

**ANNUAL TOWN MEETING COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE
WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL**

Held on Wednesday, 19 March 2025

At 7.34 pm in the Main Hall, The Corn Exchange, Witney

Present:

Councillor O Collins (Chair)

Councillors:	T Ashby	G Meadows
	A Bailey	A Mubin
	R Crouch	J Robertshaw
	G Doughty	S Simpson
	J Doughty	R Smith
	D Edwards-Hughes	J Treloar
	D Enright	
Officers:	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
	Polly Inness	Communications & Community Engagement Officer
	Derek Mackenzie	Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk
	Nigel Warner	Responsible Financial Officer
	Angus Whitburn	Operations Manager
Others:	35 members of the public	
	Councillor M Brooker – West Oxfordshire District Council	
	Councillor A Coles – Oxfordshire Country Council	
	Inspector C Ball – Thames Valley Police	
	PC J Bennett – Thames Valley Police	

1 INTRODUCTIONS AND WELCOME FROM THE MAYOR OF WITNEY, CLLR OWEN COLLINS

The Town Mayor, Cllr Owen Collins welcomed the public to the meeting as well as two members of Thames Valley Police.

He continued by introducing those in attendance to the Annual Town Report which replaced the individual reports from Committee chairs. He explained how the evening would proceed and how some additional changes to the format, such as the use of Slido would assist in helping with responses to questions that residents wished to raise.

He additionally welcomed Councillor Abdul Mubin who was attending his first Annual Town Meeting following his election as a councillor for the Witney Central ward in November 2024.

2 **OFFICIAL NOTING OF THE TOWN COUNCILLOR APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Witney Town Councillors J Aitman, D Newcombe and D Temple.

3 **TO RECEIVE AND APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING OF 20 MARCH 2024**

The minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on 20 March 2024, copies of which were available at the meeting, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 **THAMES VALLEY POLICE**

The meeting received a verbal update from Inspector Chris Ball of Thames Valley Police (TVP) with a general update on policing.

Attendees were advised it had been a year of change with policing locally, with a re-structure resulting in a team which now consisted of five Police Community Support Officers and three Police Constables.

In respect of crime statistics, he reported reductions of 67% in rural crime, 40% for Burglary/Theft offences and 17% and 8% for Knife and Anti-Social Behaviour respectively which. He credited this to The Station, the detached youth service supported by Witney Town Council, and highlighted the free KICK event which was held at the Artificial Turf Pitch which TVP.

In respect of the actual number of knife crime incidents this was five for the previous 12-month period.

It was reiterated that Witney was a safe place to live. Domestic violence was down, and perpetrators were brought to justice.

Inspector Ball took questions from residents. Regarding the logging of Incidents Online he acknowledged that this was at times difficult, especially for illegal parking however, reports should be made if this was causing a hazard or obstruction. He explained that in any other case this should be reported to Oxfordshire County Council who were responsible for parking enforcement.

Next, he was asked what could be done about delivery cyclists riding on pavements, without lights and wearing dark clothing on public roads. Insp Ball advised that action was being taken and that in the previous week two illegal e-bikes had been seized by his officers.

On the subject of younger users of e-bikes and scooters he explained he was keen that children should not be criminalised and that his team's approach was to educate by speaking with parents who in main were the purchasers of the bike/scooter. However, if the use continued then action was taken to remove the bike/scooter.

In response to a question regarding the comments about insufficient numbers of Police that arise on Facebook and how was the best way to contact the police, Inspector Ball explained that demand was led by reports and resources were focused on those areas that appeared in those "hot spots". The simplest way to report was via the "Your Area" section of the TVP website.

He closed by advising that residents could find details of crime statistics on the "Your Area" section of the website however, due to limited number of categories available these may need to be read with caution.

5 **TO RECEIVE THE ANNUAL TOWN REPORT - PRESENTED BY THE MAYOR & LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

The Chair invited the Leader of Witney Town Council, Cllr Dr Ruth Smith to present the Annual Report of the Council to attendees.

