

WITNEY ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

Held on Wednesday, 15 March 2023

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

Present:

L Duncan (Chair)

Councillors:	J Aitman	A D Harvey
	T Ashby	A Prosser
	O Collins	R Smith
	D Enright	P Hiles
	V Gwatkin	D Thomas
Officers:	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
	Polly Inness	Communications & Community Engagement Officer
	Derek Mackenzie	Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk
	Tomas Smith	Venue & Events Officer
	Nigel Warner	Responsible Financial Officer
	Angus Whitburn	Operations Manager
	Carl Whitehead	Park Ranger
Others:	41 members of the public.	

1 INTRODUCTIONS AND WELCOME FROM THE MAYOR OF WITNEY, CLLR LIZ DUNCAN

The Town Mayor, Cllr Liz Duncan welcomed the public to the meeting and introduced herself and officers of the Town Council. She advised that a representative of Thames Valley Police was expected to attend.

2 OFFICIAL NOTING OF THE TOWN COUNCILLOR APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Witney Town Councillors L Ashbourne, M Jones, and H Eaglestone.

3 TO RECEIVE AND APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING OF 25 APRIL 2022

The minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on 25 April 2022, copies of which were available at the meeting, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 **THAMES VALLEY POLICE**

A representative from Thames Valley Police was invited to attend the meeting, however no representation was made. The Mayor asked residents that if they had any questions the Town Council would pass them on to the police for an answer.

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

The Mayor gave an update on her year as Mayor which included attending over 100 events representing the town council on behalf of residents. She had thoroughly enjoyed meeting so many residents of the town and she thanked all those in attendance.

The Chairs of the town council's committees were then invited to give brief updates on their Committees' responsibilities and an overview of what they had been working on during the past twelve months.

Cllr Aitman began as Deputy Leader of the Council and Chair of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee, followed by, Cllrs Smith, Gwatkin, and Collins who introduced themselves as Chairs of the Climate, Biodiversity & Planning Committee, Parks & Recreation Committee, and Stronger Communities Committee respectively.

Deputy Mayor Cllr Collins thanked officers and staff of the Council for their efforts over the past year. He also thanked all the individuals who provide support services to the town and its residents for making Witney such a supportive community to live in.

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, beginning with the first four which had been submitted to the Town Clerk ahead of the meeting.

Q1. Urban Meadow and Verge Guidelines. Will the Town Council be following these guidelines within Witney Town? Will the mower operators be given appropriate instructions and monitored?

Cllr R Smith responded and explained that not all areas in Witney were owned by WTC. All Councils had plans to increase biodiversity, however some of these schemes had not been successful and the town council was no exception; it had tried multiple ground maintenance methods with varied success.

The Town Council does however maintain a wildflower meadow in Windrush cemetery and will add wildflower seed to Tower Hill & Curbridge Road roundabouts this year. If any of these swards successfully flower the cuttings can be collected and distributed over areas to promote species diversity using our "Grillo" grass cutting machine. Some schemes, such as the reduction of cutting in Quarry Road have not been welcomed by residents.

In October 2022 the town council's grounds maintenance was brought in house so it now had qualified operators who were able to act more quicker and carry out action where required.

Q2. Does Witney Town Council monitor the potholes in the town? Who informs Oxfordshire County Council about the potholes that need repair? And How is it that a hole, like one outside the Windrush Pub, can have a white mark around it and be filled, while holes immediately before and after it are ignored?

Cllr D Enright (OCC) advised the County Council highways crew actioned repairs on receiving a report and were tasked to inspect the area for other potholes, however they were unable to relay whole section of road. He explained March was the worst time of year for potholes following the cold, wetter, winter months and repairs could not take place during that time. Money had been borrowed and more had been fixed this year than ever before; a trial of pothole 'Superusers' was ongoing to expediate reports.

He encouraged residents to report potholes via the Fix My Street online service. It was a nationwide scheme for reporting all manner of problems that residents encounter and reports in Oxfordshire would be sent to the relevant authority to deal with.

Q3. Do Witney Town Council and the residents of Witney have a say in the speed restrictions, the implementation and review of them?

I ask this because of what I see as inconsistencies in how they have been imposed across parts of Oxfordshire I have visited. I compare Woodstock Road in a busy built-up part of Oxford, where the speed limit is 30 compared with 20 on the Burford Road which could easily be 30 and then 40. I look at the speed limits in Charlbury and compare them to Witney.

Cllr D Enright (OCC) again replied confirming that most councils were moving to 20mph which would become the norm. In response to inconsistency, he added that some of the bus routes into Oxford were still 30mph at the request of Bus Providers in order that they could still provide the required service. There were a number of things to be considered in changes which included; wideness of the roads, proximity to schools and pet mortality. Regarding the 20mph in Puck Lane raised by a resident, Cllr Enright advised that this was the lowest legal limit that could be applied.

