

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

Held on Monday, 14 November 2022

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

Present:

Councillor O Collins (Chair)

Councillors:	J Aitman	V Gwatkin
	L Ashbourne	A Prosser
	L Duncan	R Smith
Officers:	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
	Derek Mackenzie	Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk
Others:	None.	

Prior to the meeting, the Chair expressed his thanks to Council officers, the Royal British Legion, community organisations, and youth groups for their hard work in ensuring the Annual Service of Remembrance and Community Parade was such a successful event to mark the town's fallen on Sunday 13th November.

SC566 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor H Eaglestone.

SC567 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from members or officers.

SC568 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Stronger Communities Committee meeting held on 26 September 2022 were received.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Stronger Communities Committee meeting held on 26 September 2022 be approved as a correct record and be signed by the Chair

SC569 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

SC570 **COMMUNICATIONS REPORT**

The Committee received the report of the Communications & Community Engagement Officer.

Members received updates on improvements to the council website, a draft rebranded newsletter, and recent council press coverage activity and discussed how the coverage spreadsheet could be improved.

The Chair expressed his dissatisfaction with other Town and District Councillors in respect of recent negative press coverage in the run up to the recent Remembrance Day. The Chair's concerns concentrated on how this adverse publicity detracts from the good work of the council's officers and other individuals working within the community to mark such a poignant event.

Members suggested some additional organisations could be included in the "Our Partners" page of the website and were very pleased to see the rebranded newsletter which provided a professional look.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, consideration of adding both the Town Hall Charity and Town Charity to the "Our Partners" website page be given and,
3. That, the newsletter be published with the new rebranded template

SC571 **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Communications & Community Engagement Officer (CCEO) regarding the proposal to hold winter get together events and also to commence planning for the King's Coronation in May 2023.

The members discussed the two proposed "Jo Cox Winter Get Together" events to be held in January and February and were pleased to hear of this initiative and were unanimously happy to support them. They asked officers to involve individuals who could play some background music at the events, that promotional literature be provided to West Oxfordshire Community Travel (WOCT) so that they can display on the buses which are predominantly used by older members of the community.

The Committee also liked the idea of arranging one of the events in February school half term as this will allow the younger members of the community to benefit along with their families.

Members discussed ideas for the King's coronation such as a civic service, crocheting of bunting, street entertainers, Morris dancing and local choirs in the Market Square. The programme of events for the Late Queen's 1953 coronation in Witney was presented at the meeting and the committee were keen to recreate modern versions of those events if possible.

A Large TV projector display would be favourable if the budget allowed and an indoor venue for this would be best in case of poor weather on the day. The suggestion for bunting could be extended to fabric 'red, white, and blue' triangles and the community groups and schools could be invited to contribute.

Members agreed that the CCEO should proceed with the planning with a £3,000 budget plus any budget remaining from the Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations. Members requested an update at the next committee meeting in January but suggested a review at the end of December with the Mayor and Chair of this Committee

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the CCEO updates the programme of events from 1953 with the additional suggestions from the committee and,
3. That, the King's coronation planning is delegated to CCEO, Mayor and Deputy Mayor with a report of progress at the next Stronger Communities meeting on 23 January 2023.

SC572 **WITNEY FORUM**

The committee received the minutes of the Witney Forum meeting held 13 September 2022.

Resolved:

That, the minutes be noted

SC573 **IN BLOOM COMPETITIONS 2023**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Communications & Community Engagement Officer.

Members considered and agreed with the suggestion received from Witney Rotary Club to carry out Schools in Bloom judging and awarding of prizes to school at the Witney Carnival in July.

The Committee discussed the use of the leftover Britain In Bloom budget to be used for the installation of planters at the entrances to Witney under the Welcome to Witney signs. Members believe these planters would be attractive to residents and visitors to the town. They also asked that officers investigate options to refresh the signage at the same time.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the judging of future school in bloom wheelbarrow entries be carried out by the Rotary Club of Witney at Witney Carnival and,
3. That, officers investigate options to refresh the "Welcome to Witney" signs and introduce planters to these areas.

