

**MEETING OF THE
WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL**

Held on Monday, 14 October 2024

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

Present:

Councillor O Collins (Chair)

Councillors:	G Meadows J Aitman T Ashby R Smith A Bailey R Crouch	G Doughty J Doughty D Edwards-Hughes D Newcombe S Simpson J Treloar
Officers:	Sharon Groth Adam Clapton Nigel Warner	Town Clerk Deputy Town Clerk Responsible Financial Officer
Others:	Matthew Barber – Police & Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley Police.	

No members of the public.

Ahead of the meeting, the Mayor referred to the resignation of L Cherry from Witney Town Council during the summer due to health reasons. He offered thanks for her contribution, expertise and passion in her role as Councillor and that the Council would be poorer for the loss of her input and knowledge and on behalf of the everyone, wished her all the best for the future.

The Mayor also referred to the passing of long-standing officer, J Hickman during the summer and led a moments reflection after noting fond and firm memories of his time working with him until his retirement.

561 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D Enright, J Robertshaw, and D Temple.

562 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members or officers.

563 MINUTES

The minutes of the Full Council meeting held on 29 July 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 29 July 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

564 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

565 **WITNEY COMMUNITY & THAMES VALLEY POLICING ISSUES**

Inspector C Ball of the Witney Neighbourhood Policing Team had offered apologies for the meeting but had sent an update on the success of the summer KICK activity held at Witney ATP. It had been a huge success, and he passed on his thanks to the Council for funding the Station detached youth service who ran the events with TVP. He was looking ahead to next summer to see how it could. In his opinion it had helped with an 8% reduction in ASB.

The Mayor then welcomed the Thames Valley Police Crime Commissioner, Matthew Barber to address the Council and thanked him for accepting its invitation to come and speak with Members.

PCC Barber welcomed the opportunity to attend and spoke at length to the Council, updating Members on the police's work in the Thames Valley.

A new Police Crime Plan for the Thames Valley had been published which was a framework for the coming years. West Oxfordshire was a very safe area, and updates were provided on knife crime, youth interventions, shoplifting, domestic abuse crime, cyber-crime & fraud, CCTV, and road safety with a strategy on the latter due soon.

In response to questions from Members, Mr Barber spoke on stop and search figures, categorisation of non-sexual offences, enforcement of 20mph speed limits, e-scooters/bikes and the good work and staffing numbers of the Witney Neighbourhood team.

Further questions were asked on grants for community groups, foreign CCTV hardware, problems with reporting non-urgent crime, and transphobic crime statistics.

Finally, Members were complimentary of the strong local CCTV and neighbourhood policing teams.

Resolved:

That, the verbal updates be noted.

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

Cllr J Doughty thanked officers for attending to the roundabouts at Thorney Leys and Curbridge Road which had become overgrown in recent weeks. The weather conditions and other pressing items had hampered progress in clearing for the autumn, but both had been completed and residents were pleased with the results.

West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC)

Cllr R Crouch advised she was the new WODC Executive Member for Stronger, Healthy Communities. In the role she was currently working on a Refugee re-settlement Scheme but if Members required help with anything under the position's remit, they should contact her.

Cllr J Doughty was pleased to advise a replacement road sign had been installed at Moorland Road, Witney after many months of delay.

The Town Clerk/C.E.O enquired on the future of Publica and advised that Mr P Shaw, a long-standing officer who had supported the town council on planning issues over many years was leaving his post. Members advised Publica was undergoing changes, and this was the first phase and agreed a letter should be sent to Mr Shaw expressing thanks for his support.

Resolved:

That, the verbal updates be noted.

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

WING (Witney Infrastructure Neighbourhood Group)

Cllr R Smith advised that WING had met with West Oxfordshire District Council planners, the Environment Agency and others

Witney Museum

The Mayor, Cllr O Collins referred to a museum tour which had taken place the previous week. They had been awarded a grant and had exciting plans as to how this was to be spent.

Witney Town Band

The Mayor also referred to the Town Band and the excellent work they did for the Council and town. There would be a fundraising concert at the Corn Exchange on 17 November which had been provided as a subsidised let by the Council and he hoped to see Members there.

Resolved:

That, the verbal updates be noted.

568 **CLIMATE, BIODIVERSITY & PLANNING - 6 AUGUST, 3 SEPTEMBER, 17 SEPTEMBER & 8 OCTOBER 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 Climate, Biodiversity & Planning Committee meetings held on 6 August, 3 September, 17 September, and 8 October 2024 be received and any recommendations therein approved.

