

**MEETING OF THE
WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL**

Held on Monday, 29 July 2024

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

Present:

Councillor O Collins (Chair)

Councillors:	G Meadows	J Doughty
	J Aitman	D Edwards-Hughes
	D Enright	D Newcombe
	R Smith	J Robertshaw
	D Temple	S Simpson
	R Crouch	J Treloar
	G Doughty	
Officers:	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
Others:	2 members of the public.	

427 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A Bailey, T Ashby, and L Cherry (the latter by way of previously agreed dispensation).

428 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest from Members or officers.

429 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the Full Council meeting held on 17 June 2024 were received.

There were no questions, therefore the Chair moved their acceptance. Members were unanimous in agreement.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Full Council meeting held on 17 June 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

Cllr D Enright joined the meeting at 7.07pm

430 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

The Council adjourned for this item.

The Council received representations from residents of Deer Park, Witney in relation to agenda item 12 (Vandalism & Anti-social Behaviour (ASB)) and ASB at Deer park and across Witney.

The Mayor, Leader, ward councillors and others expressed thanks to the residents for bringing this to the Council's attention and for their efforts in maintaining civic pride in the area.

The Council reconvened.

431 **VANDALISM & ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR**

With the permission of the Chair, this item was raised up the agenda in order for the residents to listen to the discussion.

A spreadsheet of known vandalism anti-social behaviour issues at town council facilities was received by the Council. The Deputy Town Clerk added further instances of issues over the previous weekend.

In response to Deer Park issues, the Council thanked the residents for raising these and advised they would feed them back to Thames Valley Police. There was agreement that logging incidents with the police was difficult and when they were, it appeared some were not being recorded with crime reference numbers. It was suggested this could be raised with the Police & Crime Commissioner who was due to attend the October meeting.

A Member suggested that following a rise in litter bins being burnt, that fire retardant bins were sourced for future replacements.

Resolved:

1. That, the vandalism and anti-social behaviour spreadsheet be noted and,
2. That, details of incidents at Deer Park be forwarded to Thames Valley Police.

Inspector C Ball of Thames Valley Police joined the meeting at 7.13pm

432 **WITNEY COMMUNITY POLICING ISSUES**

Members received a verbal update from Inspector Chris Ball of Thames Valley Police (TVP).

Concerns had already been raised under public participation in reference to incidents at Deer Park, particularly after midnight, which Insp Ball advised he would explore further. Members were advised summer anti-social behaviour (ASB) patrols had begun following an uptick in ASB with particular issues at The Leys and break-ins at the Coffee Shed.

The Council were pleased to hear that TVP had had positive results in Tower Hill cemetery recently and it was hoped this would lead to less issues at the facility moving forward. The Town Clerk however, raised concerns about the difficulty in reporting crimes and in receiving crime references for them; these incidents would not therefore be logged as a crime and would not appear in statistics used for crime resources.

Insp Ball further updated on the TVP Force Review which aimed to make the force more efficient and visible, therefore further neighbourhood officers were expected. A further comment added that neighbourhood presences could help with issues in wards if possible, a neighbourhood watch scheme may help at Deer Park.

A Member thanked TVP for the increased presence of PCSO's on the Windrush Place estate in West Witney.

In response to a Member's question regarding retailer's crime reporting App, it was advised this still required work in Witney to make it more successful.

Resolved:

1. That, the verbal update be noted.
2. That, details of ASB at Deer Park, and incidents logged without crime reference numbers be forwarded to Insp Ball.

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

West Oxfordshire County Council (WODC)

Councillor D Enright advised there had been a hiatus in Council projects due to the General Election but there had been work in the background on a number of issues, and all councils would be seeking meetings with the new local members of parliament.

WODC had provided over 75 local firms with grants of £5,000 to support and help promote what they were doing in the District, some of which were in Witney.

The Pavement Trading policy had been updated and would cost £175 for two years, although there would be a subsidy for businesses.

Finally, Cllr Enright advised Members WODC was looking at new ways to manage the markets in Witney and the District in order for them to grow, and to help facilitate further event markets throughout the year. A Christmas market would be returning to Marriott's Walk in the first weekend of December.

Councillor J Doughty – raised the issue of grass cutting, with a lesser number of cuts by the County Council causing residents to complain and comment it was a health and safety issue. The Town Clerk advised she was working with WODC/OCC. Cllr R Smith advised this issue would come up later in the meeting.

Cllr R Smith advised a motion at WODC had been passed, subject to executive in regard to the creation of a Community Governance review policy. This would set regular intervals for reviews and tie them to large scale developments across the District.

Cllr R Crouch advised a further motion at WODC had been passed, subject to executive in regard to becoming a Council of Sanctuary which had received cross party support. The aim was to build a code of conduct to show respect for and look after asylum seekers in the town. It was likely the Town Council would feed into this in some way in the future.

