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Witney Past, Present & Future Working Party Committee Meeting of Witney Town Council



Wednesday, 15th July, 2026 at 4.00 pm

To members of the Witney Past, Present & Future Working Party Committee - R Crouch, G Meadows, A Mubin, J Robertshaw, R Smith and J Treloar (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. Minutes (Pages 3 - 5)

a) To adopt and sign as a correct record the minutes of the Witney: Past Present & Future Working Party meeting held on 26 May 2026.

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

3. Events Update (Pages 6 - 9)

To receive and consider the report of the Communications & Community Engagement Officer.

4. RAF Brize Norton - Freedom of Witney

Receive a verbal update from Officers on RAF Brize Norton's plans to mark the 50th Anniversary of the granting of their Freedom of Witney in 2027.

5. **Date of Next Meeting**

To agree the date and time of the next Working Party meeting.



Town Clerk

**WITNEY PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE WORKING PARTY MEETING OF THE
WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL**

Held on Tuesday, 26 May 2026

At 6.15 pm in the Gallery Room, The Corn Exchange, Witney

Present:

Councillor J Treloar (Chair)

Councillors:	R Crouch G Meadows	J Robertshaw
Officers:	Adam Clapton Polly Inness Thomas Davies Annie Hathaway	Deputy Town Clerk Communications & Community Engagement Officer Deputy Venue & Events Officer Admin Assistant - Communications & Engagement
Others:	4 members of the public.	

At the start of the meeting, the Chair invited everyone present to introduce themselves.

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor R Smith.

2 MINUTES

The minutes of the Witney: Past, Present & Future Working Party meeting held on 18 February 2026 were received.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Witney: Past, Present & Future Working Party meeting held on 18 February 2026 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the Chair.

3 EVENTS UPDATE

The Working Party received and considered the report of the Communications & Community Engagement Officer (CCEO).

St George's Day Event

Members received feedback on the St George's Day events, which officers described as a simple, positive, and family-friendly occasion. Council teams and Working Party members were thanked for their support in delivering a successful, well-attended and inclusive event, with no incidents reported and positive feedback received from attendees, including a personal thank you card sent to the Council.

Suggestions for future years included expanding the performance area, improving signage and event communication, simplifying the quiz, recognising front line service crews on stage, reviewing catering arrangements, and repositioning seating away from speakers.

The Working Party welcomed the strong attendance and community involvement. The museum representative reported good participation in the dragon-making workshop and St George's Day tours, while members also praised local businesses for supporting the window decoration initiative. Some disappointment was expressed at the low uptake from schools for the dragon competition, which members agreed should be reviewed for future events. Members also noted the successful Witney Vikings football activity despite limited space.

The CCEO confirmed the event had been delivered under the £1,000 budget and members agreed that the underspend should be used towards future Working Party events during the year.

Overall, members thanked Council staff for organising the event so successfully and agreed that a strong foundation had now been established for future annual St George's Day celebrations. The Chair noted that the event showed an array of what Witney had to offer and felt immense pride on the day.

Armed Forces Day

The Working Party received an update on an event being organised by Witney's joint Cadet Forces on The Leys on Saturday 27 June 2026. Members noted that the Council had agreed to subsidised use of the facility following a recommendation from this Working Party.

The event would include charity stalls and military vehicles and would be located near the Courtside Hubs building, with only a limited amount of space required. Officers had requested that the Leys WW1 Memorial be cleaned in preparation for the event. The CCEO also advised that the customary raising of the Armed Forces flag at the Town Hall would take place on the preceding Friday evening.

Members asked that once full details were confirmed that they be communicated to the wider public and Councillors.

Heritage Open Day

The Working Party received an update on Heritage Open Days 2026, with officers exploring a collaborative event with Witney Museum between 11–20 September around the theme "Everyday Histories". Members noted the potential to highlight Witney's blanket-making heritage and other local industries, possibly involving The Blanket Hall and Cogges Manor Farm. A craft event already planned at the Museum on 12 September may also form part of the programme, with further discussions to follow.

