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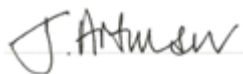
### **WITNEY ANNUAL TOWN MEETING**

**MONDAY, 25TH APRIL, 2022**

**MAIN HALL, THE CORN EXCHANGE, WITNEY  
7.30 PM**

#### **AGENDA**

1. **Introductions and Welcome from the Mayor of Witney, Cllr Joy Aitman**
2. **Official Noting of the Town Councillor apologies for Absence**
3. **To receive and approve the Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting of 11 March 2020 (Pages 3 - 6)**
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 Town Council's Standing Committees (Pages 7 - 18)**
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 JOY AITMAN  
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 discuss the work of the Town Council and town issues.**

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## WITNEY ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

Held on Wednesday, 11 March 2020

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

### **Present:**

Councillors:	J Aitman L Ashbourne T Ashby O Collins L Duncan	D Enright V Gwatkin A McMahon A Prosser R Smith
Officers:	Nicky Cayley Adam Clapton Sharon Groth Polly Inness Tracy Minns Tomas Smith Angus Whitburn	Democratic Services Officer Office Manager Town Clerk Communications Officer Cemeteries Officer Public Halls Manager Environmental Services & Compliance Officer
Others:	33 members of the public Inspector S Hookham Cllr L Price Cllr J Doughty	Thames Valley Police Oxfordshire County Council West Oxfordshire District Council

### **1 INTRODUCTIONS AND WELCOME FROM THE MAYOR OF WITNEY, CLLR DUNCAN ENRIGHT**

The Town Mayor, Cllr Duncan Enright, welcomed the public to the meeting and gave an outline of the meeting ahead.

### **2 OFFICIAL NOTING OF THE TOWN COUNCILLOR APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for their absence were received from Witney Town Councillors Bolger, Butterfield, Eaglestone, Harvey, Jones, King and Temple.

### **3 TO RECEIVE AND APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING OF 13 MARCH 2019**

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2019, copies of which were available at the meeting, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The Mayor then gave an update of his year so far and followed by handing over to the Deputy Mayor for her to provide an update.

4 **THAMES VALLEY POLICE**

The Mayor welcomed Inspector Hookham to the meeting. Inspector Hookham explained that he was the Neighbourhood Inspector for the area and would give a brief outline of the police work.

Policing priorities remained the same as last year: domestic burglaries, domestic abuse and county lines and the associated anti-social behaviour that went with it.

The work on county lines was unfinished as was to be expected and work was still continuing. It has taken 18 months to get one of the leaders convicted and jailed. However, now that he had been removed there would be someone else to take his place. The police were focusing on drug possession and users. Dealing had decreased by 18% as a result of police activity but charges for possession were up to 30% - this meant that officers were targeting the right people. Inspector Hookham emphasised that the police relied on the public to tell them what the issues were.

There had been a 32% reduction in residential burglaries but a rise in garage and shed burglaries (up 100%). Inspector Hookham advised people to mark tools and lawnmowers so that they could be returned if found after they had been stolen.

There had been a 30% rise in ASB (untargeted community, environmental and personal). The police were actively trying to engage with young people and Inspector Hookham advised that that evening he had spoken to 2 members of the Youth Council who had suggested four or five things that the police could be doing.

Operations coming up included night time economy operations across Cherwell and West Oxfordshire and Operation Sceptre dealing with knife crime.

The Mayor thanked Inspector Hookham for attending and said that he would take any questions for the police along with general questions after the Committee Chairs had given brief reports.

5 **TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM EACH OF THE COUNCIL'S STANDING COMMITTEES**

The Mayor invited the Committee Chairs to give brief updates of the committees' work over the past year. He advised that longer and more detailed reports were available at the meeting and on the Council's website.

As the Leader and Chair of Policy, Governance and Resources was unable to attend the meeting due to illness, the Mayor gave an overview of the work of that the Committee had been doing on her behalf.

Following this, Cllrs Gwatkin, Ashbourne and Smith introduced themselves as Chairs of the Halls and Green Spaces Committee, Stronger Communities Committee and Planning and Development Committee respectively. All Chairs gave a brief update of the Committees' responsibilities and an overview of what they had been working on so far this year.