Resolved:

That, the verbal updates be noted.

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

Witney Town Charity

Councillor R Crouch advised Members the charity had a property which was being let to SEND adults and this was working well. The Charity was also particularly happy as it had, after many years, managed to install double glazing in its Alms houses.

Witney Education Foundation

Councillor D Enright advised Members that funds available for charitable purposes had dropped since the previous year; this was for a number of reasons, not least cost of living and drop in income. There would have to be tighter control on the criteria by which grants were awarded.

Cogges Welfare Trust

Councillor J Aitman advised members it was encountering similar income issues. It worked closely with Blake's schools for children's needs and was involved in a project to let land to a solar farm project.

Witney & District Twinning Association & Town Band

The Mayor, Councillor O Collins advised the groups had combined exceptionally well to celebrate the 35th anniversary of twinning with Unterhaching. The Mayor had been in attendance at the events and looked forward to host events for the return anniversary in 2025.

Resolved:

That, the verbal updates be noted.

435 **CLIMATE, BIODIVERSITY & PLANNING - 25 JUNE & 16 JULY 2024**

P401 – Cllr J Aitman advised the Cogges Welfare Trust was not related to Cogges Farm.

The Vice Chair of the Committee presented the above minutes to Council, the Mayor moving their acceptance. All Members were in agreement.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Climate, Biodiversity & Planning Committee meetings held on 25 June and 16 July 2024 be received and any recommendations therein approved.

436 **PARKS & RECREATION - 1 JULY 2024**

The Chair of the Committee presented the above minutes to Council with the Mayor moving their acceptance. All Members were in agreement.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee meeting held on 1 July 2024 be received and any recommendations therein approved.

437 **HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS - 8 JULY 2024**

H372 – Following a question from a Member, the Town Clerk advised that discussions with Oxfordshire County Council had resulted in an undertaking for them to repair the right of way, as it was under their remit. Areas had been marked out and should be repaired within the coming weeks.

The Chair of the Committee presented the above minutes to Council and moved their acceptance. All Members were in agreement.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee meeting held on 8 July 2024 be received and any recommendations therein approved.

438 **STRONGER COMMUNITIES - 15 JULY 2024**

SC393 – A Member wanted to express how successful the town council events held at Witney Carnival had been. The several facets to the stall, including project consultation had been a triumph. Compliments had been received by members of the public who were impressed with what was on offer.

SC398 – The Leader advised that although the Council had declined the tree giveaway scheme, there was a WODC Community Orchard Scheme open until 31 July. Members were supportive of entering expression of interests, which would be led by officers at both organisations to agree suitability.

The Vice Chair of the Committee presented the above minutes to Council and moved their acceptance. All Members were in agreement.

Resolved:

1. That, Officers submit expressions of interest for community orchards at Thorney Leys, Witan Way and Snipe Meadow to WODC and,
2. That, the minutes of the Stronger Communities Committee meeting held on 15 July 2024 be received and any recommendations therein approved.

439 **POLICY, GOVERNANCE & FINANCE - 22 JULY 2024**

The Chair of the Committee presented the above minutes to Council and moved their acceptance. All Members were in agreement.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Policy Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 22 July 2024 be received and any recommendations therein approved.

440 **CIVIC ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Council received the report of the Mayor and Mayor's Secretary which highlighted the civic engagements of the Mayor and Deputies since the last meeting.

The Mayor expressed thanks to the Senior Administrative Officer and his PA for their administrative support.

Resolved:

1. That, the report and verbal update be noted.

441 **OXFORDSHIRE COUNCIL'S CHARTER**

The Council received the Oxfordshire Council's Charter which had been led by Oxfordshire County Council and the Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils.

The document laid out the shared commitments and principles of Oxfordshire Councils at all tiers and how they should work together for the benefit of residents.

Members discussed the benefits of the scheme and agreed it was a solid foundation for co-operative working and potential future devolution, with attached resources. A particular challenge was grass-cutting, with varying authorities responsible for maintenance, sometimes next to each other.

The Town Clerk advised the Council had brought its grounds maintenance service in house to deliver a better service, it was not about saving money, although this had also occurred naturally. There were lots of complaints about cutting and it seemed sensible to discuss obvious verge areas with the County Council with a view to bettering the service currently provided.

Resolved:

1. That, the Oxfordshire Council's Charter be noted, the Town Council having already been involved in discussions and consultation to this point.
2. That, the Town Clerk continues discussions on providing additional services regarding grounds maintenance.

442 **HEALTH & SAFETY**

The Council received the report of the Head of Estates & Operations and accompanying Council health and safety policy.

The Town Clerk reminded Members the Council had a collective responsibility for health and safety which included a duty of care to staff and residents.

