

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

Held on Monday, 13 January 2025

At 6.02 pm in the Gallery Room, The Corn Exchange, Witney

Present:

Councillor R Smith (Vice-Chair, in the Chair)

Councillors:	R Crouch	T Ashby
	J Aitman	O Collins
	S Simpson	G Meadows (In place of D Newcombe)
	J Treloar	
Officers:	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
	Derek Mackenzie	Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk
	Angus Whitburn	Operations Manager
	Mark Lewis	Head of Estates & Operations
Others:	Seven members of the public.	

PR15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor D Newcombe, Councillor G Meadows attended as a substitute.

PR16 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members or Officers.

PR17 MINUTES

The minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee meeting held on 4 November 2024 were received.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee meeting held on 4 November 2024 be approved as a correct record of the meetings and be signed by the Chair.

PR18 PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC

The Committee adjourned for this item.

The committee received representations from members of Spartan Rangers Football Club concerning Agenda Item 8.

The Committee reconvened.

An additional member of the public arrived at 6:14pm

PR19 THE LEYS EVENT FIELD USE

With the permission of the Chair, this item was moved up the agenda so that members of public could hear the discussion and outcome.

The Committee received and considered the report of the Operations Manager as well as responses from him which clarified items in the report and questions raised by Members of the public during their participation.

The most recent STRI (formerly the Sports Turf Research Institute) showed the east side of the Leys, which had been reported as unsafe to play organised sport on several years ago due to compaction had recovered and was now safe to use. This area of the Leys had been used for more events during the summer since football had ceased and these would still need to occur if football returned. It was unknown at this point how long the ground would accommodate both co-existing recreational activities but due to the lack of 11x11 football pitches across Witney, it was now an option to try. Football pitch hire would have to fit in with annual events and the Council would review the August 2025 ground reports to assess the current position.

Members were advised the STRI reports which assessed the adequacy of the sports pitches were carried out during August in order for the ground to provide a result following any remedial work. Had inspections been carried out as suggested immediately after the end of the playing season it would most likely show a greater compaction level.

The Committee also heard that since the grounds maintenance contract had been brought back in house by the Town Council in October 2023, the team had been able to bring the quality of the pitches up to a much higher standard as was evident by the report's findings.

It was proposed by Cllr Aitman, seconded by Cllr Treloar to recommence the use of the 11 v 11 pitch at The Leys conditional on the need to make use of the area for event purposes. A vote was taken with all Members unanimous in favour.

Resolved:

1. That, the report and verbal update be noted and,
2. That, use of the 11 v 11 football pitch at The Leys recommences.

Six members of the public, along with the Operations Manager left the meeting at 6:34pm – One member of the public remained.

Councillor J Treloar left the meeting at 6:34pm and rejoined at 6:36pm

PR20 FINANCE REPORT

The Committee received and considered the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) detailing income and expenditure for budgets which were the responsibility of the committee.

Resolved:

That, the report be noted.

PR21 KING GEORGE'S FOOTPATH UPDATE

The Committee received and considered the report of the Head of Estates & Operations which provided an update on the proposed footpath to cross King George V Field.

Members heard that Officers had engaged with Oxfordshire Country Council, and this would be explored in greater depth. Members asked that consideration be given to the choice of lighting to ensure that there was limited impact on wildlife however understood that sufficient lighting was necessary to ensure that users felt safe in using the path outside of daylight hours.

In response to questions, the Committee were assured the footpath would not impact negatively on the proposed community orchard and existing sports and play facilities at the recreational field.

All Members were unanimous in agreement with the project proceeding however, it would have to be driven by OCC, overseen by their Officers, this was due to Town Council Officers being engaged in larger project deliveries for the town during 2025/26. It was hoped this would be the case as OCC should be keen to fulfil a target set by them in the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan.

Resolved:

1. That, the report and update be noted and,
2. That, OCC be advised that they are to take the lead on the project.

PR22 UNTERHACHING PARK LIGHTING

The Committee received and considered the report of the Head of Estates & Operations which provided the financial details requested at an earlier meeting as to the cost of lighting at Unterhaching Park.

Members heard that moving forward costs would be reduced by the move to an alternative energy provider and when required any replacement of bulbs would be energy saving LED's.

Officers would be including lighting as part of the Play Park Review and were mindful of future acquisitions of play parks such as the two for Waterford Lane and Cedar Drive which were currently in the pipeline to ensure that sufficient commuted sums were included as part of the agreement.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, a review of lighting is included in the upcoming Play Park Review.

During the discussions of Agenda Item 9 – Major Project Update

Councillor O Collins left the meeting at 7:06pm and rejoined at 7:09pm

The remaining member of the public left at 7:07pm

Councillor T Ashby left the meeting at 7:16pm

PR23 MAJOR PROJECTS UPDATE

The Committee received and considered the updates from the Project Officer on the various ongoing works.

Members were disappointed to hear of the lack of engagement from Oxfordshire County Council in respect of the enforcement of the proposed Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) at The Leys, it was agreed that Cllr R Crouch would press along with OCC Councillors to further the discussions as it was imperative this was in place before the Town Council made the TRO application.

The Committee were pleased to hear the tender had been issued for the Raleigh Crescent sports and social park and looked forward to hearing further from Officers when the evaluation had taken place.

Members heard additional details on the plans for the Splash Pad from the Head of Estates & Operations. Officer's concerns regarding the drainage of wastewater were being addressed and Officers were confident that delivery of the project could be made in time for the summer period.

The Committee was unanimous in agreement to retain the Portaloo at West Witney Sports & Social Ground and understood that the maintenance of the facility would need to be passed to the individual sports clubs that wished to make use of it.

Resolved:

That, the report be noted.

PR24 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND 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.

PR25 WITNEY SWIFTS CRICKET CLUB AGREEMENT

The Committee received and considered the report of the Head of Estates & Operations outlining the initial details of the agreement with Witney Swifts.

Members discussed the proposed terms that had been forwarded by Witney Swifts and were grateful of the update. They asked that Officers consider all users of West Witney Sports Grounds particularly in relation to the relinquishment of control of the maintenance of the field.

There were contrary opinions expressed on the level of subsidy provided from the agreement and its length, but the Committee asked that talks with the club continue to ensure that a mutually suitable agreement can be reached.

Resolved:

That, the report be noted.

The meeting closed at: 7.25 pm

Chair