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. I'm Rev'd Jackie Bone, I'm the Leader of Witney Baptists Church, I moved to Witney in June. My question is about the new development, Windrush Place. I am funded by the National Baptists Union to work with new communities on developments, particularly Windrush Place. What concerns me is that there is no community space due to be built until 2021 when the school is due to open and we are up there already doing events. There is money for artwork – District Council – but I have been in touch with them already and they've said we can't do anything because there's no space so is there any chance of getting something like a portacabin or something on the development so that the community can be there altogether.**

The Mayor thanked Rev'd Bone for her question and said that this was something that would need further discussion by the Town Council and they would let her know when and where it would be discussed. He commented that he thought it was a terrific idea.

Cllr Price said that as a County Councillor she shared the frustration at the lack of infrastructure accompanying new developments and was aware of the impact it could have on the community. She promised to look at section 106 money from a county perspective to see what could be done, if Rev'd Bone would pass on her details.

Cllr Doughty, a District Councillor, added that she was also aware of this. There was section 106 money in the system but it needed researching. When a new estate was built it needed adopting by the County Council which could take years and sometimes section 106 was not released until right at the end.

**Q2. I'm new to understanding how the town council, district council and county council all work together but there needs to be a plan for infrastructure so that the Secretary of State doesn't call the shots. There needs to be a plan to make sure that all the services such as doctors and such are all in place.**

The Mayor replied that the District Council Local Plan was now in place and the Town Council was very aware of infrastructure. Cllr Ashbourne added that the District Council had been about to implement CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) but sadly they had decided to put a 0% levy on large estates. There was currently a consultation on this and she urged people to respond to it.

Cllr Smith spoke about the pollution of the rivers and asked the public to sign the community petition.

**Q3. Where is the tiny forest that was mentioned earlier in one of the councillor's reports?**

The Mayor replied that it was at Eton Close, Cogges.

**Q4. Why is there no bus shelter at the shops at Burwell? There are others in the town like the one at Marriott's Walk that is unused so why can't it be moved?**

Cllr Smith explained that the Council had replaced the bus shelter at the other end of Burwell but the one that the lady had spoken about was unfortunately regularly vandalized and therefore the Council was trying to find one that would stand up to vandalism. The Town Clerk added that there was a budget for this to be done and the Council had been informed by Oxfordshire County council the Marriott's Walk bus shelter would not survive being moved.

**Q5. What are the plans to safeguard Witney as a retail hub?**

The Mayor explained that the Town Council didn't own any retail units and didn't control business rates or rents. He hoped that people could be encouraged to buy locally and that the council would source locally too. The Town Council worked with the District Council on the environment – there was free parking which was a great bonus for visitors. He asked for any ideas that the public had to help with this. A resident commented that the free parking should be kept as it encouraged people to spend longer in the town. Another resident suggested a Trade Fair on Church Green once again.

**Q6. What is the Town Council's plan to pressure Oxfordshire County Council to repair roads?**

The Mayor advised all issues to be reported on Fix My Street. The town had a number of "superusers" and they were permitted to use spray paint to mark areas needing repair, potholes had to be 20cm wide and 2 cm deep. The superusers effectively cut out the middleman and were able to order the repairs direct from the contractor.

**Q7. Can we stop the temporary fixes? How many potholes have been repaired several times?**

Cllr Price explained that often a temporary fix was a response to an emergency situation. It just prevented immediate danger. She did agree that there had been a lot of temporary fixes in relation to the West End roundabouts. The County Council had increased its budget for potholes and also the Chancellor had announced further funding that day. Hopefully improvements would start to be seen.

**Q8. I want to say that people who live around Church Green and Corn Street can't park for more than 2 hours without being slapped with a parking ticket!**

The Mayor advised that this was something that the District and County Councils were working on.

**Q9. Is there a guarantee period for repairs?**

Cllr price advised that the contractors were accountable if a substantial fix had been carried out and Highways staff did go out and check these. However, there were not enough staff to do this all of the time. However, there were stricter regulations coming in where the Council held a bond from companies such as utilities doing works.

**Q10. Is it still intended to build on Woodford Way car park?**

The Mayor replied that this was an allocated site in the local plan but there was no firm plan or when or what it might look like.

**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 hear a presentation by the Youth Council and to take part in a Youth Services Provision focus group.

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The meeting closed at: 8.35 pm

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Chair

## **WITNEY ANNUAL TOWN MEETING 2022**

### **REPORT TO THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING FROM THE MAYOR**

#### **CLLR JOY AITMAN**

Witney is an amazing town, and it has been a privilege to serve as its mayor for the last two years. I am so grateful to the officers and the councillors for their support and incredibly hard work in this unprecedented time. You can see that hard work reflected in the reports of the hard-working chairs which you will shortly be hearing, and the way in which we are rebounding from the pandemic.