She explained it was the first year the Council had produced an Annual Report. The contents of which outlined the work of the town council over the previous year and listed the facilities and events it managed; some items which were statutory such as maintenance of Cemeteries, sports and play facilities and Allotments. However, the Council held the General Power of Competence which gave it the power to do things outside its normal duties to plug gaps and be innovative on behalf of the community in terms of grants such as that to the detached youth service and re-establishing a Youth Council.

She explained that there were seventeen Councillors making up the Council who were supported by Town Hall, Public Hall and Operational staffing who together speak up for Witney and its residents on a variety of subjects through meetings as well as by liaising with other levels of Council and third-party agencies.

Cllr Smith outlined the number of public consultations had taken place in the previous year including on Raleigh Crescent Play area and MUGA, the refurbishment of the Leys splashpad and the changes to the provision of services at The Leys. Also, the Council had highlighted the public consultations regarding Witney High Street which would have a further consultation on designs later in the spring.

Following this item, the Mayor invited attendees to view a series of short videos provided by organisations awarded town council grants within the last year; these included Be Free Young Carers, Witney Photo Group and Witney Music Festival.

Inspector C Ball left the meeting at 8:15pm.

6 **OPEN FORUM TO DISCUSS MATTERS RAISED BY THE GENERAL PUBLIC AT THE MEETING**

Further to the updates contained in the Town Council's Annual Report, the Mayor opened the floor to questions from the public. All were asked to provide their name and home road name before asking their questions.

Q1. Is it possible to have a progress update on the redevelopment of West Witney Sports & Social Club and on when the welfare facilities will be moved off of the shared Car Park?

The Chair deferred to Town Council officers who advised there had been a delay due to the closure of the Community Ownership Fund which meant alternative funding had to be sought for the projects. The funds held by the Council, including reserves and Section 106 funds left a shortfall which would need to be filled with a loan. There was historical precedent for this when the Club was purchased with the Council paying a loan for several years, so the cost was shared over several generations who would benefit from it.

All equipment was due to be removed from the shared car park within the next six to eight weeks.

Q2. What can be done to stop flyposting on various electrical/GPO boxes in the town (glued on to these objects)?

As Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Economic Development of West Oxfordshire District Council, Cllr D Enright responded to say that he had been working with the Town Partnership and Witney Chamber of Commerce to complete an audit of the town's signage and infrastructure. Part of this audit had identified the unsightly communications boxes and an idea of having these decorated was being explored and he was hopeful this would be implemented.

Q3. It's nice to see the footpath along Ducklington Lane (A415) has been cleared and it is now along with the cycle path restored to its original width after about six years of complaining, however where the under-pass is into Burwell Estate can the muddy and rutted grass be made into a proper cycle path/footway?

Cllr Andrew Coles the Chair of Witney Traffic Committee (TAC) confirmed he was pleased with the work to bring the once neglected underpass and path/cycleway up to a better standard would look into the further request and reply directly to the resident.

Q4. When will cameras be installed in Witney High Street? And will the scheme also cover Corn Street?

Again, as Chair of the TAC, Cllr A Coles responded to advise that the Traffic Regulation Order was in place however, no date had been set for the implementation of an ANPR camera to enforce the order. He confirmed they were only due to be installed and monitor use of the High Street area and it would not extend to Corn Street where it was mentioned by a resident there were issues with motorbikes.

Q5. Is it possible for the footbridge between Langel Common and Farm Mill Lane to be repaired and for a handrail to be installed?

The Chair advised he was unsure of the ownership with regard to this particular bridge. Town Council officers would investigate further and progress the request.

Q6. Could the path from Kingfisher Meadow area toward Crawley be maintained. This would create a circular wildlife/nature walk?

Cllr D Enright responded to advise that WODC were looking into the plotting of heritage walking routes similar to those implemented by WODC in Deer Park area, and the Town Council in the Lake & Country Park.

The Mayor added that as the river created parish boundaries then these parishes may also be informed and invited to contribute their ideas.

