

**PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE
WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL**

Held on Monday, 4 November 2024

At 6.00 pm in the Gallery Room, The Corn Exchange, Witney

Present:

Councillor D Newcombe (Chair)

Councillors:	R Crouch S Simpson T Ashby	R Smith D Enright (In place of J Aitman)
Officers:	Derek Mackenzie Adam Clapton Sharon Groth Mark Lewis Nigel Warner	Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk Deputy Town Clerk Town Clerk Head of Estates & Operations Responsible Financial Officer
Others:	None	

PR596 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Treloar and O Collins.

An apology for absence was also received from Councillor J Aitman, Councillor D Enright attended as a substitute.

PR597 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor D Newcombe declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 12 as he was a member of Witney Rifle Club, based at West Witney Sports Ground Projectile Range.

Councillor R Smith declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 11 as her children used the King George V field as their route to school.

There were no other declarations from Members or Officers

PR598 MINUTES

The minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee meeting held on 9 September 2024 were received.

PR482 – The Committee Clerk advised Members that the organisations that use West Witney Sports Grounds had been written to in order to ascertain if they wished to take on the

responsibility of the Portaloos by way of a management agreement; clubs had until 15 November to respond. Should no interest be shown, the facilities would be removed.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee meeting held on 9 September 2024 be approved as a correct record of the meetings and be signed by the Chair.

PR599 **PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC**

There was no public participation.

(Cllr S Simpson joined the meeting at 6:05pm)

PR600 **FINANCE REPORT: REVISED REVENUE BUDGET 2024/25 AND DRAFT BASE REVENUE BUDGET FOR 2025/26**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) concerning the base revenue budget, draft estimates on budget parameters for 2024-25 and a revenue budget summary.

For the benefit of Members, the RFO outlined the contents of the report and explained the reasoning behind the movement of some of the budget lines to better reflect expenditure following the works depot move. This was reflected in the notes attached to the budget forecast showing where funds had been vired.

The Committee heard that the RFO, when calculating cost of living increases was using a 2% projection due to the falling inflation rate over the past year. Members were also advised that the costs of Ground Maintenance had increased by a greater rate and therefore larger increases to some of the related budgets would be needed for 2025/26.

The Committee heard that following the transfer of Unterhaching Park from West Oxfordshire District Council it had come to light that the electricity costs would need to be met by the Town Council. Members considered if this cost should be taken from the commuted lump sum received from WODC. Members unanimously agreed that a decision be taken nearer the end of the financial year end to potentially allow the commuted lump sum to remain and the cost be met from existing budgets.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the cost of lighting at Unterhaching Park be reviewed at the end of the 2024/25 accounting period and,
3. That, the draft revised base revenue budget for 2024/25 and the estimated base revenue budgets for 2025/26, as detailed be approved.

PR601 **REVENUE GROWTH ITEMS, SPECIAL REVENUE PROJECTS, AND CAPITAL PROJECTS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the RFO concerning the financial standing of the Council's current and future projects.

Members were advised of the funding streams and budgets in place for the revised capital and special revenue projects for 2023-26 and what was needed in order to bring about their completion.

Items proposed as capital and special revenue projects for 2024/25 and beyond included funding for the Councils programme of large projects and accrual of parcels of land to its portfolio, although these would add additional strain on its finances. Members were pleased to hear of the progress of these facilities being transferred over to the Council's ownership.

Members noted that the costs indicated in the report regarding the transfer of sports pitches at Windrush Place, Raleigh Crescent and Deer Park were only reflective of the ground maintenance of the grassed surfaces and that due to the overall land area, estimated at approx. 55,000 square metres, then the costs would increase when additional staffing and machinery were taken into account.

Members heard further from the Head of Estates & Operations (HoE&O) regarding the advances on the Splashpark specification and tender process which was still on target for delivery in May 2025. In response to a Member's question, the Town Clerk/CEO confirmed that money would continue to be placed in a sinking fund for both the Splashpark and for the newly developed Wheeled Sports Park to ensure the facilities are futureproofed.

The Committee was disappointed to hear of the lack of progress from Oxfordshire County Council in their response to the Leys parking restrictions and Traffic Regulations Order which had slowed however, the HoE&O assured Members that Officers continue to push for a response.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the revenue growth items for 2025/26 and revised capital and special revenue project budget for 2023-26 be approved.

PR602 SCHEDULE OF PROPOSED FEES AND CHARGES 2025/26

The Committee received and considered the proposed recreational charges for 2025-26 as part of the budget setting process.

The RFO explained that there was a modest increase of 2% to each of the charges, Officers would further review the charges and remove those which no longer were relevant such as the hire of bowls woods and sports equipment hire.

Members recognised that the increase was small however, asked that Officers prepare a breakdown analysis of the services provided so that the Committee may see the level of financial subsidy that the Council provide to sporting activities, for example the cost of providing a football pitch each week. The Town Clerk advised that this exercise had been carried out in part previously and therefore full details could be included in the explanation of the precept amount when it was issued in 2025.

