

**MEETING OF THE
WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL**

Held on Monday, 12 April 2021

At 7.00 pm in the Virtual Meeting Room via Zoom

Present:

Councillor J Aitman (Chair)

Councillors:	L Duncan	D Enright
	L Ashbourne	V Gwatkin
	T Ashby	A D Harvey
	R Bolger	M Jones
	D Butterfield	A McMahon
	O Collins	A Prosser
	H Eaglestone	R Smith
Officers:	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
Others:	1 member of the public.	

174 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for absence was received from Cllr J King.

175 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no interests declared by members at the meeting.

176 **MINUTES**

The Council received and considered the minutes of the Council meeting held on 16 February 2021.

Matters Arising

A member was advised there had been no discussion with West Oxfordshire District Council on the Community Zero Waste Roadshow (minute number79(d)). It would take place following this meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Council meeting held on 15 February 2021 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

177 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

The member of the public present did not wish to address the Council.

178 **AN UPDATE FROM WITNEY OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCILLORS AND WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCILLORS**

There were no updates provided at the meeting from West Oxfordshire District and Oxfordshire County Council Councillors.

179 **REPORT BACK FROM THE COUNCILLORS ON THE WORK WITH EXTERNAL BODIES WHERE THEY SERVE AS THE TOWN COUNCIL'S NOMINATED REPRESENTATIVE**

Witney Allotment Association

Cllr Smith advised there had been a new committee elected who were very active; ongoing projects were progressing well and the relationship with the Council was very positive.

Witney Fairtrade Action Group

Cllr Smith had attended the most recent meeting of this group in place of Cllr Enright and reported the group was appreciative that Fairtrade coffee was being sold in the 1863 Café Bar. Information like this was used as evidence when they had to re-apply for Witney's Fairtrade status. The group was also interested in carrying out more community work such as a local procurement workshop, once the Covid pandemic had abated.

180 **CLIMATE, BIODIVERSITY & PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETINGS HELD ON 16 FEBRUARY, 9 MARCH & 30 MARCH 2021**

The Chair of the Committee presented the above minutes to Council and moved their acceptance.

Attention was drawn to minute number P168 from the meeting of 30 March and accompanying note concerning the publication of applicant names on the Councils Committee papers. The Committee had agreed that names should no longer be published due to safeguarding concerns.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Climate, Biodiversity & Planning Committee meetings held on 16 February, 9 March and 30 March 2021 be received and any recommendations therein approved.

181 **SPORT & PLAY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 1 MARCH 2021**

The Chair of the Committee presented the above minutes to Council and moved their acceptance.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Sport & Play Committee meeting held on 1 March 2021 be received and any recommendations therein approved.

182 **HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 8 MARCH 2021**

The Chair of the Committee presented the above minutes to Council and moved their acceptance.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee meeting held on 8 March 2021 be received and any recommendations therein approved.

183 **STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 15 MARCH 2021**

The Chair of the Committee presented the above minutes to Council and moved their acceptance.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Stronger Communities Committee meeting held on 15 March 2021 be received and any recommendations therein approved.

184 **POLICY, GOVERNANCE & FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 22 MARCH 2021**

The Chair of the Committee presented the above minutes to Council and moved their acceptance.

A member queried minute number F151, the resolution appeared to differ from the discussion at the earlier Sport & Play Committee meeting regarding King George's field and West Witney Sports Ground in August. The Town Clerk advised that this Committee had attempted to make the best-informed decision to accommodate the conflicting demands on the Council's pitches during the summer. The issue could be re-visited at the next meeting of the Sport & Play Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 22 March 2021 be received and any recommendations therein approved.

185 **CIVIC ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Council received the report of the Mayor outlining the civic engagements which had taken place since the last meeting.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic it had regrettably been another quiet period, however the Witney Covid-19 Hero Awards were being well received and support had been given to the Rotary Club's End Polio Now Campaign. The Mayor had also attended the virtual inauguration of the High Sheriff of Oxford Imam Monawar Hussain, MBE, whose vision for the year was 'Celebrating Oxfordshire's Heroes' and nominations for groups and businesses had been highlighted.

RESOLVED:

That the Mayor's Civic Announcement report be noted.

186 **TO AGREE A MAYOR ELECT**

The Council reflected on the difficulties of the previous year due to the Covid-19 pandemic and agreed that the current Mayor and Deputy had done an excellent job in unprecedented circumstances. It was only right that they be offered another year to fulfil the roles as actively as possible.

A member proposed Cllr J Aitman as Mayor for the municipal year 2021/22. This was seconded and all were in favour.