569 **PARKS & RECREATION - 9 SEPTEMBER 2024**

PR477 – Following a question from a Member, it was advised that the contractors were now back onsite at The Leys.

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 Parks & Recreation Committee meeting held on 9 September 2024 be received and any recommendations therein approved.

570 **HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS - 16 SEPTEMBER 2024**

H487 – A Member advised the footpath works at St Mary’s Churchyard being undertaken by Oxfordshire County Council had been delayed as they were more extensive than first thought.

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 16 September 2024 be received and any recommendations therein approved.

571 **STRONGER COMMUNITIES - 23 SEPTEMBER 2024**

SC528 – The Deputy Town Clerk drew attention to the Advent Fayre taking place on 1 December 2024 and advised a communication had been sent to all Members asking for their time to support the event.

The Vice 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 Stronger Communities Committee meeting held on 23 September 2024 be received and any recommendations therein approved.

572 **POLICY, GOVERNANCE & FINANCE - 30 SEPTEMBER 2024**

F534 – The Leader advised further communications had been received since the discussion at Committee. Officers continued to advise that legal advice had backed the Council’s staff on the interment at Windrush Cemetery, but the issue was causing distress to the family and the decision had been made to allow the interment to proceed as requested on this occasion.

The Vice 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 30 September 2024 be received and any recommendations therein approved.

573 **COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE WORKING PARTY - 14 OCTOBER 2024**

The Chair of the Community Governance Review Working Party provided an update on the meeting which had taken place earlier in the evening.

The Council needed to have a plan, and the recommendations were passed on to Members

Resolved:

That, the verbal update from the CGRWP meeting held on 14 October be noted and the recommendations approved.

574 **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 his Deputy, Cllr Bailey for attending several of the events he was unable to attend.

Cllr Collins also noted a mistake in the report; he had attended the OktoberFest at St Mary's Church and had previously attended the re-opening of St Mary's Court.

Finally, the Mayor highlighted the Street Art Showcase at the Leys Wheeled Sports Park. The event had caught everyone's eye and had received positive feedback, thanks should be passed to officers for their work on the event.

Resolved:

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

Cllr A Bailey left the meeting briefly during the following item.

575 **COMMITTEE, WORKING PARTY & EXTERNAL ORGANISATION MEMBERSHIPS**

The Council received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk concerning Committee and external organisation membership.

The resignation of a former Central ward member had resulted in positions on the Stronger Communities Committee, as a Witney Educational Foundation Trustee, and on several other working groups. In addition, Cllr J Doughty had stood down from the Stronger Communities Committee since the last meeting.

The Council were also asked to elect Members to the Council's VE & VJ Day 80th Anniversary task and finish group for the 2025 commemorations.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, Cllrs D Temple and J Aitman be elected to the Stronger Communities Committee, replacing Cllr J Doughty and the former central ward Member.
3. That, the membership of the VE & VJ Task & Finish Group be Cllrs J Aitman, O Collins, R Crouch, G Meadows, J Robertshaw, and J Treloar.
4. That, Cllr J Aitman be elected as the Town Council's nominated Trustee on the Witney Educational Foundation and,
5. That, Cllr A Bailey be elected as a Town Council Home Start Champion and,
6. That, no replacement is sought for the Town Council's Youth Council Task & Finish Group and,
7. That, Cllr J Aitman be the Town Council's representative on the Witney Community Insight Profile Steering Group.

576 **COMMITTEE CALENDAR REVIEW 2024-25**

The Council received notice of changes to the Committee Calendar for 2024. The Council meeting dates for the second to last cycle of the municipal year had been brought forward by a week, and the final cycle by two weeks to tie in with the usual dates.

Members agreed the historic schedule of meetings and gaps between them should be adhered to for continuity.

Resolved:

That, the updated calendar dates be noted.

577 **CONCLUSION OF AUDIT FOR YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2024**

The Council received and considered the notice of the conclusion of audit for the year ended 31 March 2024.

The Responsible Financial Officer (R.F.O) provided a verbal update on the external auditor's comments which were predominantly regarding the number of calendar days the inspection period for elector's rights had been published for. Members agreed this very minor technicality was open to interpretation and as such the Council could appeal as it would inform how the Council replied to next year's audit return, but on this occasion opted for a letter to be sent querying the decision.

The Leader of the Council thanked officers on the clean audit, which had been overlooked in the comments and discussions on the length of the inspection period.

