

**STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE
WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL**

Held on Monday, 27 January 2025

At 6.01 pm in the Gallery Room, The Corn Exchange, Witney

Present:

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

Councillors:	G Meadows O Collins T Ashby	A Bailey J Aitman D Temple
Officers:	Adam Clapton Derek Mackenzie Cara Murray Sharon Groth	Deputy Town Clerk Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk Administrative Support Assistant Communities & Planning Town Clerk
Others:	No members of the public. Councillor Abdul Mubin	

SC38 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor S Simpson.

Councillors A Bailey & O Collins had advised they would be late as they were attending the Holocaust memorial service at St Marys Church.

SC39 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members or officers.

SC40 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Stronger Communities Committee held on 18 November 2024 were received.

SC646 – The Town Clerk advised that a request had been forwarded to utilise Councillor Enright’s Oxfordshire County Council Priority Fund however she had not heard back and so would follow up with him.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Stronger Communities Committee held on 18 November 2024 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the chair.

SC41 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

SC42 **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:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the management accounts of the Stronger Communities Committee for the period 1 April to 30 November 2024 be approved.

During the following Item:

Councillor A Bailey arrived at 6:05pm

Councillor A Mubin arrived at 6:07pm

Councillor O Collins arrived at 6:09pm

SC43 **COMMUNICATIONS REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Communications & Community Engagement Officer.

Members were pleased to received updates on the improvements to the Council website pages and to hear that the issue regarding delivery of the annual newsletter to the Windrush estate had been resolved.

The Committee were also pleased to hear of the proposed changes to the Annual Town Meeting which included the introduction of an annual report, it was felt this would allow for more time in the meeting for discussion and also time to be dedicated to interactive engagement with the attendees.

Members had mixed opinions in relation to the use of Social Media platforms, it was agreed that the use of X would be scaled back and used only to advice of large stories or announcements, the account would be retained to ensure that the Council remained in control and to avoid any potential misuse by a third party.

A Member raised the recent changes to the Meta's (Facebook) Terms of Reference, specifically regarding those that involve the use of hate speech, they felt that they did not provide protection for the LGBTQ+ community. It was unanimously agreed that a report be prepared by Officers for the meeting of the Council on 17 February to consider the creation of a statement to be placed on the Council's "About" page of the Facebook site in order to show the Council's support for the LGBTQ+ community.

Lastly, the Committee received a summary of the news stories for the 2024 year, it was noted that some stories or activity of the Council were missing, the Deputy Town Clerk advised that press releases were issued to the Witney Gazette however it was for the paper to choose what to publish; he further explained that the news section of the Council's website could be expanded to provide an archive for the news of the Council.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, X be used to publish important or stories of interest only and,
3. That, a report be prepared by Officers for the Council Meeting on 17 February on Meta Terms of Reference & a proposed LGBTQ+ Statement.

SC44 **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Communications & Community Engagement Officer.

Members were in agreement with the potential scaling back of the In Bloom entry in order to concentrate on the rejuvenation of the Lake & Country Park and Unterhaching park area. They were also supportive of extending the invitation to the community picnic events to nominees of the Citizen of the Year awards.

The Committee was pleased to hear of the preparations for the VE Anniversary on 8 May 2025, Witney Carnival, which they were keen to be participate in again and finally the use of the Corn Exchange for the showing of the student film.

Members acknowledged the thanks received from Witney Town Band following the offer to them to hold outdoor concerts over the summer. Members looked forward to hearing further when dates were announced.

Members heard of the plans to introduce an orchard in Snipe Meadow and planting in Unterhaching park, which they believed with the use of volunteers would bring some life back after years of the park looking uncared for. The Committee was unanimous in agreement that the remaining In Bloom budget be directed for use for this community project.

In light of the Youth Council being unable to arrive at a question to be added to the annual residents survey it was suggested that a question such as "What do you want to ask the Youth Council?" may be appropriate. It was delegated to Officers to decide on the best course of action.

Additionally, it was raised that 9 March would be a Covid-19 day of reflection with it being the 5-year anniversary of the pandemic, it was agreed that this be marked perhaps at the Covid Memorial on the Leys.

It was agreed that the Community Engagement Strategy be reviewed later in the meeting due to its draft format following the exclusion of Press & Public.

Finally, the Deputy Town Clerk advised he had been notified by the District Council that a draft Witney Community Insight report for Central ward had been completed; this would be shared with the Committee once it had been finalised.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the decision of a question to be added to the annual survey regarding young people be delegated to Officers and,
3. That, invitations be extended to Citizen of Year nominees to a Community Picnic and,

4. That, the balance of the In Bloom budget be used toward the planting at Unterhaching Park and,
5. That, the Council take part in the Witney Carnival parade and host a stall and,
6. That, the Covid day of reflection on 9 March be marked by the Council.

SC45 YOUTH COUNCIL

The Committee received the minutes of the meeting of the Youth Council on 16 January 2025.