It was advised that the town council were contacted by the County Council to become a 20mph trial area which allowed councillors to highlight the roads to be included in the scheme and the town council supported the reduction. It also hosted the Witney Traffic Advisory Group where all subjects that involve travel and transport were discussed.

Cllr Enright continued by advising that road safety appeared to be improving, and the town council had received positive feedback, including correspondence from the Headmaster of Wood Green School supporting its introduction and stating that children felt more safe travelling to School.

Cllr R Smith advised that it was Thames Valley Police who were responsible for the speed cameras and enforcement of the 20mph limit, however it also relied on everyone being socially responsible for their speed.

There were representations on the scheme for and against and non-adherence, particularly in Corn Street

Q4. I cross the Windrush on my way to work and have noticed that since the national outcry over the polluted state of many of the nation's rivers, including the Windrush, it has lost its opaque grey appearance. I can only assume that that is because the sewage company upstream is no longer releasing effluent into it. As the Windrush river passes through the council's boundaries I assume that you have an active interest in the river's condition. I would like to know what you are doing to ensure that the water companies that have been causing the pollution are kept to account?

This question was raised ahead of the meeting and the resident was not in attendance. The Mayor advised that everyone was rightly concerned about this issue and the Council did keep abreast of situations as much as it could. The town was fortunate to have the group Windrush Against Sewage Pollution (WASP) who kept everyone informed.

Q5. What are the changes to on street parking enforcement?

Cllr D Enright (OCC) responded and advised the County Council would take over the on-street parking enforcement from 1 April 2023; the District Council would retain the enforcement in its car parks. As the authority responsible for all the highways in the county, information was collected on traffic flows so if the flow was restricted in an area due to parking issues, they would be better places to focus enforcement on that area.

Q6. Where are residents of Corn Street to park? Will there be resident parking permits and charges?

Cllr D Enright (OCC) agreed to look into this and report back to the resident. He was not aware of any charges and the only area with permits was West End as part of a historical arrangement.

Cllr D Harvey added that he hoped that the transfer of enforcement changes and change of staffing would not mean a loss of the community aspect the District Council community wardens brought to their role.

Q7. Who is responsible for the lifts at Marriotts Shopping Centre?

Cllr D Enright (WODC) advised that following the ownership changes at the shopping Centre he would investigate the continual breakdown of lifts with the necessary officers at the District Council.

Q8. Does the council have a digital strategy to engage with young people in order to engage with them?

Cllr Joy Aitman (WODC) responded to inform the District Council had recently completed a survey of schools to gather information on forming a strategy to reach younger people, as a former teacher, she was aware of the issues faced.

It was advised that the Witney Town youth council was wound down over the Covid period. Cllr Aitman explained she was also aware of the relationship between youngsters' mental health and sport and was working along with her fellow councillors across authorities to improve and inform the sports strategy.

Q9. Could we have an update on the Flood Warden initiative?

Cllr L Duncan advised the details of the County Council pilot scheme had been advertised and asked that any interested parties contact the town council so their details could be forwarded.

Q10. Are there any plans for the West Witney Sports Ground, such as a commercial aspect to generate income for the council?

Cllr V Gwatkin advised there were plans for the facility, but it was a difficult site with many stakeholders and varying restrictions. The town council supported Witney Parkrun, tennis and football teams, and West Witney Sports & Social Club. It was working with these clubs to grant leases so that they can access grant funding and the Council's aims could be found in the adopted Open Spaces strategy on the Council's Website.

Cllr J Aitman (WODC) advised there was a playing pitch strategy which covered west Oxfordshire. There was a huge shortage in pitches, and this was trying to re-address the balance.

Q11. What does it take to get the Witney Gazette to attend?

Cllr O Collins understood the frustration of residents about the Witney Gazette not covering Witney news and confirmed the town council did send press releases to them. There was little else the Council could do to encourage attendance.

Q12. In response to the above question, an attendee referred to problems in advertising amateur dramatics events, which were exacerbated by the difficulty in advertising on the town hall noticeboard?

Cllr O Collins apologised but assured the town council supported all events across the town and would investigate the problems with advertising third party events.

Q13. What plans do the council have for the Coronation of King Charles III?

Cllr O Collins responded the town council did indeed have plans, party in the park, volunteer day, children's activities and a community bunting-making challenge. Further details would be advertised in the coming weeks.

Q14. What are the Plans for opening the High Street?

Cllr D Enright (OCC) advised that nearly £2m had been allocated to improve the access for all, and the County Council had engaged with the Witney Chamber of Commerce and Traffic Advisory Group. After May there would be an in-person event/exhibition and associated stakeholder meetings to assist in the planning of a brand-new scheme.

It was advised the District Council were hoping to hold an event on the High Street in the Autumn for food and drink event.

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.

She also requested that any residents with questions for Thames Valley Police should leave these along with contact details and they would be passed on.

The meeting closed at: 9.03 pm

Chair