

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

Held on Monday, 24 March 2025

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

Present:

Councillor R Smith (Chair)

Councillors:	G Meadows	S Simpson
	O Collins	J Aitman
	T Ashby	J Doughty (In place of D Temple)
	A Bailey	
Officers:	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
Others:	Two members of the public.	

SC157 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor D Temple with Cllr J Doughty attending as substitute.

SC158 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor R Smith declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 8 as she was a member of the church which provided the Detached Youth Service.

During the discussion of Agenda Item 8, Councillor O Collins declared a personal interest due to APCAM being one of the nominated charities for his current term as Mayor.

There were no other declarations from Members or Officers.

SC159 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Stronger Communities Committee held on 27 January 2025 were received.

There were no matters arising from the minutes which were not covered in items on the agenda.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Stronger Communities Committee held 27 January 2025 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the chair.

SC160 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Committee adjourned for this item.

The committee received representations from The Station Detached Youth concerning Agenda Item 8. Representatives provided a report outlining the work of the group, funded by the Town Council, during the last year and answered questions from Members.

The Committee reconvened.

SC161 **YOUTH SERVICES**

With the permission of the Chair, the Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk next in the meeting concerning the provision of youth services by the town council.

As members of The Station were in attendance, Members thanked them for the service provided during the last year. The figures provided in their report were very helpful and were testament to why it was required. The Council had committed to funding for a second year which was less than previously anticipated, however The Station would need to forward a 3-5 year plan to a future meeting to agree further funding beyond 2025-26.

Members also discussed the re-establishment of the Youth Services Grant which had last run in 2022 and agreed amendments to the criteria for awarding. These included some minor word changes, removal of Covid-19 references, and bringing the time frame forward in the new fiscal year.

The Committee also considered correspondence from APCAM who were offering mental health drop-in sessions at the Corn Exchange during the school holidays. Members were favourable to what was proposed, funded from an underspend in other grant budgets in 2024-25.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and;
2. That, Council considers future funding for The Station on submission of a 3-5 year plan during 2025 and;
3. That, the Youth Services Grant opens for applications between April and June 2025 based on the agreed updated criteria and;
4. That, the Committee recommends that underspends in the discretionary grants budget fund APCAM drop-in sessions and;
5. That, these funds be granted under the General Power of Competence.

Cllr G Meadows left the meeting briefly during the following item, between 6.45 – 6.50pm

SC162 **QUEEN EMMA'S DYKE COMMUNITY GARDEN**

With the permission of the Chair, the Committee received and considered the report of the Operations Manager next in the meeting concerning a request to create a community garden at Queen Emma's Dyke amenity spaces.

A Member provided a verbal update on the request and advised a change of location to the one in the agenda pack which was less open to the general public. The suggestion was to install three raised beds, built by the Witney Shed, which the group would maintain themselves. The group requesting the garden had already spoken to neighbours who had no objections.

It was agreed no trees would be allowed and they would likely qualify for a community gardening voucher once installed. Therefore, the Committee welcomed and approved the request but there would need to be an agreement advising it would be cleared if the garden went into disrepair and that no tree planting was permitted.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and;
2. That, the request for a community garden at Queen Emma's Dyke be approved and;
3. That, the design of planters, detailing materials used in construction be subject to officer approval and;
4. That, the final location and number of planters be delegated to the Operations Manager and;
5. That, a basic agreement be provided outlining the above conditions.

Cllr R Crouch left the meeting at 6.53pm

Cllr A Bailey left the meeting briefly during the following item between 6.56 – 6.59pm

SC163 **YOUTH COUNCIL MINUTES**

With the permission of the Chair, the Committee received the minutes of the Youth Council meeting held on 10 March 2025 next in the meeting.

Members were pleased the group had become established, but agreed it needed to facilitate a successful event or project soon and that further training and confidence building was required.

With regard to events, it was suggested a cultural festival across Witney encompassing smaller events would be more achievable than a large stand-alone event at The Leys. This could mean potential free use of the Corn Exchange and or other venues, including Witney Carnival.

Resolved:

1. That, the minutes of the Youth Council meeting held on 10 March 2025 be noted and;
2. That, free use/subsidised hire of the Corn Exchange and attendance at the Carnival be considered as means to hold a cultural festival.

SC164 **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.

Members welcomed the report and noted spending was within parameters and straight forward at this point in the year.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and;
2. That, the management accounts of the Stronger Communities Committee for the period up to 31 January 2025 be approved.

SC165 **COMMUNICATIONS REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Communications & Community Engagement Officer (C&CEO).

Members received an update on the delivery of the Council's annual newsletter and were disappointed to learn there had been issues with delivery which could warrant a partial refund request. They were pleased to hear of a contrast checker to ensure WCAG AAA compliance on publications, on collaboration with the Witney Chamber of Commerce, and that a new corporate Social Media Policy was being prepared.

The Committee also viewed a Welcome to Witney guide document and asked if walks and/or trails could be included in the final document.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and;
2. That, officers consider the inclusion of trails and/or walks in the Welcome to Witney Guide.

SC166 **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Communications & Community Engagement Officer (C&CEO).