Members discussed how they could provide support to the Youth Council, it was felt that the use of shorter agendas would allow for greater focus on subjects. It was also noted that there were a number of third parties in attendance and whilst it was pleasing to see this support it was felt this should be reduced so as not to be overbearing.

The Deputy Town Clerk advised that workshops had been arranged for the Officers of the Youth Council, and these would be commencing soon. Members also suggested that coaching could be given in the meetings by way of observation of the Councillors that act as mentors.

A Member also suggested that the Youth Council be consulted on decisions of magnitude that were being made for the Town, such as large planning applications, the West Witney Sports & Social Club improvements and proposals for Windrush Pavillion in order to seek their opinions.

Resolved:

1. That, the minutes of the Youth Council meeting on 16 January 2025 be noted and,
2. That, Officers consider how to implement the comments of the Committee.

SC46 YOUTH SERVICES

The Committee received the report of the Deputy Town Clerk which provided an update on Youth Services being funded by the Town Council.

Members heard of the use of the Corn Exchange café by The Station during the February half term, and were pleased this was able to be achieved from the existing grant provided by the Council.

The Committee were also encouraged by the changes made to The Station's website and welcomed their impending annual report due in March.

Resolved:

That, the report be noted.

SC47 SALT BIN REQUESTS

The Committee received the report of the Operations Manager and were unanimous in agreement of the proposal to site a salt bin at Swingburn Place.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, a salt bin be installed at Swingburn Place at a cost of £300 to the Council.

SC48 **PUBLIC REALM: REQUEST TO RELOCATE THE BUTTERCROSS NEEDLE**

The Committee received the report of the Town Clerk/CEO outlining the proposal to re site the Buttercross Needle and for the Town Council to take on its ownership.

Members considered the proposal however; it was clear there were mixed opinions about taking on the responsibility of the art installation.

Members held concerns of the artwork being moved to Unterhaching Park, feeling this would not be appropriate and would disrupt the look of the park, particularly given the decision made earlier in the evening to rejuvenate the park area.

It was understood that the proposal had also been forwarded to other potential custodians, one being the Witney & Abingdon College which members thought may have a more suitable location. However, it was clear Members did not wish to see the installation disappear if these other potential custodians declined the offer.

It was therefore proposed that should the installation not be taken up by another custodian then the Town Council would take on ownership however, it would not be sited at Unterhaching Park.

A Vote was then called for. The proposal was carried, with voting as follows:

In Favour	4
Against	3
Abstentions	0

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, Witney Town Council take on the ownership and consider a suitable location for the Buttercross Needle should an alternative custodian not be found.

SC49 **THIRD PARTY EVENTS**

The Committee received the report of the Venue & Events Officer which provided an update on upcoming third-party events.

Members discussed the provision of additional disability parking for third party event organisers. This parking would be situated on the grass surface therefore it was agreed that Officers consider any use on a case-by-case basis in order to be assured that the organiser has both a Risk Assessment and Traffic Movement Plan in place and that ground conditions allow any additional vehicle movements.

The Committee also considered the request received from Witney Music Festival (WMF) to extend their use of The Leys by two additional days. It was the opinion of some members that the Council already provided significant financial support to WMF by way of the current £10,000 grant and subsidised use of The Leys from Wednesday to the following Monday.

Members however felt that as music events struggle to survive support should be given to the request. The Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that there was scope within the existing partnership agreement with WMF to support the request.

A Vote was called, the result being the agreement of two additional days subsidised hire of the Leys.

For	6
Against	1
Abstention	0

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, additional disability parking at The Leys be considered subject to Officer agreement and following receipt of a Risk Assessment and Traffic Movement Plan from third party event organisers and,
3. That, WMF be granted two additional days subsidised use of The Leys meaning they would be in residence from Tuesday to Tuesday at a subsidised cost of £854.

SC50 **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.

SC51 **PARISH TRANSPORT MEETING MINUTES - 19 NOVEMBER 2024**

The Committee received the minutes of the Parish Transport Representatives Meeting held on 19 November 2024.

Members were advised of the positive feedback from the Witney Traffic Advisory Committee as to how well the Bus Users meeting held in the Corn Exchange was received in October 2024

Resolved:

That, the minutes be noted.

Councillor D Temple left the meeting during the following item at 7:40pm

SC52 **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY - DRAFT**

The Committee received and considered the draft Community Engagement Strategy from the Communications & Community Engagement Officer which outlined how it would work to enhance the quality and effectiveness of its communications.

Members were pleased to see the engagement already taking place amalgamated into one document and made suggestions for improvements which included, greater focus on young people, consulting with care homes to ensure they were communicated with and adding additional noticeboards in locations where people linger such as the skatepark and the new Coffee shed on the Leys. Additionally providing information so that other groups communications such as the Scouts Online Scout Manager system and school newsletters could be utilised.

The Committee looked forward to seeing a fully drafted version when ready for consideration and adoption.

Resolved:

That, the draft version of the Community Engagement Strategy be noted.

The meeting closed at: 7.47 pm

Chair