

**FULL COUNCIL COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE
WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL**

Held on Tuesday, 18 August 2020

At 7.00 pm in the VIRTUAL MEETING VIA ZOOM*

Present:

Councillor J Aitman (Chair)

Councillors:	L Duncan	A D Harvey
	L Ashbourne	M Jones
	T Ashby	J King
	D Butterfield	A McMahon
	O Collins	A Prosser
	H Eaglestone	R Smith
	D Enright	D Temple
	V Gwatkin	
Officers:	Nicky Cayley	Democratic Services Officer
	Adam Clapton	Office Manager
	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
	Angus Whitburn	Compliance and Environment Officer
	John Hickman	Operations & Estates Officer
Others:	# members of the public.	

244 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for her absence was received from Cllr Bolger.

245 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest in matters to be discussed at the meeting.

Having declared an interest previously on the matter to be considered, the Chair asked Cllr Temple if he should declare an interest. Cllr Temple declined to declare an interest.

246 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

The meeting adjourned for this item to allow the public present to address the Council.

Mr Wilson, Proprietor of Wilson's Funfairs, addressed the Council on the subject of why he believed the annual Witney Feast fair should go ahead.

Emily Danter, Safety Officer for Wilson's Funfairs, addressed the Council on the same subject.

John Thurston, Head of Safety of The Showmen's Guild addressed the Council on the same subject.

Following the public participation, the Council reconvened.

247 **WITNEY FEAST - 14/15 SEPTEMBER 2020**

The Council received and considered the report of the Town Clerk, which detailed the advice she and other officers had received from other stakeholders at a meeting including Fire and Rescue Service, Emergency Planning, Public Health, and Thames Valley Police.

The Town Clerk explained that she had requested a SAG (Safety Advisory Group) meeting, which would have afforded Mr Wilson the chance to participate, but this had been turned down twice by West Oxfordshire District Council. She had therefore arranged an alternative meeting with stakeholders who had all reviewed the paperwork submitted by Wilson's Funfairs and had subsequently produced the report that had been circulated to members.

A member asked why the District Council would not call a SAG meeting and the Town Clerk replied that the officers had not thought it necessary.

A member commented that the Town Clerk had spoken to all of the consultees that she had been asked to speak to and they had all said no to the fair going ahead. A lot of local residents had expressed concern to him that if there was an increase in Covid Cases it could lead to a local lockdown, which could in turn lead to job losses. He thought it was better to be safe than sorry after the event and he thanked the Officers for their hard work. He was happy to support the Officers recommendations.

Another member stated that the Town Clerk had not said that everyone she had engaged with had responded or that everyone she had contacted had said no to the fair. He thanked the Town Clerk for her work but thought that everyone should discuss the report and have a say before thinking about recommendations. He felt that the feast was spread out and less people than normal would attend so there would be no issues with social distancing.

A member asked if the deadline for submission of risk assessments had been met. The Compliance and Environment Officer confirmed that it was the 12th August but paperwork had continued to arrive after that date.

Another member felt that the recommendation in the report was very strong and she did feel that the confidence of Officers was important. She understood that a revised risk assessment had been submitted and asked if that changed anything in terms of Officers' recommendations.

The Operations and Estates Officer advised that Officers had looked at what had been submitted earlier that day and whilst it was a lot better, there were still areas that needed work on. The other stakeholders who the Officers had worked with the previous week on this had been clear that there was no longer enough time for them to do the relevant work around the updated documents.

A member asked which events on The Leys had been cancelled on due to Covid-19. He added that on Friday the number of new infections recorded nationally was the highest in 2 months. In response the Town Clerk advised that the May Fair had been cancelled in mid-May, the Music Festival and Libfest had also been cancelled. These were all due to take place during the lockdown period so were not permitted.

A member commented that he really would have preferred the SAG to have been involved but he understood that the Town Clerk had tried her hardest to get one held and so now the Council had to make a decision. The Town Clerk clarified that the SAG would not have made a decision – it was there in an advisory capacity. She referred back to a member’s earlier comment *“that not all of the stakeholders had come back with views”* - she stated that all those spoken to had come back and in fact it was unanimous that the fair should not go ahead. She advised that the Town Council was the landowner and it was its duty to ensure that the fair was safe to run and that due diligence was carried out.

The Town Clerk, in response to a member’s comment that other fairs were going ahead and that some were yet to be determined, explained that those going ahead were on the highway so different to The Leys.

A member felt that everyone was in a difficult position and that he was disappointed that a SAG had not taken place due to the truculence of other councils. Officers had sought advice from the most knowledgeable people they could find and he felt that the Council should follow the recommendation in the Town Clerk’s report. He expressed sympathy for the proprietor of the fair and all of his staff as it was not an easy situation and he knew they had worked hard to make things happen. He felt that providing the world was not in the same position next year then the Feast could be the most celebratory occasion and the most well attended and welcomed Feast for many years.

Another member referred to football teams not allowing fans at matches until October at the earliest. He had additional concerns as he was clinically vulnerable. He had asked residents in Deer Park if they would attend the fair and most had said they would not.

A member asked for clarity on why a fair in Banbury was allowed to go ahead by SAG. The Town Clerk replied that that was under the control of Cherwell District Council and Oxfordshire County Council as it was on the highway, and as it was in October it was further away than the feast.

A member thanked the speakers for their words under public participation but she felt the Officers’ recommendations were strongly worded and compelling and the time had now run out.

The Chair also thanked all of the speakers and asked members to vote on the recommendation contained in the report. Members should vote “for” to support the recommendation to cancel the Feast this year and “against” to go against the advice and allow the fair to go ahead.

The votes were as follows:-

Cllr Enright	-	for
Cllr Ashbourne	-	for
Cllr Ashby	-	for
Cllr Bolger	-	for
Cllr Butterfield	-	for
Cllr Collins	-	for
Cllr Duncan	-	for
Cllr Eaglestone	-	for
Cllr Gwatkin	-	for
Cllr Harvey	-	for
Cllr Jones	-	for
Cllr King	-	for

Cllr McMahon	-	for
Cllr Prosser	-	for
Cllr Smith	-	for
Cllr Temple	-	against
Cllr Aitman	-	for

The result was 15 members voting for the Town Clerk's recommendation to be approved, 1 member voting against and 1 member absent. The recommendation was therefore approved.

RESOLVED: that the Witney Feast Fair is CANCELLED for this year, due to the COVID pandemic, as the Council considers that the risk to public health is too great.

The meeting closed at: 7.50 pm

Chair