Members also heard about early proposals for Bishop's Palace Community Heritage Events aimed at promoting the site through activities such as tours, exhibitions, and family events. No funding was being requested at this stage, although support and suggestions from the Council would be welcomed.

The Chair advised that an organisation had expressed interest in supporting future civic events, such as St George's Day celebrations. Members agreed further details would be needed regarding the nature of any sponsorship arrangement and whether it aligned with the Working Party's remit and capacity.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the feedback, and outcomes from the St George's Day event debrief be noted and,
3. That, St George's Day Events be held in a similar vein in future years and budgeted for accordingly and,
4. That, the proposed arrangements for Armed Forces Day activities on The Leys for 2026 be supported and,
5. That, the planned discussions regarding Heritage Open Day be noted and that further plans be brought to the next meeting and,
6. That, the Council supports continued partnership working with local organisations, community groups, and volunteers to enhance future events and engagement opportunities, including,
 - a. Support for Bishop's Palace Community Heritage Events by the Museum,
 - b. Sponsorship opportunities where appropriate and,
7. That, this Working Party requests that the underspend for this year's St George's Day event budget be allocated on other events during the year under the auspices of this Committee and,
8. That, a further meeting, or meetings are held in June and/or July 2026.

4 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Due to the time of the year, it was suggested that a meeting or meetings be held in June and or July 2026.

The meeting closed at: 6.50 pm

Chair

STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE



Agenda Item:	Past Present and Future Working Party Report
Meeting Date:	Wednesday, 15 July 2026
Contact Officer:	Communications & Community Engagement Officer

The purpose of this report is to update Members on the progress of planning for the Town Council's participation in Heritage Open Days (HOD) 2026 and to seek agreement on the proposed event format and timings.

Current Situation

The Town Council hadn't initially planned to participate in Heritage Open Days (HOD) 2026. However, the national theme for this year is particularly relevant to Witney's heritage and provides an excellent opportunity for local heritage organisations to showcase aspects of the town's social history.

Officers invited local heritage organisations to work in partnership on Heritage Open Days 2026, including Witney and District Museum, Cogges Farm Museum and Witney Blanket Hall. To date, Witney and District Museum is the only organisation to have responded positively, and officers have since met with museum volunteers to develop plans for the opening weekend.

An outline of the proposed event was presented verbally to the Stronger Communities Committee and has subsequently been registered with the national Heritage Open Days programme. Registration enables the Council to access Heritage Open Days promotional resources and branding to support the event.

The event listing, entitled **Lives in Stone – Witney's Everyday Histories**, is available to view on the Heritage Open Days website and is attached as Appendix A.

<https://www.heritageopendays.org.uk/submission-event/lives-in-stone-witney-s-everyday-histories.html>

Heritage Open Day Format and Timings

The Witney and District Museum is collaborating with the Methodist Church on an exhibition entitled Blankets, Witney & Methodism, which will run throughout the two-week Heritage Open Days programme. Additional activities include a children's craft workshop on Saturday 12 September, a guided tour of the Bishop's Palace on Sunday 13 September focusing on the occupations of members of the Bishop's household, and a family genealogy day on Saturday 19 September.

To complement these activities, it is proposed that the Town Council revisits a successful feature from a previous Heritage Open Days event at Tower Hill Cemetery, which explored burial records and the changing occupations of those interred over successive decades. This proved to be a popular and informative activity, offering visitors an insight into the social and economic development of Witney.

The proposed event would highlight selected graves with information about the occupations of those buried there, illustrating how employment patterns within the town have evolved over time. Historic trade and business directories from the Council's collection would also be displayed to provide additional historical context.

The cemetery chapel would remain open throughout the event, allowing visitors to explore the building, which continues to attract considerable public interest. Refreshments would also be available.