SC574 **YOUTH SERVICES AWARDS 2022**

The Committee received a letter of thanks from Home Start Oxford in relation to the recent Youth Service Grant that the council awarded to them.

The Deputy Town Clerk also provided a verbal update to confirm that the council had also received more letters and emails of thanks from recipients of the Youth Services Grants that were awarded.

Resolved:

That, the correspondence and verbal update be noted.

SC575 **CHAT BENCH**

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

Members were surprised by the requirement for planning should the council wish to paint words 'Happy to Chat' on the bench. In consideration of this members agreed that the white plastic sign with a speech bubble in the reports pack should be the basis of a sign incorporating the Council's logo colours.

Resolved:

1. That the report be noted and,
2. That, the Happy to Chat Bench is progressed with a plaque or sign instead of painted lettering

SC576 **COVID -19 MEMORIAL**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Project Officer

Members agreed that the proposed concept of a Covid-19 memorial and garden was beautiful, 'Together, but Apart' incorporating rocks situated two metres apart. One rock would symbolise those lost while the other recognised those who went above and beyond to help the community throughout the pandemic.

There was discussion over the inclusion of metal Cor-ten plaque to title the memorial, however it was deemed too expensive as exceeded the budget. Members agreed that the rocks should be the Heather slate boulders cut in two and the distance of two metres apart signified social distancing. An Eastgate bench should be placed in the centre, set back looking towards the church along with a low sign between the rocks facing the bench explaining the purpose of the memorial and that the rocks are 'together... but apart'.

It was agreed that planting could be confirmed after installation of the other component parts. The Town Clerk confirmed that the additional funding for the memorial could be sourced from the community infrastructure earmarked reserve.

Members agreed that this memorial was of great importance given the numbers of lives lost, particularly as this comes at the poignant time of November when we remember those lost in conflict around the world.

Resolved:

1. That the report be noted and,
2. That, the Covid-19 Memorial is progressed with heather slate stones placed two metres apart, with a bench and sign at the proposed site on The Leys Recreation Ground

SC577 **FINANCE REPORT: REVISED REVENUE BUDGET 2022/23 AND DRAFT BASE REVENUE BUDGET FOR 2023/24**

The Committee received and considered the report and verbal update of the Town Clerk/CEO.

Members were concerned to hear the CCTV system in Witney had needed to have urgent repairs and that there still appeared to be vague plans over its future improvement and replacement.

Members however did agree to budget for £10,000 to be added to the other funds held in reserve to support the scheme.

The Committee agreed that water safety remained as a priority and that consideration is needed to ensure the Council has sufficient and informative signage.

Resolved:

1. That, the report, and verbal update be noted and,
2. That, the Town Council seeks reassurances on the future of the CCTV scheme from its providers.

SC578 REVENUE GROWTH ITEMS, SPECIAL REVENUE PROJECTS AND CAPITAL PROJECTS

The Committee received and considered the report and verbal update of the Town Clerk/CEO.

Members discussed items that they would like to see in the 2023/24 budget which included commemorating the 75th Anniversary of the NHS possibly with planting around the town. Councillor Ashbourne offered a NHS “Thank You” flag which could be flown from the Town Hall.

Members agreed the Union Flag at the Town should be replaced as the current one is looking rather worn.

The Chair raised the prospect of treating of all community events at the Leys fairly and offering subsidised hire to all, subject to a completed grant form. This would not include commercial hirers.

A Member raised that the council may wish to consider a memorial to the “Windrush Generation” as the ship HMT Empire Windrush which is remembered for bringing one of the first large groups of post-war West Indian immigrants to the United Kingdom, was named after the river running through Witney. A memorial with a plaque by the river would record the link and information could also be added to the council website to explain its significance.

Resolved:

1. That, the report and verbal update be noted and
2. That, the town council commemorates the 75th anniversary of the NHS and,
3. That, a new Union flag be purchased and
4. That, Witney Pride be offered subsidised ‘free’ use of The Leys to host their annual event and,
5. That, a memorial or recognition of the town’s link to HMT Empire Windrush be considered.

The meeting closed at: 7.40 pm

Chair