have put first supporting the community in Witney, before the essential job of representing Witney outside the town. I have played a role in reshaping the business of the council, and finally organised events and initiatives to raise funds for four local charities: Witney Woodland Volunteers, The Wychwood Project, Friends of Springfield School, and Oxfordshire Mind.

Supporting community takes many guises, and I have attended many dozens of business openings and re-openings, school events, local clubs and society events, and civic functions. There are so many highlights in our fabulous town, but ones that involved a bit of singing included the Witney Pride Picnic, Witney Carnival, Witney Music Festival, LibFest, Richmond Villages Music afternoon, Witney Day Centre, and Ceewood Hall Christmas Lunch (a legendary event that will live long in memory, also attended by Cllrs Coles, Price and Bolger!) I would like to praise in particular our service clubs including the magnificent team at Rotary for their huge efforts across the town.

I have represented Witney at events in our neighbouring towns and in our beloved city Oxford. I also have the privilege of working with our twin town mayors in Unterhaching and Le Touquet, and on the first weekend in April I hope you can join us for some of the events to celebrate 30 and 40 years of twinning with them. On the days before, during and after leaving the European Union, we flew their flags and the town flag to demonstrate our continued friendship, despite any national political issues. I have also tried to make sure our District and County Council colleagues are aware of what is happening in town, and to encourage people to work together.

As Mayor I chair the Council, and it has been a pleasure to see more people attending our meetings in the slightly less crowded Gallery Room of the Corn Exchange (we still use our

historic chamber above the Town Hall for meetings too). I will leave it to our brilliant councillors to describe the work we have been doing on your behalf, and on your instructions.

Finally, I am pleased to say that raising the profile and funds for the charities continues. I will be holding further events between now and May. The Hedgehog Day in Autumn was a huge success, and something we will build on in future. As we face the Climate Emergency, we must think hard about our environment, which is why I have been very impressed to see so many councillors and residents coming forward with ideas, including an expansion of tree planting around the town and district. If you wish to contribute to this or any other area of town life, please don't hesitate to contact your councillors, or me as mayor.

Cllr Duncan Enright

WITNEY ANNUAL TOWN MEETING 2020

REPORT TO THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING FROM LEADER OF THE COUNCIL AND CHAIR OF POLICY, GOVERNANCE AND RESOURCES COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE – CLLR ROSA BOLGER

As Leader of the Witney Town Council I am proud to introduce a year of hard work by our Councillors and officers, in which a great deal has been achieved. Our committee chairs have prepared excellent reports on their areas. I'd like to thank them for their work this year.

We have moved all of our main Council meetings to the Corn Exchange this year, to make them more accessible, and we have all been pleased to see increased attendance from Witney residents. You are welcome to attend our meetings and we value your contributions.

We are delighted to welcome a number of new officers to the Council team in the last 12 months. We were pleased to create new posts for the Venue Manager, as well as a Compliance & Environment Officer to help the council and our partners meet their statutory responsibilities.

Our draft strategic plan, informed by people in Witney through a widespread consultation, prioritises action in six areas:

A Vibrant Local Economy; an Engaged & Supported Community; a Beautiful Witney; a Forward-Looking Town Council; an Empowered Community; and a Respectful Community.

We have set a budget for the year to come that makes progress on the things our town needs and that we all care about. The Town Council share of Council Tax will rise just over a pound a month for the average home, to pay for the priorities you told us were needed and to invest in the future of our town. This plan includes some long-awaited and long-term projects, including the new future of the lovely Corn Exchange. It also includes steps towards zero-carbon Witney and a much-needed investment in our children and youth services.

I was proud to chair a packed public meeting in the Corn Exchange in the summer to discuss the Climate Emergency, with experts from across the County. Since then I have chaired our newly formed Climate and Biodiversity Sub Committee, hearing from people from Witney and beyond, working with officers, and putting in place the plans we need.

The Policy, Governance and Finance Committee is chaired by the Leader. We've revised the grants budget to encourage more groups in town to help build a stronger community. We have been pleased to support activities including the Town Twinning, and we flew the flags of our twin towns, and that of our own town, when the UK left the European Union as a sign that we remain committed to our twin towns.