It is proposed that the event is held over one and a half days, from 3pm to 8pm on Friday 11 September and 9am to 1pm on Saturday 12 September. This timetable aims to maximise accessibility by enabling school visits on the Friday afternoon while also providing an opportunity for residents who work during the week to attend on Friday evening or Saturday morning.

Impact Assessments

The Town Council has a duty to consider the impact of its decisions on equality, biodiversity, crime and disorder, and the environment.

a) Equality

The proposed event is intended to be free and open to all members of the community. The extended opening hours over two days are designed to improve accessibility for a wide range of visitors, including school groups, working residents and families.

b) Biodiversity

The event will make use of existing cemetery paths, buildings and infrastructure and is not expected to have any adverse impact on biodiversity. Visitors will be encouraged to respect the cemetery's natural environment.

c) Crime and Disorder

The event is expected to have a positive impact by encouraging community engagement and increasing responsible use of the cemetery. Appropriate stewarding and risk assessments will be undertaken to ensure the event is delivered safely.

d) Environment and Climate Emergency

The event will make use of existing facilities and resources wherever possible. Printed material will be kept to a minimum, with digital promotion utilised where appropriate, supporting the Council's commitment to reducing its environmental impact.

Risk

The principal risks associated with the event relate to weather conditions, volunteer availability and visitor management.

As much of the event will take place outdoors, adverse weather may reduce attendance or affect the visitor experience. Appropriate contingency arrangements will be considered where practicable. Suitable risk assessments will be completed for public access to the cemetery and chapel.

Social Value

The proposed event will strengthen partnerships between local heritage organisations while increasing public awareness of Witney's social history. It provides opportunities for residents and visitors to engage with the town's heritage, encourages volunteering and community participation, and promotes Tower Hill Cemetery as an important heritage asset.

Financial

The event does not have a budget but will be low cost and use existing Witney Town Council resources and assets. Expenditure will relate primarily to promotional materials and refreshments (£200 remaining underspend from St George's Day was agreed at the previous PP&F working party meeting to be used to cover refreshments and printing) with officer time being taken as lieu time.

Recommendations

Members are invited to:

1. Note the progress made in planning the Town Council's Heritage Open Days event.
2. Approve the proposed event format and timings.

! This content is editable by users within your organisation.

Approved

Organiser

Polly Inness

polly.inness@witney-tc.gov.uk

Submitted on

17 Jun 2026

Lives in Stone: Witney's Everyday Histories

Tower Hill Cemetery Chapel, Tower Hill, Witney, Oxfordshire, OX28 5ES

Multiple dates available | In person | Pre-booking not required | Site opening

Discover Witney's past through the lives and occupations of those buried at Tower Hill Cemetery. Explore graves, burial records and historic directories, uncover stories of local workers, and enjoy a rare opportunity to visit the historic chapel.

The 2026 Heritage Open Days theme, "Everyday Histories", celebrates the lives, work and stories of ordinary people who helped shape their communities. Tower Hill Cemetery provides a unique opportunity to uncover Witney's rich social history through the lives of those laid to rest there.

Visitors are invited to explore selected graves and burial records that reveal how occupations and working lives changed over the decades. From local tradespeople and craftsmen to business owners and factory workers, these stories offer a fascinating glimpse into Witney's social and economic development.

Visitors will also be able to browse burial records and historic trade directories, enjoy refreshments, and take advantage of the rare opportunity to step inside the cemetery chapel - one of Witney's secrets!

Timings

Friday 11 September

15:00-20:00

Saturday 12 September

09:00- 1300

Location & directions

Tower Hill Cemetery Chapel, Tower Hill, Witney, Oxfordshire, OX28 5ES

Directions:

The easiest way to find us is on foot from any of the entrances on Tower Hill, Curbridge Road or the gate in the alley from Windrush Valley Estate.

Contact on day:

Polly Inness

Telephone number: