

Parks & Recreation

Committee Meeting of Witney Town Council

Monday, 1st September, 2025 at 6.00 pm



To members of the Parks & Recreation Committee - J Aitman, S Simpson, J Treloar, R Smith, A Bailey, J Doughty, D Edwards-Hughes and D Temple (and all other Town Councillors for information).

You are hereby summonsed to the above meeting to be held in the **Gallery Room, The Corn Exchange, Witney** for the transaction of the business stated in the agenda below.

Admission to Meetings

All Council meetings are open to the public and press unless otherwise stated.

Numbers of the public will be limited, with priority given to those who have registered to speak on an item on the agenda. Any member of the public wishing to attend the meeting should contact the Committee Clerk derek.mackenzie@witney-tc.gov.uk in advance.

Recording of Meetings

Under the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 the council's public meetings may be recorded, which includes filming, audio-recording as well as photography.

As a matter of courtesy, if you intend to record any part of the proceedings, please let the Deputy Town Clerk or Committee Clerk know before the start of the meeting.

Agenda

1. **Apologies for Absence**

To consider apologies and reasons for absence.

Committee Members who are unable to attend the meeting should notify the Committee Clerk derek.mackenzie@witney-tc.gov.uk **prior** to the meeting, stating the reason for absence.

Standing Order 8(e)(v) permits the appointment of substitute Councillors to a Committee whose role is to replace ordinary Councillors at a meeting of a Committee if ordinary Councillors of the Committee have confirmed to the Proper Officer **before** the meeting that they are unable to attend.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

Members are reminded to declare any disclosable pecuniary interests in any of the items under consideration at this meeting in accordance with the Town Council's code of conduct.

3. **Minutes** (Pages 3 - 6)

a) To adopt and sign as a correct record the minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee held on 30 June 2025;

b) Matters arising from the minutes not covered elsewhere on the agenda (Questions on the progress on any item).

4. **Participation of the Public**

The meeting will adjourn for this item.

Members of the public may speak for a maximum of five minutes each during the period of public participation, in line with Standing Order 25. Matters raised shall relate to the following items on the agenda.

5. **Finance Report (- To Follow)**

To receive and consider the report of the R.F.O concerning the financial position of items under the remit of this Committee.

Parks

6. **Play Area Review (- To Follow)**

To receive and consider the report of the Project Officer.

Recreation

7. **Sports Pitch Update** (Pages 7 - 10)

To receive and consider the report of the Operations Manager.

8. **Football Club Training Fees (- To Follow)**

To receive and consider the joint report of the Head of Estates & Operations and the Operations Manager.

9. **Projects Update (- To Follow)**

To receive and consider the report of the Projects Officer concerning ongoing projects under the remit of this Committee



Town Clerk

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

Held on Monday, 30 June 2025

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

Present:

Councillor A Bailey (Mayor in the Chair)

Councillors:	R Smith	G Doughty (In place of J Treloar)
	J Doughty	R Crouch (In place of S Simpson)
	D Edwards-Hughes	G Meadows (In place of J Aitman)
	D Temple (In place of T Ashby)	

Officers:	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
	Derek Mackenzie	Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk
	Adam Cook	Project Officer
	Angus Whitburn	Operations Manager

Others: Two members of the public.

PR389 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors T Ashby, J Aitman, J Treloar & S Simpson, Councillors D Temple, G Meadows, G Doughty & R Crouch attended respectively as substitutes.

The Deputy Town Clerk advised the Committee that Cllr T Ashby had advised he would be stepping down from the Committee and had proposed he should be replaced by Cllr D Temple. The request would be considered at the meeting of the Council on 28 July 2025.

PR390 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members or Officers.

PR391 MINUTES

The minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee meeting held on 12 May 2025 were received.

PR265 – Officers advised that the owners of the basketball court adjacent to Windrush Leisure Centre were the responsibility of West Oxfordshire District Council.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee meeting held on 12 May 2025 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the Chair.