Making the grants process more accessible has meant we have been able to support many local organisations; we continue to support our town band, the Citizen's Advice, Volunteer Link Up and we have funded the continuation of our town's much loved big community events, including the carnival, Lib Fest and the Witney Music Festival. We've also been pleased to receive many requests for support from local environmental organisations, and have proudly supported the Witney Woodland Volunteers and XR Witney, to name a few.

I'd like to thank the Town Clerk and her team for the professional way the finances of the Council have been managed this year. At a time when much is going on, it is good to see them receive a clean audit and remain in a healthy position to face future challenges.

Cllr Rosa Bolger, Leader

WITNEY ANNUAL TOWN MEETING 2020

REPORT TO THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING FROM CHAIR OF THE HALLS & GREEN SPACES COMMITTEE – CLLR VICKY GWATKIN

This is a new Committee, which amalgamated the responsibilities of the former Sport & Recreation and Estates Committee, meeting six times a year. It deals with public halls notably the Corn Exchange and Burwell Hall, cemeteries, burial responsibilities, closed churchyard and war memorial obligations, all recreation grounds, parks and public open spaces, sports activities upon any recreational ground and allotments.

An Empowered Community

An important part of our work over the past few months has been building relationships and trust. As a committee we are very keen to support and facilitate community initiatives, recognising the time and efforts devoted by many volunteers within our community.

We have met with many clubs and associations to better understand their needs and remain keen to proactively work with them going forward.

We have worked with Parkrun to improve facility access and are hoping to help them address the winter viability of their run route.

The Council hopes to take on additional sport pitches at Madley Park, offering better changing facilities, and potentially social facilities, in the hope of providing a more secure and suitable home for one of our football teams.

A Respectful Community

The committee was privileged to be able to make the decision to have Lucy Harris added as the final name on the Witney War Memorial, allowing Lucy's role, and more generally the role of women in periods of conflict, to be official recognised and remembered.

Accessibility and equality of access has been a focus of the committee. We have arranged for a smooth path to be installed from Buttercross works footpath to the Leys to facilitate older residents. We have also funded disabled ramps at West Witney and the Leys Bowls Clubs.

We have worked with Friends of the Cemeteries to improve the reliability of access to Tower Hill cemetery.

An Engaged and Supported Community

As part of the committee's rolling program of investment, the Council is in the process of upgrading five of Witney's play areas at King George's, Fieldmere Close and Moorland Road with smaller improvements at the Leys and Burwell Recreation Ground. Initial conversations

have taken place on planned improvements to the Leys skatepark and wheeled sports provision in general.

At their request, we have increased the number of junior pitches available on the Leys for the Witney Vikings girls football team.

The committee will continue to work with Witney Swifts to make amendments to the cricket pitch at West Witney following their decision to relocate their first and second team from the Leys next season.

A Vibrant Local Economy

The Corn Exchange Working Party has been formulating a vision for the long-term future of the Corn Exchange. Arts consultants have been appointed to look at acoustics, lighting, retractable seating, capacity, accessibility and the potential for installing a café and bar.

The Council is hopeful that improvements planned for the Corn Exchange will make it a focal point for the whole community and provide a 'destination' arts facility we can all be proud of.

A Beautiful Witney

Climate change is obviously an important issue for Witney going forward and is now taken into consideration in all the decisions made by the Halls & Green Spaces committee. Whilst Council owned land is overseen by this committee, there is considerable cross over with the Stronger Communities committee who primarily deal with tree planting and other 'green' initiatives through the Climate Change & Biodiversity Subcommittee.

Last year the Council worked alongside the Witney Land Army and the Wychwood Project to sow an experimental wildflower border on King George's Field. If this is successful, consideration will be given to extending to other council owned green space, and further wildflower planting is planned for Witney Cemetery.

A Forward Looking Town Council

A key objective of this committee has been, and continues to be, improving the sports facilities within Witney. One of the first actions taken was to review the Council's sports strategy for the town by recommissioning a sports consultant. This has coincided with similar reviews at District and County Council level.

Sports consultants KKP have been commissioned to deliver local football facility plans (LFFPs) by the FA for its National Football Facilities Strategy. This has been delivered over four tranches of local authority and the Town Council is in the final tranche. LFFPs set the ten-year vision for football facilities in each local authority and will drive community investment. These plans will include commitments to affiliated football but also will invest in social, recreational and other forms of football delivery in a range of settings and with a variety of partners (including multi-sport facilities).