I would like to firstly just say how pleased I am to be making this speech in such wonderful surroundings, getting the refurbishment right has taken a lot of work and will be enjoyed by the many clubs and societies which lacked somewhere suitable. I was so proud of the team who made this room come alive for the citizen of the year ceremony earlier this month

It has seemed to me that one of the unexpected outcomes of the pandemic is that the town and its communities have been united in their support for each other like never before. The officers and individual councillors have worked their socks off to facilitate this. They have given time, space, and limitless energy, without question and all while looking after their own families, to make sure we were all safe. There are not enough words to express the fullness of my thanks. Thank you all.

My role definitely wasn't business as usual, and I won't list everything that was postponed or cancelled but I will rejoice in everything that actually took place. Sometimes differently and sometimes online. People were generous in support of my charities, but as with so many the cost-of-living pandemic hampered this, but I did my best to support them in other ways. Our inspirational youth leaders at Got2be and the amazing young people they support have brought insight into the needs of the youth of our town. Home-start have opened my eyes to the increasing problems faced by families over the last decade and Guideposts have brought so much laughter in dark times. I will be continuing with my support of these groups throughout the coming year. They made me feel like one of their family.

Being allowed back into schools again has been a long-awaited sign of returning normality. From being a judge in a world record breaking musical bumps attempt to opening a new library. I know it is a cliché, but children really are our future and Witney is going to be in safe hands.

I have represented Witney round the county too. It is important for us to be seen and, also to learn from the others that we share Oxfordshire with. The mayoral chain and I have been on many adventures and I am relieved to return it and its new case intact. These events have included working with the Oxford City Lord Mayor and attending a number of events with the Lord Lieutenant and her deputies and working with the Sheriffs of Oxford past and present. This has been an important networking opportunity and I have been impressed with the

support they provide to caring organisations and young entrepreneurs in and around the county.

For obvious reasons Twin Town activities have been limited to local planning and community events. Our Deputy Mayor, Liz Duncan, represented us at the Remembrance Service in Unterhaching and I am looking forward to starting the Witney to Le Touquet car rally in a couple of days' time. The bond remains strong and supportive.

My mayoral term started with the care of the freshly planted tiny Forest, which has flourished and become a favourite spot for many and is now the first amongst 30 or so around the country. Now as my Mayoral term ends I have had a flurry of tree planting for the Queen's Green Canopy. It gives me great pleasure to know that these trees will be a lasting legacy for our town of an amazing, hardworking monarch.

Finally, I would like to thank the town for their support and trusting me to take part in their events. I have made many new friends and I know these friendships will be lasting because that is the kind of town Witney is. Thank you.

**Cllr Joy Aitman, Mayor of Witney (Chair of Witney Town Council)**



# **WITNEY ANNUAL TOWN MEETING 2022**

## **REPORT TO THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING FROM THE LEADER OF WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL & CHAIR OF THE POLICY, GOVERNANCE & FINANCE COMMITTEE CLLR LUCI AHBOURNE**

Councils are public-facing and publicly funded organisations designed to deliver grassroots services to the community in a meaningful and accountable way. However, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that a Town Council as large as Witney's is a professional body, and any Council aspirations have to be workable in both in terms of capacity and culture.

### **Town Council Organisational Review**

After the change in leadership roles in 2020, one of the first strategic tasks that we undertook was employing an external consultant to conduct an organizational review of Witney Town Council.

The resulting recommendations were that we needed to increase our staffing capacity by 50% to be able to meet the growing needs of Witney. I am pleased to say that after many months of planning and hard work, Council adopted the recommendations from the organizational review in full, allowing us to begin the task of recruitment. It has been wonderful to work with so many brilliant new members of staff, and I speak for everyone when I say that we are so grateful to the existing employees who have offered patience, flexibility throughout the process, and guidance and support to our new recruits.

Our new organizational structure will future-proof the Town Council for many years to come, ensuring that residents have the council they deserve, and that the staff have the capacity and support they need. I am grateful to the Councillors who placed their trust and belief in this vision and offered support and input on every level.