PR392 **PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC**

The Committee adjourned for this item.

The Committee received representations from two residents of Edington Road concerning Agenda Item 7 – Projects Update.

The residents raised concerns of the lack of additional consultation regarding the proposed Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) at Raleigh Crescent. They understood through recent engagement with the Town Council's Project Officer and Cllr T Ashby how the scheme would progress however, felt that alternative locations and designs had not been fully explored.

Concerns were also raised regarding Anti-Social behaviour, noise, lack of parking provision and potential nuisance if the nearby wooded copse was used inappropriately.

The Committee reconvened.

The members of the public left the meeting at 6:30pm following the discussion regarding the Raleigh Crescent MUGA.

PR393 **PROJECTS UPDATE**

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

The Committee received and considered the report of the Project Officer.

Raleigh Crescent MUGA

Members were provided with an update on the project. They heard that it was still in the early stages with no decision yet on the size, design or exact position. He confirmed that the areas under consideration were owned by West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) and currently designated as a play area.

The financing of the MUGA was reliant on funds from a Section 106 contribution from a development in the Curbridge Parish to provide recreation facilities. Once the procurement process was complete then WODC would move forward with finalising the design and placing a planning application. Residents would at that stage be able to submit their comments for consideration.

It was agreed that the Project Officer would liaise with WODC to ensure that communications with residents were maintained.

Courtside Hub at The Leys

Members received an update and heard that progress had once again slowed due to supply issues and this had led to an updated completion date of December 2025.

The Committee was very disappointed to hear that delays continued and raised concerns of the effect of the overall delay would be having on Courtside's business forecasts. A Member also added the concern of whether some of the clubs and individuals, in particular tennis, would

return to the Leys when it was complete as they were now established in using other facilities during the hiatus.

Members were somewhat reassured that no financial contributions had been made to Courtside and that payments were tied to Courtside reaching set milestones, such as completion of changing rooms, the access road and the completion of the hub building. The Town Clerk/CEO confirmed that she would continue to engage Courtside to obtain assurances before the release of any funds.

Resolved:

1. That, the report and verbal updates be noted and,
2. That, the Chair write to WODC Planning Department to highlight potential issues regarding noise, lighting & use of open space as a toilet and,
3. That, Town Council Officers liaise with WODC Officers to ensure residents are kept informed and,
4. That, the Committee write to Courtside to express the Councils disappointment with continued delays to the project.

The Project Officer left the meeting at 6:40pm

PR394 RECREATION COSTS

With the permission of the Chair, this item was also moved up the agenda.

The Committee received the report of the Operations Manager regarding the costs of maintenance of recreation grounds in respect of the provision for football.

Members heard that the pitches at Burwell were well used, hence the lower subsidy however, this was having an effect on the quality of pitches due to the demand placed on it from the increasing number of teams that used the facility.

It was highlighted that the maintenance of the football pitches also provided benefits to all recreational ground users, including dog walkers and that the annual STRI review of the Council's grass pitches would take place soon to support the work.

A Member noted the absence of the Leys Cricket pitch from the report, in response the Operations Manager confirmed that little was spent to maintain the cricket square as it was not and had not been in use for many years.

A Member was pleased to see that the Council was providing such quality of grass pitch provision for what was an overall subsidy of £34,240. Which in his opinion offered great value.

An issue that did arise during the discussion was that of unofficial training by football clubs who had been witnessed on a number of occasions using the recreational grounds without agreement. This impacted the recovery of pitches as they were not receiving the necessary rest and continued to be compacted from this off-season activity. Teams had been reminded recently of the need to book their use or make use of the alternative locations provided by the Council.

Cllr D Temple, seconded by Cllr R Crouch suggested that the Committee consider the introduction of a fee to cover the annual out of season training and make a recommendation to the Policy, Governance and Finance Committee during budget-setting.