The Council has and will continue to work hard to have a voice in these consultations in the hope of securing desperately needed funding for Witney, as a sports centre for an expanding population - not just in Witney but also in surrounding villages. This may take a little longer than initially hoped, but it is important the right decisions are made and that the Council does not place the town at a disadvantage by moving too quickly.

The Committee has also been working to improve community access to existing sports facilities, pushing the District Council for a 4G pitch to be placed at West Witney and striving to provide the very best for the town! To focus this drive and demonstrating the Council's commitment to improvement, the Sports Strategy Sub Committee has recently been set up.

A very complex issue has been the legal dispute around Park Road playground. The Committee understands the importance of this area to the immediate community and is doing everything possible to ensure something is in place as soon as possible.

Cllr Vicky Gwatkin, Chair of Halls and Green Spaces Committee

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WITNEY ANNUAL TOWN MEETING 2020

REPORT TO THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING FROM CHAIR OF THE STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE – CLLR LUCI ASHBOURNE

This committee meets six times a year and is primarily concerned with maintaining infrastructure, organising Civic events, and helping facilitate community led events. It supports the Youth Council and oversees the Council's communication and publications and is committed to implementing good joint working practices with other principal authorities across the town, bringing out the best in Witney, and ensuring that the people of the town are the primary benefactors of council decisions.

An Empowered Community

The committee has been helping to make Witney a safer, cleaner and more welcoming town through a variety of initiatives, including deciding on the best use of funding from the District Council for 'community clean-up' use. Through consultation, the committee will identify various local groups and organisations that could play a part in this clean-up, and share funding across them, enabling the residents of Witney to take a hands-on approach to creating a clean, green and appealing town.

The Town Council has also been involved in making Witney safer, working in conjunction with local County Councillor Laura Price to set up a community Speedwatch initiative – again, empowering residents to take responsibility for making Witney's roads safer for drivers and pedestrians alike.

An Engaged and Supported Community

The Committee has been taking steps to make sure that the people of Witney are proud of their town, and are engaged as an active part of it, so that the Town Council can be as representative of the people it serves as possible. To this end, councillors have initiated Witney's first cross-party, cross-authority residents' surgeries, which have taken place in the Corn Exchange on Saturday mornings. Bringing together councillors from the Town, District and County to hear people's concerns and issues, these have been highly well-received events which have gone a considerable way to boosting residents' faith in their local representatives.

Other efforts to empower and support the people of Witney have included the One Witney plan, setting out the strategic vision of the new Town Council, and which was put to the people for their feedback during the winter consultation stage.

The Committee organised a community Christmas cook up – inviting residents to bring their families along for a ready steady cook style event.

The Stronger Communities committee has also set the wheels in motion for Witney's first ever Community Piano, to be placed in a public location and available to be played by all. The piano, which was donated by a local resident, will be painted according to the designs of a student from Abingdon and Witney College, following a Dragons' Den-style contest to inspire the creative minds of Witney's next generation.

A Vibrant Local Economy

The committee has been proudly taking action to support the many and varied events and initiatives that serve to engage residents, as well as welcoming new visitors to Witney. Our work this year has included the support of grassroots organisations such as Homestart and Guideposts, but also pledging the Council's continued support to West Oxfordshire Community Transport, to whom we have given both our financial and administrative backing.

A Respectful Community

The Council is proud to be celebrating Witney's history, as well as looking to the future, through facilitating the town's celebrations of the 75th anniversary of VE Day this May, to continually developing relations with our twin towns of Unterhaching and Le Touquet. We have also displayed the town's solidarity with the displaced peoples of the world, becoming one of the first local authorities in the country to fly the striking orange and black Refugee Nation flag to mark World Refugee Day last year.

A Beautiful Witney

Through the In Bloom Sub-Committee, the Stronger Communities committee has received excellent feedback on the town's floral displays in summer 2019, receiving a Gold Award for its work on making The Leys a colourful and verdant hub of green space.

The Stronger Communities Committee will also, through its Christmas Sub-Committee, be retendering the town's Christmas lights following discussions on how to provide the festive magic the people of Witney have come to expect, whilst also being progressive and conscientious in terms of environmental impact.

