

WITNEY ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

Held on Monday, 25 April 2022

At 7.30 pm in the Main Hall, The Corn Exchange, Witney

Present:

Councillor J Aitman (Chair)

Councillors:	T Ashby	D Enright
	D Butterfield	V Gwatkin
	O Collins	A Prosser
	L Duncan	R Smith
	H Eaglestone	D Temple
Officers:	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
	Angus Whitburn	Maintenance & Environmental Services Officer
	Polly Inness	Communications & Community Engagement Officer
Others:	16 members of the public.	

1 INTRODUCTIONS AND WELCOME FROM THE MAYOR OF WITNEY, CLLR JOY AITMAN

The Town Mayor, Cllr Joy Aitman, welcomed the public to the meeting and introduced herself and the Deputy Mayor, Liz Duncan, officers of the Town Council and representatives of Thames Valley Police.

2 OFFICIAL NOTING OF THE TOWN COUNCILLOR APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Witney Town Councillors L Ashbourne, R Bolger, D Harvey, M Jones, and A McMahon.

3 TO RECEIVE AND APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING OF 11 MARCH 2020

The minutes of the Annual Town Meeting meeting held on 11 March 2020, copies of which were available at the meeting, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 THAMES VALLEY POLICE

The Mayor welcomed Inspector Chris Ball to the meeting who introduced himself and his colleague PC Chris Cochrane who was part of the Witney policing team.

Attendees were advised there had been a number of successes in recent months on crime and the police were actively working with young people to build a respectful and educated community.

There had however been 23 burglaries, 2 robberies, and 41 bicycle thefts. The figures were low compared to those nationally, but they were still too high. In response to a question from the floor, Officers confirmed they did have tactics in place to tackle the high rate of bicycle thefts, and there were hot spots, mainly in secluded areas which included the Leisure Centre. The most beneficial advice to the public was to not be so trusting and to make it less attractive to potential thieves.

Cllr Jane Doughty, West Oxfordshire District Council, raised concerns about antisocial behaviour at Tungsten Park in West Witney. Residents were frustrated the police appeared to be doing little about car meet ups late at night which were disturbing families in this part of the town. It was advised that Officers were speaking with those involved and trying to make it less attractive to the drivers. Police resources were stretched and being put towards targeted events when they were known about with a tactic of disperse and displace. They stressed the more the police were told about these kinds of events, the more they could do.

A final question concerned the illegal use of e-scooters and the lack of a police presence on the streets. It was confirmed the police were recruiting more staff, but the number was below where it needed to be and PCSO's were being drawn into police work. With regard to e-scooters, warning letters were issued and, if after that they were still being used by individuals they were confiscated. Bike thefts were currently the top priority.

5 TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM EACH OF THE TOWN COUNCIL'S STANDING COMMITTEE

The Mayor gave an update on her two years as Mayor and invited the Town Council's Committee Chairs to give brief updates on their Committees' responsibilities and an overview of what they had been working on throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

As the Leader and Chair of Policy, Governance and Finance Committee was unable to attend, Cllr O Collins gave an overview of the work of that the Committee had been doing on her behalf.

Following this, Cllrs Smith, Gwatkin, and Collins introduced themselves as Chairs of the Climate, Biodiversity & Planning Committee, Parks & Recreation Committee, and Stronger Communities Committee respectively. Cllr Aitman provided an update on the work of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee in that Chair's absence.

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

Further to the updates from Committee Chairs, the Mayor opened the floor to questions from the public.

Q1. Is anything being done to address the problems around the new cycle lanes in Corn Street? They are not currently safe, and buses cannot pass each other safely.

The Mayor thanked the member of public for the question and referred to fellow councillors R Smith and D Enright.

It was confirmed that feedback and questions had been passed on by the Town Council at the consultation stage for this project, which was part of an active travel package delivered by the County Council. There had regrettably, been a short time frame on consultation due to time constraints in spending the funds and the result was narrower, and not necessarily safer lanes.

There was agreement this was a work in progress, and unfortunately not everything is right first time. The County Council was currently creating a Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) which would attempt to produce a plan. There would also be further consultation when additional funding became available.

Q2. 20mph Speed Limits. People do not know Corn Street has a 20mph limit – what can be done? Drivers might take more notice if signs are on the road

The Mayor advised this information would be fed back to Oxfordshire County Council who were responsible for implementing the scheme. As a wider issue, it was advised that lots of footpaths and cycle paths were overgrown so there was work needed on the ground to clear these. Police representatives suggested the Police Community Payback Scheme may be able to assist with this.

Q3. What is the Town Council role in assisting vulnerable people and riparian ownership of land in conjunction with flooding?

The Mayor advised the Town Council's Planning Committee, members recognised and commented on new developments, large and small where ground is tarmacked over. Thankfully, these comments were being listened to increasingly at District Council. Everyone was beginning to recognise the sewerage problem which tied into this issue.

Cllr Andrew Coles, West Oxfordshire District Council commented that there were a number of reasons why flooding happens. Government thinking was that not enough properties flood and therefore no funding is provided to invest in defences and mitigations. What was being done was a sticking plaster approach. The floods two years ago highlighted many failures, it was the worst time for affected residents and community agencies were not ready. Therefore, much more needed to be done.

Q4. What is happening to our 500-year-old Market town? Is it becoming a suburb of Oxford?

There was agreement that shopping habits had changes as a result of the Covid-19 Pandemic and further investment was needed in the town centre. Members advised there would be an opportunity to come together and talk about the future of the High Street during the coming months.

Q5. Are you disappointed with the turnout for this evening's meeting?

The Mayor advised it was disappointing only a small number of the public had attended but the meeting had been advertised in all the usual ways, Witney Gazette, website, poster, and social media. In response to an attended, the Mayor said the Town Council could look into the communications in the future.

7 TOWN MAYOR'S CLOSING REMARKS AND THANKS

The Mayor thanked the public for attending the meeting and invited them to stay on now that the formal business was concluded to speak to the Councillors informally.

The meeting closed at: 8.45 pm

Chair