Resolved:

1. That, the external audit report and verbal update be noted and,
2. That, the Council notes that the Council's External Auditor – Moore – has completed the review of Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return for year ended 31 March 2024, and in their opinion the information is in accordance with the Proper Practices (external Audit Report and Certificate 2023/24 and Notice of Conclusion of Audit for year ended 31 March 2024) and,

- 578 3. That, the Council writes to the External Auditor to help inform future returns.
OXFORDSHIRE COUNCILS CHARTER - ADOPTION

The Council received the Oxfordshire Council's Charter and were asked to formally adopt and become a signatory of the document.

All Members agreed Witney Town Council should do so due to the importance of the document's contents.

Resolved:

That, Witney Town Council formally adopts the Oxfordshire Council's Charter and agrees to be a signatory of the document.

- 579 **WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL - POLLING DISTRICT AND POLLING PLACES REVIEW 2024**

The Council received notice of the West Oxfordshire District Council Polling Places Review 2024.

Members discussed the proposed changes in Witney and agreed the Davenport Methodist Church should continue as a polling station.

There was further discussion regarding West Witney polling stations and the use of schools when other locations could be sought. The use of Witney Community Primary and Blake's C of E School highlighted the lack of community facilities in all three areas and electoral officers should think creatively for new locations.

At West Witney, residents of the Colwell Green development had a long way to walk to the current polling stations. Once the Sports Pavilion at Windrush Place had been built it would be the most sensible place, but in the meantime a community room at the front of Windrush Place Church of England Primary School would appear to be a better option as its use did not impact the school day and was separated from the playground and classrooms.

Members also agreed a response should confirm the polling places took into account the proposed boundaries from 2025 following the Oxfordshire County Council review. If so, was there an opportunity to add further stations for the Leys, for example the ATP in Gordon Way.

Resolved:

1. That, the consultation be noted and,
2. That, a response from Witney Town Council be submitted encompassing the above points.

- 580 **HEALTH & SAFETY**

The Council received the report of the Head of Estates & Operations which provided an update to Members on the progress of items.

Members were pleased to see items progressing under the collective responsibility of the Council.

Resolved:

That, the report be noted.

Cllr J Doughty left the meeting briefly during the following two agenda items.

581 **WITNEY HIGH STREET AND MARKET SQUARE ENHANCEMENT SCHEME**

The Council received the response submitted to the Oxfordshire County Council Witney High Street consultation by the Climate, Biodiversity & Planning Committee, on its behalf before the deadline of 9 October 2024.

Resolved:

That, the response entered by the Climate, Biodiversity & Planning Committee on behalf of the Council on 9 October 2024 be noted.

582 **VANDALISM & ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR**

The Council received an updated list of anti-social behaviour and vandalism incidents on its Estate since the last meeting.

Resolved:

That, the updates on vandalism and anti-social behaviour be noted.

583 **COMMUNICATION FROM THE LEADER**

The Leader raised a communication received from the Schools Chaplain at Witney Parish regarding a cultural event which was taking place during Black History Month of October which asked for help with funding the event.

Members agreed the Council should support the event, to the sum of £150 (£50 from the 50th Anniversary fund and £100 from the discretionary fund) subject to an application form being returned, along with receipts for sundries for the event.

The Leader also advised Members that Witney Area Fair Trade Action Group (WAFTAG) had held a successful anniversary event at the Corn Exchange on 14 September and were supporting 'Justice for Oranges' which was campaigning for the import of fairly traded oranges to the United Kingdom.

Resolved:

1. That, the communications from the Leader be noted and,
2. That, subject to providing an application form, receipting documents and a report to the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee, the Council financially supports the multi-cultural activity day on 23 October 2024 to the sum of £150. £50 of this being allocated from the £50 for fifty grant scheme and £100 from the discretionary grants budget.

584 **ELECTORAL REVIEW OF OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL - FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Council received correspondence from the Local Government Boundary Commission, outlining its final recommendations for electoral arrangements for Oxfordshire following a County Council review.

The changes had an impact on Witney parish and would create two new wards, while losing another. Members were disappointed that the points made during the consultation on this had not been implemented more widely but welcomed a change of name for the new Windrush Quay parish ward which they would help stop confusion with Windrush Place.

There was nothing further which could be done at this point with regard these changes, but it was suggested the Council writes to the LGBC to advise it would be lobbying for a community governance review in the near future.

Resolved:

1. That, the final recommendations of the LGBC regarding an electoral review for Oxfordshire County Council be noted and,
2. That, Witney Town Council corresponds with the LGBC concerning a future community governance review of Witney.

585 **THAMES WATER - RESPONSE TO VOTE OF NO CONFIDENCE**

The Council received correspondence from Thames Water in response to its vote of no confidence in the company as competent water and sewerage undertaker.

