

**MEETING OF THE
WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL**

Held on Monday, 6 December 2021

At 7.00 pm in the Main Hall, The Corn Exchange, Witney

Present:

L Duncan (Vice-Chair in the Chair)

Councillors:	T Ashby	M Jones
	R Bolger	A McMahon
	D Butterfield	A Prosser
	H Eaglestone	R Smith
	D Enright	
Officers:	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
Others:	3 members of the public.	

612 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Aitman, L Ashbourne, O Collins, V Gwatkin, A D Harvey, J King and D Temple.

613 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from members & officers.

614 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 11 October 2021 were approved and adopted.

615 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Council adjourned for this item.

Ms. K Jerred representing residents of Riverside Gardens addressed the Council concerning flooding in Witney, as part of Agenda Item No. 19 – Emergency Plan.

Mr. H Mo addressed the Council regarding Agenda Item No. 18 – Consultation – High Street & Market Square (Witney) – Proposed Prohibition of Motor Vehicles & Parking Restrictions.

The Committee reconvened following this item.

The Chair indicated that, with the agreement of members, Agenda Item Nos. 19 & 18 would be taken before Agenda Item No. 5

616 **EMERGENCY PLAN**

Consideration was given to the report of the Maintenance & Environmental Services Officer.

Members considered the role of the Town Council in addressing emergencies and the importance of volunteers in dealing with emergency events. It was emphasised that joint working and information sharing with other groups and statutory authorities was vital.

Clarification was given that the District Council was the lead authority under the Civil Contingencies Act, with relevant plans in place, on these matters and welcomed the positive approach from Thames Valley Police and Oxfordshire Fire Service. It was agreed that the District Council be asked to share details of the emergency plan with the Town Council. The Town Clerk confirmed that emergency contact details would be included in the Town Council document.

It was reported that the Section 19 report from Oxfordshire County Council regarding flooding last year would be produced soon. The Council further noted correspondence that had been received from Oxfordshire County Council and CPRE regarding flooding that had been circulated under Agenda Item No. 15 – Correspondence.

Resolved:

1. That, the Town Council undertake a full review of watercourses of riparian ownership and set a program of works to ensure they are cleared and maintained;
2. That, the scope of the Town Council Emergency Plan as outlined in the report be approved; and
3. That, a letter be sent to West Oxfordshire District Council requesting details of their Emergency Plan.

617 **CONSULTATION – HIGH STREET & MARKET SQUARE (WITNEY) - PROPOSED PROHIBITION OF MOTOR VEHICLES & PARKING RESTRICTIONS**

The Council considered consultation documents from Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) regarding proposed prohibition of motor vehicles and parking restrictions in the High Street and Market Square in Witney.

Members considered the proposed restrictions and suggested that there should be flexibility in usage of marked areas to facilitate taxis, disabled parking and loading/unloading. Concern around the safety of the junction at Church Green, Corn Street and Market Square and exhaust emissions in that area were highlighted. It was considered that the disabled parking should be realigned to make access easier.

Members acknowledged the conflicting demands and considered that a wider development plan for the town centre was required from relevant authorities to meet the needs of all stakeholders. It was agreed that it should be easier to facilitate closure of areas for community events.

Resolved:

That the following response be submitted to Oxfordshire County Council in respect of the consultation:

Witney Town Council supports the permanent prohibition of motor vehicles covering High Street and Market Square with the following exemptions: buses, taxis, vehicles loading/unloading and those displaying a valid blue badge. However, it would like to see its potential introduction managed better, which includes effective and intuitive communications around the scheme and effective and simple road markings/signage to help with clarification on approaches to the area. It would ask that loading and unloading is made as easy as possible through sharing the parking areas between taxi bay, disabled parking and loading for traders and that all ideas to help traders along this stretch are considered.

The safety and air quality at the roundabout at the junction of Church Green, Corn Street & Market Square (including the area adjacent to the war memorial and the constricted entry into Corn Street) needs to be considered as a priority. Avoiding the conflict of all road users and pedestrians should be paramount, as listed in the Statement of Reasons. The current barrier of planters does not conform with that outcome because the roundabout does not function properly – opening both lanes for use by permitted traffic and restricting via signage and a change of road surface colouring may be less hazardous for entering the High Street and preventing gridlock and conflict on the roundabout.

