

WITNEY ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

Held on Wednesday, 18 March 2026

At 7.30pm in the Main Hall, The Corn Exchange, Witney

Present:

Councillor A Bailey (Chair)

Councillors:	J Aitman	G Meadows
	T Ashby	A Mubin
	R Crouch	J Robertshaw
	G Doughty	S Simpson
	J Doughty	R Smith
	D Edwards-Hughes	J Treloar
	D Enright	
Officers:	Derek Mackenzie	Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk
	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
	Lorraine Harwood	PA to the Town Clerk and Secretary to the Mayor
	Polly Inness	Communications & Community Engagement Officer
	Mark Lewis	Head of Estates & Operations
	Nigel Warner	Responsible Financial Officer
Others:	78 members of the public.	
	Inspector C Ball	Thames Valley Police

1 INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME FROM THE MAYOR OF WITNEY, CLLR ANDY BAILEY

The Town Mayor, Cllr Andy Bailey welcomed the public to the meeting as well as Inspector Chris Ball from Thames Valley Police.

He explained how the evening would proceed and how those present could raise questions and how these would be responded to.

2 OFFICIAL NOTING OF THE TOWN COUNCILLOR APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Witney Town Councillors D Newcombe and O Collins.

3 TO RECEIVE AND APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING OF 19 MARCH 2025

The minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on 19 March 2025, 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), who provided a general update on policing activity in Witney.

Attendees were advised that, over the previous six months, TVP had carried out targeted operations to address anti-social behaviour. These operations had been successful and focused on individuals identified as prolific offenders with targeted daily engagement visits to those individuals. The work was supported by The Station detached youth service which it was acknowledged was in place due the funding of the Town Council.

Inspector Ball also reported on operations targeting e-bikes, which he advised were of greater concern than e-scooters due to the higher speeds that could be achieved. Operations involved the use of plain-clothes officers, which had reduced the number of pursuits required. As a result of this work, six illegal e-bikes had been seized so far during the year.

In relation to shoplifting, Inspector Ball advised that there had been notable success in tackling this issue and that the use of CCTV had been particularly effective.

Whilst acknowledging an increase in incidents of criminal damage, rising from 123 to 150 cases (an increase of approximately 22%), Inspector Ball advised that some of the overall crime figures for Witney remained among the lowest recorded in the county.

Inspector Ball then responded to questions from those present:

- In response to a question regarding bicycle theft, he advised that there had been some success in addressing these incidents and that bike theft was not currently considered a significant issue within the town.
- A question was raised regarding whether Police Community Support Officers (PCSO's) were required to work in pairs. Inspector Ball confirmed that this was not TVP policy and that PCSO's should generally be patrolling solo. He advised he would look into the matter further.
- When asked whether Witney Police Station was open, Inspector Ball confirmed that it was staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and that it was supported by additional police stations in Woodstock, Chipping Norton and Carterton.
- In response to a question regarding the main priorities for policing in Witney, Inspector Ball advised that an issue previously associated with pony and trap racing had been addressed through the introduction of a Public Spaces Protection Order and would be further supported by a Traffic Regulation Order. Current priorities included drugs, anti-social behaviour and criminal damage; however, he did not identify any single overriding concern for the town at that time.

A Town Councillor commented positively on seeing one of the e-bikes, which had been part-funded by the Town Council, being actively used on patrol.

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

The Mayor advised that, for the second consecutive year, the Town Council had published an Annual Town Report, copies of which were available to those in attendance.

He introduced the Members of the Town Council and invited those councillors to stand so that members of the public could identify them and know who to approach should they wish to raise questions either after the meeting or at a later date. The Mayor highlighted that the average age of councillors was comparatively low for a parish or town councils and noted that this was something to be encouraged as it helped reflect and represent the wider community.

The Mayor then provided a brief overview of the Council's committee structure, explaining that the work of the Council was delivered through a number of committees, details of which were set out in the Annual Town Report.

He summarised the role of the Planning & Development Committee in reviewing planning and licensing matters affecting the town, the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee in managing community buildings, cemeteries and allotment provision, the Climate & Biodiversity Committee in leading work on environmental sustainability and green spaces, including the Lake & Country Park, and the Parks & Recreation Committee in overseeing parks, play areas, sports pitches and open spaces across Witney.