RESOLVED:

That Cllr J Aitman be declared Mayor Elect for the municipal year 2021/22.

187 **ANNUAL COUNCIL MEETING**

The Committee received a verbal update from the Town Clerk concerning the Annual Council Meeting.

The Meeting had been scheduled virtually for 12th May 2021 but The Local Authorities & Police & Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority & Police & Crime Panels Meetings) (England & Wales) Regulations 2020 was due to end on 7th May, meaning an in-person meeting would need to take place.

As it was unclear whether this legislation would be extended, Members agreed it was sensible to bring the Annual Council forward to ensure the statutory business of this meeting could take place. As local elections were taking place on Thursday 6th May, Tuesday 4th May was proposed as the new date and accepted by the Council.

RESOLVED:

That Witney Town Council's Annual Council meeting is re-scheduled from Wednesday 12th May to Tuesday 4th May 2021, to be held virtually.

188 **CONTINGENCY PLAN & DELEGATIONS**

The Council received and considered the report of the Town Clerk concerning contingency plans and delegations for the continuation of the Council's democratic process during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Members had already heard that legislation to continue virtual meetings was due to end at the beginning of May and were disappointed that this Council and others across the country had been left in this situation. The decision conflicted with guidance on indoor gatherings and virtual meetings had been hugely beneficial for the Council to continue its work. They had made meetings much more open and accessible to the disabled, working parents and women and they hoped that a High Court judgement, due on 21st April would allow them to continue. A future with the possibility of virtual meetings would be welcomed and the Council should continue to lobby NALC and consider investing in technology to allow this to happen should the legislation be amended.

The Town Clerk advised that the Council had a Duty of Care to Members, Officers and members of the public and although the Council may be able to facilitate a small, socially distanced in-person meeting, was it right to do so while Covid-19 was still in circulation.

The Town Clerk advised that there were delegations in statute which had been re-affirmed by the Council in March 2020, and they could be used again in the decision making process. It was envisaged they would be temporary if required and a fundamental meeting to agree the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) would have to be held in some way at the end of June. By this time, the Government roadmap out of lockdown would indicate in-person meetings should be held without restriction.

The Council agreed, that while in-person meetings were desirable, it was not the right time to implement them, so the delegations should be used in the short-term if they were required but the matter should be discussed at the Annual Council Meeting to offer a clear resolution.

RESOLVED:

1. That delegations in statute to the Town Clerk be re-affirmed as well as those per the Council's Delegations Policy; and,
2. That in principle, and depending on the outcome of the High Court decision on the continuation of virtual meetings, these delegations be used for a temporary period until in-person meetings can be held again; and,
3. That this issue be re-visited at the Annual Council Meeting to be held on Tuesday 4th May 2021.

189 **LOCAL AUTHORITY REMOTE MEETINGS - CALL FOR EVIDENCE/CONSULTATION**

The Committee received notice of an open Government consultation concerning the current provision for remote or hybrid local authority meetings.

Members agreed that town and parish Councils should have the right to choose how they hold their meetings and agreed that officers should enter a response for the Council. Councillors should also submit their own individual thoughts directly.

RESOLVED:

That the Town Council enters a response supporting the current provision to hold meetings remotely or in a hybrid format.

Cllr R Bolger left the meeting at 7.46pm

190 **MEMBERS CODE OF CONDUCT**

The Council received and considered the report of the Town Clerk concerning the Members Code of Conduct which had been adopted in 2019 following the last ordinary elections.

The Town Clerk pointed out that a new national Members Code of Conduct had been released, however the current code was the model which was still recommended and had been adopted by all Oxfordshire District and town/parish Councils for the time being.

RESOLVED:

That Witney Town Council re-affirms the adoption of the current Members Code of Conduct, as circulated.

191 **STANDING ORDERS & FINANCIAL REGULATIONS - REVIEW**

The Council received and considered the revised Financial Regulations provided by the Town Clerk and noted the intention to review Standing Orders in the near future.

Members were advised the new regulations incorporated changes in legislation, regulations and personnel and were based on the recognised model by the National Association of Local Council's (NALC). Once adopted they would assist new officers of the Council in meeting the Council's transparency and financial obligations.

As the Standing Orders contained many technical and statutory parts, they would require further time for review, but would be brought to the Council soon.

RESOLVED:

That the Financial Regulations, as proposed with the report be accepted by Witney Town Council.

192 **CPRE SURVEY ON SEWAGE, FLOODING & WATER ISSUES IN WITNEY**

The Council received correspondence and a survey from CPRE Oxfordshire concerning Sewage, Flooding and Water Issues in Witney.