### **Open Spaces Strategy**

Alongside this, we developed our recently published Open Spaces Strategy. Our open spaces and parks are important places to be protected, cherished, and enhanced. They take great effort - and money - to maintain, but they give back so much to our community. Witney is lucky to have some wonderful open spaces - from the beauty of the Lake and Country Park to the tranquillity of its cemeteries, and from our well-used sports grounds and allotments to the vibrancy of The Leys, which has been at the heart of the town for generations.

This strategic document, developed alongside stakeholders and the wider community, sets out the Council's ambitions to manage our open spaces, working closely with the people of Witney. It highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of our offer and looked at opportunities for the future - particularly to encourage better health, ensure greater accessibility, and increase Witney's biodiversity and carbon reduction. The plan is also mindful of the financial

challenges we will face in delivering our aspirations and meeting the needs of the community and gives us a direction of travel for future investment decisions. Crucial to our long-term efforts is the involvement of the local community and its various interest groups. Whilst there is already a good degree of public engagement in our services, there is still so much more that could be achieved with more interaction, and by building close working relationships between the Council and those that it represents.

Working together, we can accomplish so much more, and I'm excited to begin this journey to creating better open spaces, that the whole of Witney can enjoy and be proud of.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

Much of the past two years have been dominated by the Covid-19 pandemic, which has been challenging for us all on so many levels. As a town we proudly rallied round, supporting one another in unprecedented ways, with organisations and individuals stepping up to do all they could to ensure that everyone had help where they needed it.

As a Town Council we were proud to open the doors of both Burwell Hall and the Corn Exchange to provide a space for the Witney Land Army and the Witney Community Fridge volunteers to prepare food and other supplies to be delivered. It was a remarkable effort and working with those volunteers inspired us to launch our Covid Heroes awards scheme, that our Stronger Communities Committee Chair will report on later.

### **Grant Funding & Further Spending Commitments**

In addition to annual financial assistance provided to the Community Bus Service, the Policy, Governance and Finance Committee has approved discretionary grants to many local organisations such as the Witney Shed, Witney Mills Cricket Club, Rotary Club of Witney, and Witney Air Cadets and has increased the grant budget in light of the growing need, largely due to the impact of the pandemic on our community.

The Committee also ensures that proper financial practices are followed in terms of auditing and has agreed spending on the repair & re-decoration of the Town Hall and Corn Exchange exteriors, the futureproofing of democratic meetings, and the further development of Windrush Cemetery.

We have also introduced lights into our beautiful Corn Exchange, which enable us to illuminate the building in different colours, to show solidarity and raise awareness for causes and events– such as the Black Lives Matters demonstration, our precious NHS's birthday, Infant and Baby Loss Week, the people of Ukraine, and many more. The Council now have a policy for lighting up public buildings and flag flying, which means that we can proudly display our support and thoughts on behalf of Witney in more way than one.

### **Cllr Luci Ashbourne, Leader of Witney Town Council**

# **WITNEY ANNUAL TOWN MEETING 2022**

## **REPORT TO THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING FROM CHAIR OF THE TOWN COUNCIL'S CLIMATE, BIODIVERSITY AND PLANNING COMMITTEE CLLR RUTH SMITH**

Since the last Town Meeting, in 2020, the Planning and Development Committee was re-formed to the Climate, Biodiversity and Planning Committee, acknowledging the Climate Emergency and the council's target to meet net zero by 2028 and making the work of the Wildlife and Nature Working Party more ongoing.

### **Planning & Licencing**

The committee still meets every three weeks with the main business being responding as consultees to planning and licensing applications that fall within Witney town, and near its borders in neighbouring parishes such as Hailey and Ducklington. The committee can object, enter no objection, ask for infrastructure funds from the development (Section 106 funds), or make comments and suggestions based on local knowledge which are welcomed by the planning authority. 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.

During the last two years April 2020 – March 2022, the Town Council has been consulted on 386 planning applications within the Witney parish. The majority of the Town Council responses, which are based on Local Plan policies, have been endorsed by the District Council.

The first meeting of each council cycle also includes Climate and Biodiversity matters. These meetings have seen healthy public participation on matters ranging from tree-planting to re-wilding.

### **Active Travel and LCWIP**

Since 2020, the committee has made robust representations to the County Council to provide evidence for active travel infrastructure needs across the town. The Town Council's Active Travel Infrastructure Development Plan is a working document that details improvements the Town Council considers the town requires.

The council now has representatives on the steering group guiding the development of the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan for Witney. This document, based on research that is happening now, will detail ways to connect Witney residents on foot and by pedal power.