The updated policy had some minor amendments so needed to be re-adopted to ensure compliance with legislation. A report on health and safety was a standing agenda item at Full Council to demonstrate to Members things are in order.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,

2. That, the amended health and safety policy statement as presented, be approved. In doing so, Members and reconfirmed their responsibilities for Health and Safety in the organisation.

Cllr D Edwards-Hughes left the meeting at 8.08pm and rejoined at 8.11pm

443 **GOVERNANCE – REGISTER OF INTERESTS, HOSPITALITY & DATA PROTECTION**

The Council received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk concerning Council governance.

Members were reminded of their obligations relating to Register of Interests and Hospitality & Gifts and asked to update forms within 28 days of changes or receiving hospitality.

The Council were also reminded of the Council's Data Controller obligations under data protection legislation and how individually, they were responsible for ensuring they adhere to the Council's procedures on this.

Finally, Members were advised there is a Councillor training budget and if refresher training on data protection or any other training was required they should contact the Deputy Town Clerk.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, Members note their obligations regarding Register of Interests
3. That, Members note their obligations regarding Gifts & Hospitality and,
4. That, Members note their obligations regarding Data Protection and will request any training if they do not and,
5. That, the Council notes the Councillor Training Statement.

444 **NALC – LOCAL COUNCIL AWARD SCHEME**

The Council received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk concerning the National Association of Local Council's (NALC) Local Council Award Scheme.

Members were advised that this national scheme highlighted best practice, good governance and legal compliance with a raft of sector legislation. It had been a longstanding objective to apply for recognition via this scheme and there were several items which the Council needed to understand and resolve before an application could be submitted.

In response to a Member, it was confirmed there was still some work required to apply for a gold or quality status award, but the Council had everything in place to apply for the foundation award; higher statuses should be achievable before the end of this Council's administration.

In particular, the Council was reminded of its duties concerning crime & disorder and biodiversity.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the Council recognises its duties in relation to the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and,
3. That, the Council recognises its duties in relation to biodiversity under the Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2006 and,

4. That, the Town Council has the necessary documents, policies and procedures as set out in Table 1 of the report and publishes them online and,
5. That, the Town Council has the necessary documents, policies and procedures as set out in in Table 2 of the report [and can therefore apply for the NALC Foundation award] and,
6. That, the status is reviewed annually to confirm eligibility.

445 **COUNCILLORS @ THE CAFE ENGAGEMENT - ANNUAL REVIEW**

The Council reviewed the Councillors @ The Café engagement morning which had been running for a year.

Members discussed the success of the engagement and generally agreed it worked well and was valuable in offering a human side of the Council and for receiving current relevant feedback on issues affecting residents. It was not political as Councillors were representing the Town Council, not political parties.

There was discussion on how to improve the sessions on the first Saturday of each month and agreement that final attendance would be agreed the week prior when Councillors plans were known, and that signage and communications could be better. There was also agreement to invite Witney District and County Councillors to attend.

Resolved:

1. That, Councillors @ The Café continues to be held on the first Saturday of each month at the Corn Exchange and,
2. That, attendance is confirmed by individual Members the week before each event and,
3. That, Witney & District Councillors be invited to take part and,
4. That, a pop-up banner is purchased to highlight the event on the day and,
5. That, signage and communications are amended by Officers to reflect that not all councillors will be in attendance every week.

446 **COMMUNICATION FROM THE LEADER**

The Leader had nothing to be communicated.

447 **THE SAFETY OF ELECTRIC-POWERED MICRO-MOBILITY VEHICLES AND LITHIUM BATTERIES**

The Council received correspondence asking it to support a campaign and parliamentary bill regarding the safety of Lithium-ion Batteries and e-bikes and scooters.

Although supportive of the subject, Members questioned why it needed the support of town and parish councils when it was supported by national Council bodies and large companies; it seemed obvious this should already be in product regulatory systems.

It was agreed the issue should be forwarded to Witney's new MP to lobby the bill on behalf of Witney and West Oxfordshire residents.

Resolved:

1. That, the correspondence be noted and,
2. That, Charlie Maynard MP be asked to support this campaign as the town's parliamentary member.

448 **POLICE & CRIME COMMISSIONER UPDATE**

The Council received the most recent Thames Valley Police & Crime Commissioner newsletter.

Members were advised that officers had received the TVP Plan for tackling Crime and Disorder 2024-29 earlier in the day and would circulate the following day.

Resolved:

1. That, the PCC newsletter be noted and,
2. That, the TVP plan for Tackling Crime and Disorder 2024-29 be circulated to Members.

449 **QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

There were no Questions for the Leader of the Council.

450 **SEALING OF DOCUMENTS**

There were no items sealed since the last meeting.

Resolved:

That the seal of the Council be affixed to any documents arising from decisions taken by this meeting of the Council.

The meeting closed at: 8.40 pm

Chair