The Mayor also highlighted the work of the Stronger Communities Committee, which focused on supporting residents by awarding grants to local organisations and investing in projects that strengthen the town and improved people's lives. As part of this item, attendees were invited to watch a short video from The Station detached youth service, following which the Mayor commented that it was an excellent example of how residents were funding and help deliver positive outcomes within the community.

The Mayor advised that the Town Council had supported a number of other organisations during the year, including Yellow Submarine, West Oxfordshire Levellers, Home-Start Oxford and Be Free Young Carers. Short videos from these organisations were also shown demonstrating the impact of their work in supporting some of the town's most important and, at times, vulnerable residents. The Mayor assured attendees that these organisations provided valuable services to the community and noted that they represented only a small sample of the wider work supported by the Council, full details of which were available in the Annual Town Report.

In closing, the Mayor reminded those present that all Town Council committee meetings were open to the public and could be attended in person. He also highlighted that meetings were now being live-streamed, with online access details available on the front page of the meeting agendas.

Following the Mayor's presentation, the Leader of the Council provided a summary of the work of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee. She explained that the Committee played a key role in ensuring that Witney Town Council operated effectively and responsibly.

Its responsibilities included overseeing the Council's finances to ensure public funds were spent prudently, transparently and they maintained strong governance by reviewing policies and ensuring the Council met its legal and regulatory obligations.

The Leader highlighted the Council's partnership working with a wide range of organisations that contributed to community life in Witney. Particular reference was made to Witney Town Football Club and the Witney Music Festival, both of which played an important role in bringing people together through sport and culture. Short videos from each organisation were shown to attendees, highlighting their work and impact within the town.

The Leader then summarised several of the Council's larger capital and investment projects. These included the Council-funded redevelopment of the West Witney Sports & Social Clubhouse, the establishment of a new works depot, and the re-development at The Leys by Courtside CIC, to which the Council was contributing.

She advised that the Council continued to invest in facilities and partnerships that supported sport and community activity across Witney. West Witney Sports Ground was highlighted as an example of this investment, with refurbishment works to the Clubhouse underway following many years of partnership working with West Witney Sports & Social Club.

Plans for a new 3G pitch at West Witney were also progressing to expand all-weather provision for Witney. It was noted that the location continued to support a wide range of user groups, including West Witney Sports & Social Club, Witney Projectile Range, Witney Lawn Tennis Club and Witney Parkrun. Assistance had also been provided to Witney Swifts Cricket Club to support its long-term security and development.

A representative of the Courtside Hub development then provided a brief update, supported by images showing progress at The Leys. The Leader thanked the representative for the presentation and advised that any questions relating specifically to the Courtside development could be raised directly with Courtside after the close of the meeting, as it was not a Town Council project.

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

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. What are the Town Councils thoughts regarding the condition of roads and highways within the town and across the County?

Cllr Duncan Enright responded in his capacity as Chair of the Witney Traffic Advisory Committee (WTAC) and outlined the role of the Committee. He advised that Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) was the responsible highway authority and encouraged residents to raise highways issues directly with their OCC councillors as a first point of contact. It was advised that OCC had given assurances that necessary repairs would be carried out. Attendees were also informed of an upcoming Bus Users Group meeting scheduled for 19 May 2026, which residents were encouraged to attend. Cllr Enright additionally highlighted improvements to the Oxford Tube service to London, particularly at weekends.

Q2. Can the Council confirm how and when the old boxing club site at Newland will be fully made safe and restored, including the removal of all asbestos, rubble and contaminated material by licensed contractors; and measures put in place meanwhile to prevent asbestos contamination, vermin infestation and pollution of the stream; the timetable for complete site clearance and replanting of illegally removed trees; and the Council's long-term plans for the site once it has been cleared?

It was advised that whilst Witney Town Council would do its best to assist residents by providing information where possible, the matter fell outside of the Town Council's remit and West Oxfordshire District Council's planning and enforcement team would be best placed to advise on the supervision of the works being carried out.

Q3. What are the thoughts of the Council regarding the condition of Queen Emma's Dyke and the associated loss of habitat?

The Leader of the Council responded that the Town Council recognised the distress felt by residents and would continue to press the Environment Agency to take action. Cllr Simpson added that works carried out within the Lake & Country Park had helped improve areas of habitat that had previously been in decline.