Recommended:

1. That, the proposed fees and charges for 2025-26 as presented, be agreed and,
2. That, Officers prepare a breakdown of subsidies for the services provided

(The RFO left the meeting at 6:38pm)

PR603 PLAY AREAS REVIEW

The Committee received and considered the report of the Projects Officer which provided an update on the Council's play areas.

Members were pleased to hear of the review being carried out and that there were plans for the installation of inclusive play equipment as items were replaced across the Town. Members asked to see the review once completed.

Following on from the discussion on Unterhaching Park, the Committee were advised there was a question over who was responsible for the lighting at Waterford Lane, which would be explored further by officers before the transfer.

A Member asked that now the transfer was complete that a picnic bench be considered for inclusion at Raleigh Crescent play park.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the Play Area Review be presented to a future meeting of this Committee and,
3. That, Officers consider the inclusion of a picnic bench at Raleigh Crescent play park.

PR604 SPORTS/FOOTBALL PITCHES UPDATE

The Committee received and considered the report of the Operations Manager which was accompanied by a report on the Council's grass sports pitches by STRI (formerly the Sports Turf Research Institute).

Members welcomed the positive comments within the report with outlined the continued improvement in the Council's sports pitches and praised the impact the Council's in-house ground's maintenance regime. Members expressed their thanks to the Operations Manager and his team.

The Committee also received a verbal update from the Head of Estates & Operations on the potential use of the Deer Park & Raleigh Crescent sports pitches. The transfer of these areas from WODC was progressing however, these pitches would only be suitable for use as training pitches due to the lack of onsite facilities.

At a point later in the meeting a Member raised that one of the improvements in the report outlined that the area currently used for events at The Leys was once again in a condition where it could be considered for hosting sports activity; though it was understood by the Committee that owing to the yearly events schedule this would not automatically mean the area could be used uninterrupted, Members asked that Officers carry out a feasibility review for presentation at the next meeting.

The Committee asked that the report findings were communicated in the most appropriate way with all of the sports users that benefit from the use of the Council's facilities.

Resolved:

1. That, the report and verbal update be noted and,
2. That, the continued improvement in the Council's grass sports pitches be welcomed and,
3. That, officers evaluate the possibility of sports use on the Leys events field and report back to the next meeting and,
4. That, communications on the finding of the STRI report are issued via the appropriate channels.

PR605 CRICKET AT THE LEYS RECREATION GROUND

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk/CEO which provided details following a meeting with Swifts Cricket Club and the Oxfordshire Cricket Board (ECB).

Members heard of a proposal to establish an artificial wicket in place of the current grass surface. Members heard that this could lead to a return of cricket to the Leys with potential use by Henry Box School as well as youth or woman's cricket.

The Committee were unanimous in agreement that Officers should continue with discussions with the ECB, Henry Box School and any other involved parties.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, Officers continue with discussions for the establishment of an artificial wicket at The Leys.

PR606 PROPOSED KING GEORGE V FIELD FOOTPATH

The Committee received correspondence from Oxfordshire County Council's Place, Planning and Co-ordination Team detailing their request to establish a pathway across town council owned land at the King George V field, funded by the use of Section 106 Contributions from the development at Wood Green School.

Members were pleased to hear of the proposal for a shared path to facilitate access across King George V Field, principally for the benefit of Wood Green School's pupils accessing the side gate of the school via Pens Close. Members asked that OCC progress the idea and provide options for delivery to the Town Council for further consideration.

A Member also provided an update on two another schemes that OCC were progressing; the establishment of a shared pathway from Oxford Hill to Woodbank and a pathway between the Windrush Estate and Deer Park Road. The Member advised that those schemes had reached the tender stage with an expectation for delivery of both in May 2025.

Resolved:

1. That, the correspondence and the update on the other paths for the benefit of residents be noted.
2. That, Officer progress with discussions with OCC for a shared pathway at King George V Field.

PR607 **MAJOR PROJECTS UPDATE**

The Committee received the report of the Project Officer providing an update on the various major projects that the Council was currently engaged with.

Members also heard that following the success of the Street Art Event at the Wheeled Sports Park that Officers were looking to host a similar event in Spring 2025.

The Committee was disappointed to hear from Courtside CIC of fresh delays to the redevelopment of The Leys. The Head of Estate & Operations advised that Officers were working very closely with the Courtside Team to monitor progress. Members were hopeful that with a new proposed start date of 18 November that completion would be ahead of Autumn 2025 as had been indicated by Courtside.

Members were also pleased to hear of the progress of the Raleigh Crescent Sports & Social Park and looked forward to receiving further updates as it was expected this project would be the next to be delivered.

The Committee, in response to their request made at the meeting of this Committee on 9 July 2024 received details of the Councils financial arrangements with Witney Mills Bowls Club.

Resolved:

1. That, the major project update report be noted and,
2. That, the Community Hub update provide by Courtside CIC be noted and,
3. That, the summary of Witney Mills Bowls Club financial agreements be noted.

The meeting closed at: 7.24 pm

Chair