The Town Council supports the changing of existing 30-minute parking bays to 3 hour disabled parking places, but not the road markings as the proposals stand. Traders need loading spaces. This area is not currently optimised for disabled parking as spaces are against a wall. Further thought needs to be given as to whether the spaces could be larger, have hatching all around or be slanted for ease of access.

As part of a wider aspiration, the Town Council would like to see a larger town centre development plan coming forward. The council requests that Market Square is made easier to close off for community use at the request of any Council.

618 **WITNEY COMMUNITY POLICING ISSUES**

Insp Chris Ball, Thames Valley Police, provided an update on policing issues.

It was reported that the 'Cut it Out' initiative where those involved in hairdressing and other beauty service providers were trained to spot domestic abuse was being pursued with the local college and other partners. There was also a wider domestic abuse awareness campaign focusing on rural areas.

A new project with schools on online safety covering a range of topics had been introduced. As part of the 'Safer Streets' campaign, funding had been secured that could provide mobile CCTV for identified problem areas and improve current CCTV provision. It was highlighted that the current system was outdated but plans for improvement were being considered.

In response to concerns regarding anti-social behaviour with motor vehicles on industrial areas it was explained that education and pre-emptive measures were key in addressing such issues. The demands on resources in the police area were highlighted.

Discussion ensued regarding problems in the vicinity of Church Green and licensed premises in that area.

The Council thanked Insp. Ball for his attendance.

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

Oxfordshire County Council (OCC)

Councillor Enright reported that the budget was being considered and areas such as demand on Social Care provision needed careful consideration.

West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC)

Councillor Prosser reported that WODC had undertaken a survey on sport facilities and a response was expected in January outlining proposals.

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

There were no updates from Councillors on external bodies.

621 **WITNEY TOWN CHARITY TRUSTEES**

Consideration was given to the report of the Town Clerk in respect of Town Council representation on the Witney Town Charity.

It was clarified that currently there were a total of 14 trustees including six from the Town Council. It was suggested that as the Town Council could appoint external professional representatives, they should retain the current level of six.

It was agreed that further clarification was needed before a decision could be made but that the continuation of Chris Woodward, as a former town councillor, as a trustee could be supported.

Resolved:

1. That, a decision on the request to reduce the number of Town Council nominations be deferred pending clarification regarding who can be nominated; and
2. That, the continuation of Chris Woodward as a Nominated Trustee be approved

Councillor M Jones left the meeting at this juncture

622 **CLIMATE, BIODIVERSITY & PLANNING COMMITTEE - 12 OCTOBER, 2 NOVEMBER (ATTACHED) & 23 NOVEMBER 2021**

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

Resolved:

That the minutes of the Climate, Biodiversity & Planning Advisory Committee meetings held on 12 October and 2 & 23 November 2021 be received and any recommendations therein approved.

623 **PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE - 1 NOVEMBER 2021**

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

Resolved:

That the minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee meeting held on 1 November 2021 be received and any recommendations therein approved.

624 **HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE - 8 NOVEMBER 2021**

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

It was reported that the new access to Tower Hill Cemetery had been completed.

Resolved:

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

625 **STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE - 15 NOVEMBER 2021**

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

The Deputy Town Clerk advised that OCC were to look at salt bin provision between Madley Park and Oxford Hill as part of the wider Active Travel scheme. In the interim the Town Council had ordered one bin to be sited in that area.

Resolved:

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

626 **POLICY, GOVERNANCE & FINANCE COMMITTEE - 22 NOVEMBER 2021**

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

Resolved:

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

627 **CORN EXCHANGE WORKING PARTY - 2 DECEMBER 2021**

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

The Deputy Town Clerk clarified that Building Control Approval was being progressed with regard to the seating.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Corn Exchange Working Party held on 2 December 2021 be received and any recommendations therein approved.

628 **APPOINTMENTS TO TASK & FINISH GROUPS**

The Council considered appointments to two task & Finish groups.

It was reported that Councillors Aitman, Collins and Duncan had volunteered to serve on the Covid-19 Commemoration group. Councillors Aitman, Duncan and Smith were nominated for the In Bloom group.

