

**MEETING OF THE
WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL**

Held on Monday, 31 July 2023

At 7.00 pm in the Gallery Room, The Corn Exchange, Witney

Present:

Councillor O Collins (Chair)

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| Councillors: | G Meadows J Aitman T Ashby D Enright D Temple A Bailey L Cherry R Crouch | G Doughty J Doughty D Edwards-Hughes D Newcombe J Robertshaw S Simpson J Treloar |
| Officers: | Adam Clapton Sharon Groth Derek Mackenzie Nigel Warner | Deputy Town Clerk Town Clerk Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk Responsible Financial Officer |
| Others: | 1 member of the public. | |

420 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor R Smith.

421 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest from members or officers.

422 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the Full Council meeting held on 26 June 2023 were received.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Full Council meeting held on 26 June 2023 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the Chair.

423 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

A member of the public was present however they only observed the meeting and did not wish to speak.

424 **WITNEY COMMUNITY POLICING ISSUES**

Members received a verbal update from Sgt Siobhan O'Hare of Thames Valley Police (TVP).

Sgt O'Hare reported that there were no major concerns and that the level of crime was consistent with those recorded last year. There had been an incident a few days prior where a knife was involved by no injury sustained. Arrests had been made and they were hopeful for a prosecution.

TVP had carried out thirteen stop and searches in May which were mostly drug related.

Sgt O'Hare outlined the key aims for the New Chief Constable, Jason Hogg, and explained the steps that had been taken to implement these, including the use of more advanced technology to advise colleagues of problem areas in order to inform, in particular, specialist officers to focus their time when policing the town.

Members raised questions regarding the number of responses that TVP had made relating to Mental Health incidents Sgt O'Hare did not have the necessary details however advised these would be available at the next meeting in October. A Member also asked about the effectiveness of Neighbourhood Watch Schemes, Sgt O'Hare advised results vary and were principally driven by Neighbourhood engagement.

Resolved:

That, the verbal update be noted.

Sgt O'Hare left the Meeting at 19:20pm.

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

Oxfordshire County Council

Cllr Enright provided an update on the High Street consultation which was due to start in September 2023 where residents and businesses would be encouraged to provide thoughts on how the allocated £1.98m, provided from the Government active travel fund, should be spent to enhance the public realm in the High Street and Market Square. He asked that Members encourage residents to take part with the consultation to provide a long-term vision for the areas.

West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC)

Cllr Enright provided an update on the steps WODC had taken to increase business in the town including the letting of the old Debenham store to a high street chain. They are also carrying out a review of the markets held in Witney with the aim of improving them and potentially introducing events in Marriotts Walk.

WODC were also supporting Local Government Association lobbying of central government in changing the law for empty shops, which would provide authority to take over premises that have been left empty long term.

Cllr Doughty raised a query regarding wildflower planting on roundabouts which the Chair advised would be dealt with by officers.

Cllr Aitman advised that a recent round of Community grants did not receive a large uptake despite the council speaking directly with groups. Therefore, they would likely launch a second round, Members were encouraged to ask groups such as those that work to combat loneliness and food poverty, to apply and Cllr Aitman advised that assistance is available from WODC to complete the grant application paperwork.

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

Witney Town Charity

Cllr Aitman reminded Members of the support provided by the charity since it's broadening and of needs it would consider.

427 **CLIMATE, BIODIVERSITY & PLANNING COMMITTEE - 4 & 25 JULY 2023**

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

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Climate, Biodiversity & Planning Committee meetings held on 4 July & 25 July 2023 be received, and any recommendations therein approved.

428 **PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE - 3 JULY 2023**

The 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 3 July 2023 be received, and any recommendations therein approved.

429 **HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE - 10 JULY 2023**

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

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee meeting held on 10 July 2023 be received, and any recommendations therein approved.

430 **STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE - 17 JULY 2023**

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

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Stronger Communities Committee meeting held on 17 July 2023 be received, and any recommendations therein approved.

431 **POLICY, GOVERNANCE & FINANCE COMMITTEE - 24 JULY 2023**

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

The Deputy Town Clerk provided a verbal update regarding item F407 – a list of youth services over the summer had been published including details of mental health support sessions being run by APCAM and financed by the Council.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 24 July 2023 be received, and any recommendations therein approved.