### **20 mph Speed Limit Scheme**

Witney Town Council is working with OCC to set up a large 20 mph scheme, as the first Oxfordshire market town to do so. The proposal is that all residential areas and areas with shops, schools and similar amenities in Witney will be 20 mph, to keep the rules simple and

to keep signage costs down. Some of Witney's faster roads will also see a commensurate reduction in speed limit, to promote safety, air quality, running and active travel for residents above the pollution and injury that traffic can bring.

### **Lake and Country Park**

The council has written mini management plans for each aspect of the Lake and Country Park. A Park Ranger will be recruited in 2022, to maintain the site and to work with community partners. We have agreed to a re-wilding project with Wild Witney, which will focus on an area of the dry meadow. We have met with local nature groups to get expert advice on how to run this recreational space for optimal biodiversity and public enjoyment.

### **Climate Change**

The council's commitment to reducing its carbon footprint cuts across all the committees. It is worth reporting here, though, that since 2020, the council has switched to renewable electricity provider and certified 'green' gas. The council has plans and a budget to move its facilities away from fossil fuel heating.

On a smaller scale, the committee oversaw the purchase of an infra-red camera with the intention that it can be used to help residents check energy losses from their homes. We hope to partner with a community group for this.

Last Christmas, with a new lighting contract, the Christmas lights had timers for the first time, and were off in the daytime, cutting carbon dioxide emissions and costs.

### **Sewerage & Flooding**

The committee is acutely aware of the risk of fluvial and pluvial flooding in areas across Witney and takes this into account while considering householder, as well as large development planning applications. Where the plans result in a loss of permeable ground area, which acts as a soakaway, the committee returns comments requesting that mitigating actions are taken against the loss.

The committee has noted slightly more assertive replies from Thames Water to planning applications, saying when capacity cannot be met but stopping short of saying they will increase capacity.

The committee joins the rest of the town in voicing serious concerns that even the planned upgrade of the Sewage Treatment Works will not keep up with the needs of our expanding population.

### **Cllr Ruth Smith – Chair of Climate, Biodiversity and Planning Committee**

# **WITNEY ANNUAL TOWN MEETING 2022**

## **REPORT TO THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING FROM CHAIR OF TOWN COUNCIL'S PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE**

### **CLLR VICKY GWATKIN**

This Committee, which was previously known as the Sport & Play Committee, has responsibility for all recreation grounds, parks and public open spaces and sports activities upon any recreational ground under the control of the Town Council.

The Committee is overseeing a number of projects in Witney. The main ones being:

#### **Open Spaces Strategy (OSS)**

The OSS has been approved by Council and provides a framework for developing a number of projects and longer-term ambitions for a wide range of open spaces in the town. The committee has been involved in the analysis of what is currently in place, areas for improvement and clear timetabled future strategy.

As part of the OSS, a master plan for the **Leys Recreation Ground** is being developed. A project that is currently being progressed is to significantly improve the skatepark on the Leys.

#### **Play Areas**

Work is continuing to improve existing play areas and look at opportunities for new facilities. This has included bringing Park Road playground back in to use after years as unused land.

In addition, new play facilities are due on Quarry Road, King George's, and other sites. Ongoing replacement/upgrade of play facilities will now be part of a rolling council strategy.

#### **Playing Pitches**

Working with other local authorities to ensure new Astro turf pitch is in place and other pitches can be brought on-line or improved as soon as possible to support our local teams.

#### **Burwell Playing Fields**

Additional changing rooms for Burwell are planned and are currently in the scoping stage with a view to progressing the project soon.

#### **West Witney Sports Ground**

Working with consultants to bring about much needed improvements to West Witney facilities. In the interim works continue to maintain the current facilities including resurfacing of the tennis courts.

All these works have largely been made possible by a staffing review, ensuring we have sufficient resources to take forward much needed projects. Control of the Town Council's

grounds maintenance contract will also enable a more dynamic and efficient service of grass cutting and maintenance of its open spaces in the future.

**Cllr Vicky Gwatkin, Chair of Parks & Recreation Committee**

# **WITNEY ANNUAL TOWN MEETING 2022**

## **REPORT TO THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING FROM CHAIR OF THE TOWN COUNCIL'S HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE**

### **CLLR MEL JONES**

This Committee has responsibility for all aspects of the public halls, cemeteries, and allotments under the control of the Town Council.