Recommended:

1. That, the report and verbal update be noted and,
2. That, the Committee consider the introduction of an annual fee for out of season training.

The Operations Manager left the meeting at 7:03pm

PR395 ANNUAL RESIDENTS SURVEY 2025

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk concerning the results of the resident's annual satisfaction survey which was held at the beginning of the year.

Members were advised the report represented the survey results for the services under the remit of this committee and showed the combined satisfactory and above percentages against poor ones. Previous years data was also included to help benchmark the results. The report also contained all unedited comments on the services.

The Committee were pleased to see a number of positive comments interspersed with the negative ones however overall, it was noted that there was a decline in the overall satisfaction of respondents. It was agreed that any issues that had a simple and quick to action solution, such as the posting of "No Dogs" signs at Underhaching Park should be introduced without delay and communications should be published to highlight facts around pitch booking and minimal cancellations.

The Town Clerk/CEO confirmed to Members that the decision to bring the Council's grounds maintenance contract back in house was not based on cost cutting, rather it was to improve the response and quality of work. There was a budget available to increase the workforce which would have an impact on the delivery of expected Council and resident's standards.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, Officers review the comments and schedule work to resolve any simple tasks.

The meeting closed at: 7.18 pm

Chair

PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE



Agenda Item: Sports Pitch Update

Meeting Date: Monday 1 September 2025

Contact Officer: Operations Manager

Background

Witney Town Council manages 4 recreation grounds, facilitating seven 11-a-side football pitches and numerous junior pitches. The football season runs from September through to the end of April. From May through to the end of October; these pitches are then renovated and rested.

Clubs make bookings through Witney Town Council's bookings office, which will assign them pitches for their fixtures. Clubs have designated home grounds for league purposes, but there is the control to reassign teams to alternative pitches in case their home grounds are not available. This helps ensure pitches aren't left un-played and that as many teams as possible are getting their bookings.

Two requests have been received from Witney Vikings Football Club for the upcoming 2025-26 season; firstly to inset all available 11-a-side pitches with junior-size pitches. Secondly for a storage container on King George's field.

Current Situation

Renovations

The renovation programme was completed in early May, the earliest it could have been completed with the football season. However, due to the record dry weather in the spring and early summer, it has meant the pitches couldn't be aerated. The lack of rain has also led to most of the grass seed failing to germinate. This unfortunately means the pitches are in a poor condition heading into the 2025-26 season. The only way to have avoided this issue would have been to irrigate the fields, which is not feasible on public grounds.

When the rains pick up in the autumn, the pitches will be aerated, which will help to alleviate the compaction over the fields. This couldn't be carried out in spring because of the dry weather; it would have opened up huge cracks in the fields, making them unplayable for the 2025-26 season. Some high-wear areas (goal mouths) have recovered; however, some at Burwell and King George's completely failed. Due to this, the compacted ground has been dug out and replaced with fresh topsoil and then turfed. The grass coverage will be an ongoing challenge throughout the season, as little can be done; the main focus will be on relieving the

compaction in the field to ensure pitches don't become waterlogged for long periods in the rain.

Grants

Witney Town Council were successful in 2024 in obtaining a grant for West Witney Sports ground to financially assist in the renovation works required at the field. This grant pays out annual contributions until the year 2029. Officers made the application for West Witney as these pitches were regularly offline during the winter months when they become waterlogged. The hope was that the grant would assist in the installation of drainage; however, it only aided financially in the renovation works that were already taking place.

The grant application process proved difficult as the football foundation's system kept changing. The pitch reports also didn't return the outcome officers felt they should have, mainly due to the assessment being a desktop exercise rather than a physical inspection of the pitches. The same grant application was to be made for Burwell, but recently, FA officers have made the council aware of Football Foundation grants for pitch drainage and free drainage consultations.