432 **CIVIC ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Council received the report of the Mayor's Diary Secretary which listed the civic engagements of the Mayor & Deputy Mayor since the last meeting.

The Deputy Mayor & Chair advised the meeting with Rev Toby Wright was rescheduled for the following week. He also expressed his pleasure at the news of the award of a British Empire Medal to Witney resident Jeanne Chattoe (Witney in Pink) for her charitable services to People with Cancer locally and nationally.

Cllr Temple thanked the Deputy Town Mayor for attending the ICE centre's recent celebrations.

Resolved:

That, the report be noted.

433 **VANDALISM & HEALTH AND SAFETY**

The Council received the report of the Operations Manager concerning health & safety issues and vandalism since the last meeting.

Members were disappointed to hear of the vandalism at Windrush Cemetery Depot along with the issues being experienced with the poor installation of the COVID-19 memorial stones, though pleased to hear that the Operations Manager was in discussion with the contractor to have the problem rectified.

Members discussed the need to protect the Lakeside Allotments. All members were in agreement to proceed with the installation of additional fencing required to avoid trespassing

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, additional security fencing at Lakeside Allotments be installed at a cost of £3,183.

434 **COMMUNICATION FROM THE LEADER**

In the Leader's absence the Deputy Leader had nothing to be communicated.

435 **OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL - SHORES GREEN SLIP ROADS PLANNING APPROVAL NOTIFICATION**

The council received correspondence from Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) advising that planning permission had been granted for the Construction of the changes to the Shores Green junction.

Members were pleased to receive this confirmation.

Resolved:

That, the correspondence be noted.

436 **OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL - APPROVAL OF THE RE-PHASED HIF2 A40 IMPROVEMENTS PROGRAMME NOTIFICATION**

The council received correspondence from Oxfordshire County Council confirming their approval of the HIF2 A40 Improvement Programme.

Resolved:

That, the correspondence be noted.

437 **QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

There were no questions for the Leader.

438 **SEALING OF DOCUMENTS**

There were no documents sealed.

The member of the public left the meeting.

439 **EXCLUSION OF PRESS & PUBLIC**

Resolved:

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

440 **MAJOR STRATEGIC PROJECTS**

The Council received a confidential report from the Town Clerk/C.E.O updating Members on the Leys Masterplan as well as the proposed improvements to the Leys Skatepark.

She outlined the options of accounts from which the councils £250,000 contribution towards the cost of the Leys Masterplan could be drawn from with a recommendation to use the earmarked reserve – rolling capital fund. This recommendation was proposed by Cllr J Doughty and seconded by Cllr Meadows. A Vote was taken, and all members were in agreement.

The Town Clerk also provide a confidential verbal update on the issues being experienced regarding the new pavilion and sports facilities at Windrush Estate. She had met with the development consortium and West Oxfordshire District Council and discussions were ongoing.

Following this, the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) tabled a report detailing the options available to “opt to Tax” for Burwell Hall in order to reclaim Value Added Tax (VAT) on the major expense due to be incurred with impending improvements.

Members heard from the RFO to explain the technicalities of the report and noted the impact on income and expenditure as well as the request to delegate the decision to the RFO and Town Clerk.

The RFO advised of an amendment to one of the recommendations in the report. The amendment was proposed by Cllr Collins, seconded by Cllr Cherry. A vote was taken, and all members were in agreement.

The Town Clerk reminded all members of the confidential nature of these discussions.

Resolved:

1. That, the report of the Town Clerk be noted and,
2. That, the grant awarded to Courtside CIC be funded from the earmarked reserve – rolling capital fund and,
3. That, the report and verbal update of the RFO be noted and,
4. That, the council delegate authority to the Town Clerk to “opt-to-tax” the Burwell Hall as set out in this report at a date to be determined by the Town Clerk between 1 August and 30 September 2023 subject to further work by the officers to determine that this is financially advantageous to the Council in relation to its ability to recover input tax and,
5. That, fees and charges for the Burwell Hall to 31 March 2024 to be inclusive of VAT if the option-to-tax is exercised, noting the impact on income and expenditure as set out in this report.

The meeting closed at: 8.05 pm

Chair