Members were disappointed with the standard response and agreed it should be forwarded to the Windrush Against Sewage and Pollution (WASP) group and a representative from Thams Water should be invited to a future meeting.

Resolved:

1. That, the correspondence be noted and,
2. That, it be forwarded to WASP for information.
3. That, a representative from Thames Water be invited to a future meeting of the Council.

586 **DEPARTMENT FOR ENVIRONMENT FOOD & RURAL AFFAIRS - THAMES WATER**

The Council received correspondence from the Department for Environmental Food & Rural Affairs in response to its vote of no confidence in the Thames Water as competent water and sewerage undertaker.

Members welcomed the response which did address the concerns raised in the Council's earlier correspondence.

Resolved:

1. That, the correspondence be noted and,
2. That, it be forwarded to WASP for information

587 **DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT - THE OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL (HIGHWAYS INFRASTRUCTURE - A40 ACCESS TO WITNEY) SRO & CPO 2023**

The Council received correspondence from the Department of Transport concerning the A40 Access to Witney highways scheme.

Resolved:

That, the correspondence from the Department of Transport concerning the A40 Access to Witney Side Road and Compulsory Purchase Orders be noted.

588 **OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL - DEFINITIVE MAP MODIFICATION ORDER FOR WITNEY FOOTPATH 32 - MARLBOROUGH LANE**

The Council received correspondence from Oxfordshire County Council concerning an anomaly on the Definitive Map and how it hoped to resolve this with a Draft Modification Order.

Members appreciated the detailed history of the Marlborough Lane site and explanation as to how a small area had been omitted from the public right of way map. There was clearly an error made when historic documents were updated so the Council had no comments to make.

Resolved:

1. That, the anomaly on the definitive map and Draft Modification Order for Marlborough Lane and Oxfordshire County Council report be noted and,
2. That, Witney Town Council has no objections to the Order and,
3. That, the historical information in the report be shared.

589 **OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL - CONSULTATION ON HAILEY PROPOSED 20MPH SPEED LIMITS**

The Council received notice of an Oxfordshire County Council consultation concerning a reduction to 20mph speed limits in Hailey.

As a neighbouring parish, Members agreed this could be referred to the Climate, Biodiversity & Planning Committee for a response.

Resolved:

1. That, the consultation be noted and,
2. That, it be referred to the Climate, Biodiversity & Planning Committee for a response.

590 **OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL - 2024-25 TREE PLANTING**

The Council received correspondence from Oxfordshire County Council showing its tree planting schedule for the forthcoming planting season.

Members were pleased to be able to see the planting taking place in each area. Officers advised if Members encountered issues opening the document they should contact them to resolve.

Resolved:

That, the correspondence be noted.

591 **CAMPAIGN FOR LOCAL ELECTRICITY BILL (AND REQUEST TO SUPPORT AMENDMENTS TO THE GREAT BRITISH ENERGY BILL)**

The Council received correspondence asking for support in amendments to the Great British Energy Bill.

It was noted the date for support had passed but the correspondence had brought it to their attention should it reoccur in the future.

Resolved:

That, the correspondence be noted.

592 **PCC CORRESPONDENCE**

The Council received the Thames Valley Police & Crime Commissioner's monthly bulletin updates for July, August & September.

Resolved:

That, the correspondence be noted.

593 **SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS**

As the meeting had now reached over two hours in length, the Committee agreed to suspend standing order 48 in order to allow the meeting to continue to completion.

594 **QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

A Member asked if the Leader could ascertain the situation of Portaloos at West Witney Sports Ground. On behalf of the Leader, Officers advised they were corresponding with the Clubs at West Witney Sports Ground to ask if they were being used as a former resolution was to remove all but the disabled unit used by the Sports & Social Club.

A Member asked that Councillors be kept updated on the progress of the Leys development. On behalf of the Leader, Officers advised this was a Policy, Governance & Finance resolution so updates would be issued.

A Member asked that the Corn Exchange was listed as a Warm Space, the item having been previously raised to the Leader. It was agreed the Corn Exchange should be listed and Officers would follow this up after the meeting.

Resolved:

That, the questions be noted, and any appropriate follow-up points be actioned.

595 **SEALING OF DOCUMENTS**

The Town Clerk advised the following leases had been signed and sealed.

Date	No of Seal	Nature of Document
21 August 2024	92	Acquisition of Raleigh Crescent Play Area from West Oxfordshire District Council. In duplicate

Resolved:

1. That, the above sealed documents be noted and,
2. 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: 9.07 pm

Chair