The Council's current renovation programme exceeds the Ground Management Association's recommendations. So, although the grant received from the football foundation does help financially, it does little to actually physically improve the pitches, as the council were already investing that money. The additional income from the grant for renovation costs could mean the council have more funding available to support the potential costs of drainage.

Ground Allocation Trial

With the increase in Junior teams in Witney and the pressure this brings on the council to provide more pitches, there is the concept of allowing the junior clubs to be responsible for their grounds. All pitches would be marked and prepped weekly by the council, but the clubs would be responsible for managing the games on those grounds.

Vikings are allocated Burwell as a home ground and Tower Hill, West Witney. As West Witney is a larger ground, Vikings would be allocated the Leys as well, apart from one 9-a-side pitch and one 5-a-side pitch. There are some details to still work out with the trial, and meetings need to be arranged with each club to discuss the trials. The concept would help with the booking administration and reduce the loss of income for the council from cancelled games.

Insetting pitches

This is the process of marking smaller junior pitches within a larger 11-a-side pitch. This helps with pitch availability but does permit overplay. For example, a pitch could be played 2 or 3 times a day as opposed to once. Not allowing the pitch to adequately recover can cause damage to the turf and diminish the quality of the pitch.

Inset pitches have been present at Burwell for a few seasons. Burwell field has, for the last few years, been one of the better-performing fields thanks to its soil quality; however, over

the past two seasons, the field has struggled. There are many contributing factors to this, but the major one is that the pitches are being overplayed.

As the new 11-a-side pitch at the Leys will not be hosting an adult team until the new year, some junior pitches could be marked, in its place, to help, but these would then be lost when the changing rooms are built at the Leys and it can rehost a men's football team.

The only other ground that can be considered for inset pitches would be the West Witney; however, the field has required a lot of work to try and keep it online for the season, and the implementation of inset pitches would risk this.

Storage container at King George Field

King George could be better utilised by junior teams; a 7-a-side pitch was planned at King George's for the 2023-24 season, but was never booked. Viking have raised that they would require a 10ft storage container on site to make the site a more suitable location to book. And with Spartans moving to the Leys, it could become overall a better location for junior football in the new year and potentially training. The placement of the storage container would need permission from West Oxfordshire District Council, as it falls within a conservation zone.

Impact Assessments

The Town Council has a duty to consider the effects of its decisions, functions and activities on equality, biodiversity, and crime & disorder. Consideration should also be given to effects on the environment, given the Council's Climate Emergency declaration in 2019.

- a) Equality – Both junior clubs in Witney have female teams and have done a lot to help boost interest in the women's game.
- b) Crime & Disorder – Football games attract low levels of disorder, smashed bottles in changing rooms, excessive litter and bad language being reported but the situations are rare.

Risk

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

Ground Allocation Trial

The Ground Allocation Trial would be risky, although it increases admin time, the ability for the council to manage all its grounds means that when grounds become waterlogged and unplayable, these teams can be offered alternative locations. West Witney performed well last season, but the weather was favourable, the ground regularly holds water, and in those situations, those teams need to move to alternative grounds. If the ground allocation trial were in effect, that would leave Tower Hill without 4 – 5 of its pitches, with no alternative.

Insetting Pitches

For the reasons stated in the report, the insetting of pitches is a risk that could result in further deterioration to football grounds.

Storage Container at King Georges

Utilising King George's Field for more football training and matches could result in complaints from residents about the parking situation, of which the council have received complaints before.

Financial implications

- The Grant from the Football Foundation for West Witney pays out a total of £27,948 over 6 years.
- Witney Vikings have confirmed they will cover the costs for the 10 foot shipping container at King George's Field.

Recommendations

Member are invited to note the report and

1. Instruct officers to meet with Junior Clubs to discuss a ground allocation trial.
2. Approve the placement of a storage container on King George's Field if approval is granted from West Oxfordshire District Council.
3. Consider the proposal of insetting pitches as detailed in the report.