Members agreed this was an important document which the Council should have an input to, given the recent and continuing problems with these issues in the town.

RESOLVED:

That the response to the survey be delegated to the Town Clerk, in conjunction with the Chair of the Climate, Biodiversity & Planning, Cllr R Smith.

193 **WITNEY COMMUNITY ACTIVATION**

The Council received a verbal update from Cllr L Duncan concerning a fund provided by Oxfordshire County Council for community bike repair pumps and signs.

It was agreed that the signs would require some further investigation and would be a long-term project, but an application for funding should be made for the pumps. They would need to be robust and should be in an area away from residential housing to make them a worthwhile contribution to the active travel infrastructure.

RESOLVED:

1. That Witney Town Council supports Witney Community Activation and agrees that bike repair pumps be installed on land in its ownership; and,

2. That this initiative be delegated to the Deputy Town Clerk to progress in terms of siting and the application for funds from Oxfordshire County Council.

194 **TOWN COUNCIL REBRANDING**

The Council received a project plan for the re-branding, provided by the Communications & Community Engagement Officer. An informal presentation had also been offered to Members ahead of the meeting.

There was agreement that a task and finish group should be created to enable the expedient roll-out across the Council's administrative and operational services.

RESOLVED:

That a task and finish group to assist with roll-out of the Town Council's re-branding be established, the members being Cllrs L Ashbourne, V Gwatkin and O Collins.

195 **GREAT BRITISH SPRING CLEAN**

The Council received information concerning the national Great British Spring Clean campaign.

Members were enthusiastic in supporting the initiative as the community had been invigorated to undertake litter picks during the pandemic lockdowns of the last year. Promotion and awareness of this would continue to highlight the value of these in enhancing areas of the town.

RESOLVED:

That Witney Town Council promotes the Great British Spring Clean on its Website and Social Media platforms, the content being shared by Councillors on their own outlets.

196 **PROJECT UPDATE**

The Council received and considered the report of the Project Officer containing updates on projects at Windrush Place Allotments, West Witney Sports Ground, The Leys, Corn Exchange and Park Road Play Area.

Members were pleased the new Project Officer had hit the ground running and good progress was being made in these areas. There had been some frustration that some of the play equipment earmarked for the play area could not be re-assembled due to health and safety concerns, but new smaller scale schemes, within budget would be presented to the Sport & Play Committee and opening for some part of the summer was still plausible.

RESOLVED:

That the report of the Project Officer be noted.

197 **PROPERTY MATTERS - TOWN HALL, TOWN HOUSE/51 MARKET SQUARE**

The Council received a verbal update from the Town Clerk concerning the Town House and 51 Market Square.

While undertaking work to enable the ground floor of the Town House to be used as offices, the beams between the two floors had been found to be in a poor state of repair and infested with death watch beetles.

The Town Clerk was hopeful this would not be a time heavy project and solutions on how to repair and treat the beams were currently taking place with timber experts, the District Council's Conservation Officer and other professionals. At this stage, there was no indication of cost and although the Landlords of the premises, Witney Town Hall Charity had been made aware of the situation and had pledged some funding, the Town Council would need to meet the shortfall under its tenancy obligations.

RESOLVED:

That the verbal update of the Town Clerk be noted.

198 **HEALTH, SAFETY & VANDALISM REPORT**

The Council received and considered the report of the Maintenance & Environmental Services Officer.

Members were advised that there had been a small amount of vandalism since the last report and what plans were for the re-opening of services after the most recent pandemic lockdown.

RESOLVED:

That the report of the Maintenance & Environmental Services Officer be noted.

199 **COMMUNICATION FROM THE LEADER**

There was no communication from the Leader.

200 **LETTER FROM ROBERT COURTS MP**

The Council received correspondence from Robert Courts MP in response to a letter issued raising concerns on drug dealing and County Lines issues in Witney.

RESOLVED:

That the correspondence from Robert Courts MP, concerning drug dealing and Oxfordshire county lines be noted.

201 **RAF BRIZE NORTON - PROPOSED RADAR TOWER**

The Council received correspondence from RAF Brize Norton concerning a proposed radar tower.

RESOLVED:

That the correspondence from RAF Brize Norton concerning proposal for a new radar tower be noted.

202 **QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

There were no questions submitted to the Leader of the Council.

203 **SEALING OF DOCUMENTS**

RESOLVED:

That the seal of the Council be affixed to any documents arising from decisions taken by this meeting of the Council.

The meeting closed at: 8.12 pm

Chair