Q7. Are we doing enough on anti-social behaviour?

PC Josh Bennett of Thames Valley Police advised this was a year-round focus of the policing team however, they were aware that as the warmer months arrived and as youth supervision decreased then additional issues may arise. He asked that the resident to speak with him following the meeting to discuss any specific concerns they may have.

Q8. Are the lights at St. Mary's Churchyard now fixed?

The Operations Manager responded to confirm that with the exception of the archway, all the lighting was now operational; the archway lighting was the cause of the issues experienced.

Q9. Why is there graffiti on only one side of the A40 underpass?

There was no-one present who could answer this question so it was agreed town council officers would ask OCC why this was the case.

Q10. What is being done to enforce no cycling through Marriott's Walk? Can signage be improved?

Cllr D Enright responded on behalf West Oxfordshire District Council to say that the area was being reviewed with the intention of reducing its use as a through route for cyclists. Cllr R Smith added that she had personally seen cyclists being challenged by shopping centre staff.

Q11. In relation to new Parking Permits in Corn Street, will the new rules extend to West End?

Cllr A Coles again responded to confirm that West End was a historical scheme and that there was no proposal to introduce a permit scheme similar to the one in Corn Street & Church Green. The main contributing factor was that Witney was an old town and not built for the number of vehicles that need to use and park within it in modern times.

Q12. Could we have a mini multi-cultural festival, would residents be accepting of this?

The Mayor confirmed that the Youth Council were already working on this and it was suggested that United Nations Day in October may be a suitable occasion.

It was agreed by those present that a celebration of the diverse demographic of the town makes it a better place and that it was important to include participation from the younger members of the community in building on this.

Q13. What can be done about the poor Car Park signage and faded road markings in the Short Stay parking area behind Waitrose?

This car park was under the responsibility of West Oxfordshire District Council, officers would pass on the comments to WODC and ask them to review.

Q14. Flooding at Witney Lake appears to have been worse this year. What is the Council doing?

The Operation Manager provided a response to say that the Council's Biodiversity & Green Spaces Officers has carried out significant work to improve the Lake & Country Park area and this work will continue in order to best maintain the pathways around the area. However, the Council was sometimes hampered due to having to gain permissions from the Environment Agency or other riparian owners.

Cllr A Coles highlighted the work of the Witney Flood Group who had a new website showing some great data on the work they have carried out to access issues across the town.

Q15. How long will it take to complete the Shore's Green construction?

Cllr D Enright (OCC) replied to confirm that the aim was for a completion by November 2026. Cllr M Brooker (WODC) added that regular updates had been requested from OCC, and these would be provided via the designated "access to Witney" webpage on OCC's website.

Q16. Can we have more events such as the recent roller disco to celebrate 50th Anniversary of the Windrush Leisure Centre and allow families to come together?

Cllr A Coles (WODC) agreed that these types of events were very important. Leisure centres in the district had received lots of investment recently to bring them up to a better standard and he would take the suggestion forward and see what additional activity could be brought forward.

During the above questions thanks were received from Cllr A Coles for the Town Council's support to the residents of Riverside Gardens during potential flooding risk events.

A further comment of praise was made regarding the quizzes about Witney in one of the High Street Estate Agent windows which were enjoyed by a resident as they passed by.

7 TOWN MAYOR'S CLOSING REMARKS AND THANKS

The Mayor thanked the public for attending the meeting and reminded them they were welcome to approach Councillors or the officer from Thames Valley Police afterwards to discuss any issues further.

He also thanked all his fellow Town Councillor who continued to show their passion and love for Witney, most importantly doing this as volunteers as they did not receive any financial remuneration for their role on the Council.

Finally, the Mayor thanked all the Town Council staff, Thames Valley Police and Councillors from WODC and OCC for the work they contributed to make Witney a great place to live and continued by highlighting that all present should be proud to be different and have different ideas and priorities and that they should always recognise this and continue to care for the community in which they live.

The meeting closed at: 9.00 pm

Chair