Members were provided with updates on Great Big Green Week, the resident's satisfaction survey and Witney Carnival, the latter for which they were asked to consider a musical theme for this year's float entry.

The Committee was also provided with details of a Twinning Anniversary reception at the Corn Exchange on 2 May 2025 and were asked to consider who should be able to utilise the Gallery Room at the Corn Exchange for the Christmas Lights Switch-on event. Members agreed there was a need to allow as many residents as possible the opportunity and felt the Youth Council were excellent hosts in 2024.

Members also discussed further proposals from APCAM to hold WeGame sessions for young people in the Corn Exchange during the summer. There was no budget for this or any VR/Arcade day this year but there was an underspend in the £50 for fifty grants budget which could be carried forward to fund this opportunity which all agreed should not be missed.

Finally, the Committee agreed the Inclusivity and Diversity panel should be reformed under a temporary new name, and that the Council should enter Witney Lake & Country Park into the 2025 Thames & Chilterns In Bloom competition. A range of enhancements had taken place there in the last year and all of the suggested engagement ideas were worthy of taking forward.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and;
2. That, APCAM WeGame sessions should be held during the summer in the Corn Exchange, funded from an underspend in the £50 for fifty grants fund and;
3. That, these funds be granted under the General Power of Competence and;
4. That, a musical theme for this year's Carnival be agreed by Councillors ahead of Full Council on 14th April and;

5. That, Friday 28th November be noted as the Christmas Lights Switch-on date and;
6. That, officers contact care facilities to gauge interest in the use of the Gallery Room for the Christmas Lights Switch-on event before a decision on who to provide use to is considered and;
7. That, Big Green Week be marked by a book swap in the 1863 Café and publication of recipes for leftover food, these could include cultural recipes in conjunction with the Youth Council's cultural festival and;
8. That, the inclusivity and diversity panel be temporarily branded with the name Community Voices Forum and relaunched and;
9. That, the Council enters Witney Lake & Country Park into the Thames & Chilterns In Bloom competition for 2025 and;
10. That, the updates from the VE&VJ Day 80th Anniversary task and finish group and Witney Forum be noted.

SC167 VE & VJ DAY 80TH ANNIVERSARY TASK & FINISH GROUP NOTES

The Committee received the notes of the VE & VJ Day 80th Anniversary task and finish group meeting held on 13 March 2025.

Members were pleased plans had progressed and to hear the local BBC news team would be attending during the day. It promised to be another successful community event for the town.

Resolved:

1. That, the minutes of the VE & VJ Day 80th Anniversary Task and Finish Group meeting held on 13 March 2025 be noted.

SC168 WITNEY FORUM MINUTES

The Committee received the notes of the Witney Forum meeting held on 28 January 2025.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Witney Forum meeting held on 28 January be noted.

SC169 WITNEY CENTRAL COMMUNITY INSIGHT PROFILE REPORT

The Committee received notice of the Witney Central Community Insight Profile, produced by Community First Oxfordshire in association with Oxfordshire County & West Oxfordshire District Councils.

Members welcomed such a comprehensive report which clearly set out social issues, concerns and solutions in the Witney central ward. It was comforting to know The Station were already working in this area and other community initiatives were already taking place there.

The Chair asked Members to all read the document and to consider the contents in future Council discussions.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and;
2. That, the Council considers the subject matter in any future decision making.

SC170 **TOWN CENTRE ISSUES RAISED BY THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE: WAYFINDING, MAPPING, VISITORS, PUBLIC REALM AND TRAFFIC FLOWS**

The Committee received the report of the Town Clerk/C.E.O concerning items raised by Witney Chamber of Commerce during a meeting in February.

Members welcomed the collaboration with Witney Chamber of Commerce and that the majority of items were already being progressed by officers.

Resolved:

That, the report be noted.

SC171 **AMENITY LAND AREAS MIS-USE - INSTALLATION OF BOLLARDS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Operations Manager concerning misuse of amenity land in Manor Road.

Members were disappointed amenity land was being parked on in this area and discussed various ways to prevent it. A sign would likely be ineffective, leaving the suggestion of bollards, knee rail or metal fence. Each of the latter, however, was likely to be more expensive than wooden bollards.

The Committee agreed the most cost-effective solution should be trialled in the area to see whether it was a successful before agreeing to installing at other areas with similar issues in the future.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and;
2. That, preventative measures be taken at this site with the most cost-effective solution being delegated to officers and;
3. That, the installation be reviewed and that similar sites are considered on a case-by-case basis in the meantime.

SC172 **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.

SC173 **THIRD PARTY EVENTS - WILSONS FUNFAIR LETTING AGREEMENT**

The Deputy Town Clerk provided a confidential verbal update concerning negotiations with Wilson's Funfairs on a renewal of their letting agreement.

Members welcomed the update and were pleased negotiations were proceeding well, recommending endorsement of the proposal presented which appeared to be acceptable to both parties.

Recommended:

1. That, the confidential verbal update be noted and;
2. That, the current proposal for the letting agreement between Witney Town Council and Bob Wilson's Funfairs be recommended for approval.

The meeting closed at: 8.00 pm

Chair