The Committee is overseeing a number of projects in Witney. The main ones being:

#### **Public Halls**

The redevelopment of the Corn Exchange into a Community Arts Facility continues, and the café bar has been developed to offer a wide range of food and drink during the daytime, when there are performances and for private bookings in the hall.

A designated stage area with professional curtains, lighting and audio relay system has been installed and retractable seating will follow later this year.

The Corn Exchange has a wedding licence for the Gallery Room and the council provides wedding packages.

A number of performances including a Christmas pantomime, sea shanty evening and jazz nights have been held in the Corn Exchange.

It has been a difficult time due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, but bookings are now on the up at both the Corn Exchange and Burwell Hall. There are a number of clubs/organisations that have regular bookings and individuals hiring the halls for parties etc. is also increasing.

#### **Cemeteries**

A new access gate has been provided at the Tower Hill cemetery following consultation to establish the need. It provides those wishing to pay respects a safer, shorter, and less steep route to the more recent grave sections.

A scheme of wildflower planting has been undertaken in the cemeteries to help increase the biodiversity of the council's land.

A Children's Memorial is planned at Windrush Cemetery later in the year which will be an area where all parents may reflect on their loss.

#### **Allotments**

New allotments have been provided at Windrush Place and the management of the plots has been handed over to the Witney Allotment Association.

The committee is always keen to hear from residents and will assist as much as they are able and always want to make Witney accessible to all.

**Cllr Mel Jones, Chair of Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee**



# **WITNEY ANNUAL TOWN MEETING 2022**

## **REPORT TO THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING FROM CHAIR OF THE TOWN COUNCIL'S STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE**

### **CLLR OWEN COLLINS**

This Committee has responsibility for improving the community environment in terms of street infrastructure, trees, floral displays, Christmas lights, working with voluntary groups, and arranging or facilitating events on Town Council premises.

The Committee has implemented and supported a number of projects throughout the Covid pandemic in Witney.

#### **Community & Civic Events**

The Town Council helped keep the community connected virtually throughout the last two years. In 2020 there was a doorstep Christmas switch-on, a virtual advent calendar and a virtual Remembrance Sunday video. Thankfully, these events and others, such as the annual Advent Fayre returned to some normality in 2021 which the Council hopes to build on as the country tries to move on from the pandemic.

The Town Council continues to support community events and looks forward to the welcome return of annual favourites, Witney Carnival, Witney Music Festival and Witney Feast as well as others throughout the summer.

#### **Youth Services Grant Funding**

The Council set aside a budget for enhancing youth service provision in Witney. In 2021 funds totalling £30,000 were shared between Got2B CIC, who deliver youth outreach sessions in Witney, Home-Start who provide services for very young children and their parents, Oxfordshire Music & Arts Trust who hold music sessions and Synolos who are providing a service for young people with learning difficulties and autism.

#### **The Covid-19 Heroes scheme**

The Town Council recognised the extraordinary effort and community spirit displayed by individuals, organisations and businesses during the pandemic which has defined the period since the last town meeting. There was no criteria and awardees received a certificate signed by the mayor, and a badge/sticker to display. A lasting memorial to mark those who lost their lives due to Covid-19 and those heroes who went above and beyond to help others is planned for later in the year.

#### **Britain In Bloom with the RHS**

The town may have been in lockdown but the planting across the town still went ahead, brightening a difficult time for all. In 2020 there was no official competition, but The Leys returned a Royal Horticultural Society and Thames & Chilterns In Bloom 'Certificate of

Recognition' and in 2021 it was awarded a Gold Award, with Tower Hill Cemetery receiving Silver-Gilt for the flower beds there.

### **Living Roof Bus shelter**

An important milestone against climate change, the first living roof shelter in Oxfordshire was installed at Burwell during 2021, delivering the infrastructure requested by the community. A bin and cycle racks will complement the shelter during the Spring.

### **Defibrillator**

A new defibrillator was installed at the Lake and Country Park which was funded by local fundraiser Neil Taylor and electricity company Bouygues E&S Solutions UK Limited who we offer our thanks.

### **Langel Common WW2 Pill Boxes**

Following a request to help raise awareness of the pill boxes at Langel, the Committee agreed to install a sign to highlight their importance.

### **Queen's Platinum Jubilee**

A programme of events across the town is being finalised, full details will be published shortly which will include a children's Play Day at Burwell Recreation Ground on 1<sup>st</sup> June and a Beacon Lighting at the Leys on 2<sup>nd</sup> June.

### **Cllr Owen Collins, Chair of Stronger Communities Committee**