We have been upholding Witney Town Council's newly-declared commitment to climate action through various measures, each seeking to tackle climate change whilst continuing to keep Witney a beautiful and attractive town to live in. These initiatives include the spearheading of England's very first Tiny Forest to be planted on land next to Eton Close this coming Saturday. The prestigious honour of being the first town in the country to plant a Tiny Forest, a worldwide phenomenon, shows the Council's desire to give residents a town that reflects its rural surroundings, and quite literally ground-breaking.

A Forward Looking Town Council

As well as its work for the environmental and ecological future of Witney, the Stronger Communities committee has also been working hard for the social future of Witney, through its establishment of the Youth Services Working Party. This group has been working with

representatives from Witney Youth Council and other relevant stakeholders to help the young people of the town achieve their potential, as well as increasing opportunities for socialising, recreation, and engagement. Witney Town Council has committed a £30k funding pot to support open access organisations and detached youth work, and is building a visual, clear and accessible asset map of education, play, recreation and support services from birth to adulthood.

Cllr Luci Ashbourne, Chair of Stronger Communities

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WITNEY ANNUAL TOWN MEETING 2020

REPORT TO THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING FROM CHAIR OF THE PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE – CLLR SMITH

The Planning & Development Committee meets every three weeks and the main business is responding as consultees to planning and licensing applications that fall within Witney town, and near our borders in neighbouring parishes such as Hailey and Ducklington. We can say 'no objection'; we can say we do not object and make comments or suggestions based on local knowledge or we can raise objections to proposals. Planning permission decisions are then made by officers at the District Council and, where objections are concerned, a committee of councillors, at West Oxfordshire District Council.

Bus Shelters

Last May, the new committee inherited a decision that needed to be made about the bus shelter above Corn Bar on Corn Street. Houses were being built with windows right behind the bus shelter but the builders still hadn't been given permission to move the shelter slightly. Our first meetings therefore involved far more than commenting on planning applications. It made the council think through how to deliver on our responsibility for bus shelters in the town. Bus users on Corn Street were inconvenienced whilst the building was carried out, but we ensured that the developer paid for a new bus shelter and an additional shelter, which has been fitted on Burwell Drive.

Consistency

We are seeing regular planning issues that crop up on the various estates in the town, often to do with covenants on the land that restrict the type of fencing or trees and shrubs, or even windows, that can be installed to replace original features. Our response to WODC each time has been to call for it to enforce the rules consistently across each case. We want see all residents treated fairly, especially where planning rules are restrictive.

We have been assuming that town centre flats will attract residents who do not necessarily have cars, so we do not generally insist on parking spaces for these. Away from the centre, however, we take a dim view of proposals that want to maximise the number of dwellings but really don't have enough parking spaces. We also look out for floor space areas to ensure living standards are adequate.

Active Travel, Connectivity and the Economy

In line the council's recognition of the Climate Emergency, and in the interests of public health, air quality and local productivity, we are a committee that points out opportunities to improve cycling and walking infrastructure. We always check for adequate secure cycle storage in plans for new houses and flats. We advocate for installation of electric car chargers.

We are also concerned with connectivity to rail stations, bus routes and for the A40 to get its long-awaited Shores Green junction, with public transport and cycling options that can flow freely. We are keen that any new park and ride at Eynsham also has buses to and from Witney so that shoppers and clients can use that hub for Witney as the destination.

Sewerage

Whilst not a planning consideration, the developers of sites designated for large developments are beginning to submit planning applications at a time when the local community is becoming aware that Witney's sewerage system is frequently overloaded. Surface water finds its way into the foul water system during heavy rain and the storage tanks overflow. There have been discharges into Colwell Brook and Madley Park Brook as well as the river. The Committee calls for upgrades to the sewage capacity when it responds as a consultee and has deep concern at the prospect of connecting more properties to a system that currently cannot cope. The Committee has additional concerns about the surface water that may be generated by large scale developments.

Infrastructure Development Plan

The Committee has drawn up an Infrastructure Development Plan so that large and small developers can see, alongside WODC and OCC, what Witney really needs. With new estates pencilled in for the East and North of the town and the emerging new community to the West, the Committee intends to keep the need for well-connected roads, footpaths, bus routes, cycleways as well as schools, surgeries and shops at the centre of all discussions. Several areas of Witney really need a community centre, and these are important entries to the plan. We will do our best to work with the other councils to shape Witney for the benefit of all residents.

Cllr Ruth Smith – Chair of Planning & Development Committee