Q4. What influence does the Town Council have in encouraging OCC to carry out highways improvements, in particular the missing safety barrier on the bridge behind the Leisure Centre?

It was advised that the Town Council would continue to raise and pursue such issues with OCC; however, residents were encouraged to continue reporting specific problems via the *Fix My Street* system to ensure they were formally logged with the responsible authority.

Q5. What is the progress of the High Street/Market Square redevelopment?

A response from the OCC project team advised that works were expected to commence in May 2026, subject to approval by the Cabinet Member at a meeting scheduled for 26 March 2026. Attendees also heard that OCC would hold a public information event immediately prior to works and have a liaison in place to meet with businesses as the works progressed.

Q6. When can we resume desilting around the town bridge and do more joint river clearance work, supported by OCC funding secured by Witney Flood Group and with help from the Volunteer Flood Wardens?

It was advised that the matter would be considered further by the Climate & Biodiversity Committee and an update would be provided in due course regarding any future works.

Q7. I used to see traffic wardens when we first moved here 5 years ago. I haven't seen any recently. Parking illegally on Corn Street is a real problem. It would be useful if wardens were to dish out some fines there.

Residents were advised that the Town Council would write to OCC to request increased patrols and enforcement in the area.

Q8. Is any provision being made for parking in relation to the Courtside Development. In particular is restricted time parking going to be introduced on the Leys?

It was advised that the Town Council had found it difficult to progress enforcement due to a lack of support from OCC. However, the Council's intention remained for the changes and for these to be enforced. It was clarified that the matter related to changes in time restrictions and not the introduction of parking charges.

Q9. What action can be taken to address house sale and rental boards being left in place or positioned in unsuitable locations?

Cllr J Treloar advised that he had visited one estate agent in relation to this issue and had requested that signs be removed promptly and better supervised. Attendees were encouraged to report incidences to the advertising estate agent.

Q10. What has been the result of the introduction of parking enforcement in Church Green?

It was advised that Witney Traffic Advisory Committee would request a report from OCC's Civil Enforcement team and that the level of service being provided within the town was currently not considered satisfactory.

Q11. How will the plans for local government reorganisation impact on Witney Town Council and does the Town Council hold a view on which of the three options it prefers?

The Leader advised that Witney Town Council had issued the same response to all consultation options, setting out its expectations. The Council's position was that any reorganisation should be funding led, ensuring the Town Council was appropriately resourced and reimbursed for any additional services transferred to it.

Q12. What can the town council do to ensure that Woodford Way car park remains as is and is not sold off for development?

It was advised that housing provision at this location had been included in the adopted 2018 WODC Local Plan and that development was therefore well advanced in principle. Residents and the Town Council would, however, be able to provide their views through the normal consultation process once a planning application was submitted.

Q13. What is the Council's policy as far as the proliferation of flags on lampposts?

The Mayor expressed sympathy with residents' concerns but advised that OCC had a policy in place which the Town Council did not have any influence over. Residents were asked to report issues via *Fix My Street* so that appropriate action could be considered.

Q14. What the Town Council's view on the proposed alterations/cutbacks to the Oxfordshire Fire Service?

It was advised that Witney itself was unlikely to see any negative changes to its fire station, however the Town Council remained concerned about the wider impact on fire and rescue resources across the county. The Council was awaiting the outcome following its submission made as part of the consultation.

7 TOWN MAYOR'S CLOSING REMARKS AND THANKS

In his closing remarks, the Mayor reflected on how proud he was of Witney and the diversity of its community. He described the town as a welcoming and inclusive place to live and noted that, during his year as Mayor, he had seen and experienced more of what the town, its organisations and residents had to offer than he had during the previous fifteen years of living here.

The Mayor referred to correspondence he had received from a member of the public who had been travelling through Witney, commenting on how welcoming the town had appeared to them. He felt this exemplified the strength of the community and reiterated the message that Witney was "stronger together".

He concluded by highlighting that Witney continued to have a vibrant local economy and, unlike some towns, was focused on growth and expansion rather than decline. The Mayor thanked those present for their engagement and ongoing contribution to the town and its community.

The meeting closed at: 8.57 pm

Chair