Resolved:

1. That Councillors Aitman, Collins and Duncan be appointed to serve on the Covid Memorial Task & Finish Group; and
2. That Councillors Aitman, Duncan and Smith be appointed to serve on the In Bloom Task & Finish Group.

629 **CIVIC ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The report of the Town Mayor was received.

The Deputy Mayor reported on her trip to Unterhaching where she had made a speech to a representatives from a number of towns twinned with Unterhaching.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

630 **VANDALISM REPORT**

Consideration was given to the report of the Maintenance & Environmental Services Officer updating on vandalism at Town Council owned property and land. It was noted that discussions with a street artist were ongoing to see if a project could be progressed.

The issue of the condition of Unterhaching Park was raised. It was clarified that discussions were ongoing with officers at the District Council regarding the transfer to the Town Council and works to be undertaken to improve the site.

Resolved:

That the update report be noted.

631 **HEALTH AND SAFETY**

There was no update to be presented.

632 **COMMUNICATION FROM THE LEADER**

There were no communications to be reported.

633 **CORRESPONDENCE**

It was noted that correspondence regarding flooding had been presented during discussion on the Emergency Plan earlier in the meeting.

Correspondence had been forwarded by Robert Courts MP regarding flying of the Union flag on the Town Hall. It was suggested that the constituent should be asked to contact the Town Council direct. Discussion ensued regarding dates that the flag should be flown. A holding response indicating that the Town Council flew the flag on specified days had been sent.

Resolved:

That, a response clarifying the Town Council policy on flying the flag be sent and the constituent be asked to contact the Town Council if they wished to discuss the matter further.

634 **QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

There were no questions submitted.

635 **COMPLIMENTS & COMPLAINTS**

Consideration was given to the report of the Deputy Town Clerk.

Resolved:

That the report be noted

636 **PROJECT UPDATE REPORT**

The report of the Project Officer was considered.

Confirmation was given that funding for the blue plaque at Batt House was already allocated in the budget but a figure needed to be agreed. Members agreed a contribution of £300.

The Town Clerk updated that budget provision would be considered in due course for the skate park. Councillor Butterfield advised that further information would be forwarded in due course on the project.

Resolved:

1. That, a contribution of £300 towards the blue plaque in memory of Alice Batt be approved; and
2. That, a decision regarding funding of the skatepark be deferred to the budget presentation on 13 December.

637 **COUNCIL CONTRACTS & SEALING OF DOCUMENTS**

Resolved:

To note that Corn Exchange – Contract for Specialist Theatre Systems– Sound & lighting with Henley Theatre Services Ltd. had been signed by The Mayor, Cllr J Aitman & the Town Clerk.

638 **FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE COUNCIL**

The Council considered future arrangements for committee meetings of the Council.

The Deputy Town Clerk reminded that virtual advisory meeting had been previously held and in light of the pandemic councillors were asked to consider the position.

The Town Clerk confirmed that an additional face to face meeting to consider the budget would be required in January. The issue of accommodation for meetings was also raised due to ongoing works in the Corn Exchange. It was explained that Town Hall could not be used for meetings.

Discussion ensued regarding delegations and options for decision making processes and a council decision in respect of alternative options was needed. Councillors considered the guidance that was available.

Members agreed that as a further Council meeting was required in January the decision be deferred.

Resolved:

That, a decision be deferred to the Extraordinary Council meeting in January 2022.

639 **EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

Resolved:

That, in accordance with section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admissions 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.

640 **PROPERTY & LEGAL MATTERS**

Consideration was given to the confidential report of the Town Clerk.

The Town Clerk updated on progress regarding a number of property and legal matters and negotiations that were being undertaken regarding a specific property. Links to the aspirations of the Council were discussed in respect of the property. Members considered the funding of a feasibility study.

The Council was asked to consider the freehold purchase land used as a play area and funding options were discussed.

Resolved:

1. That, approval be given for £2,600 to be allocated to progress discussions on the property identified in the report; and
2. That, approval be given for the freehold purchase of the play area and land identified in the report.

The meeting closed at: 9.00 pm

Chair