

WITNEY ANNUAL TOWN MEETING 2023

REPORT TO THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING FROM THE MAYOR

CLLR LIZ DUNCAN

It has been a great privilege to spend the last year as Mayor of Witney, a time when the life of the town has become so much busier as we have been able to return to some level of normality moving out of the effects of the pandemic. I have met so many people and can say that Covid and its effects are still with us in so many ways, particularly for people's health, for key workers and for local businesses.

My mayoral year has been framed by events for our Royal Family, starting with the celebrations for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. It was wonderful to support the family events, the coffee morning for seniors, the beacon lighting, the wonderful Jubilee concert and the Big Lunch on the Leys.

And then, we had the sad death of the Queen and the formal duties of the historic proclamation from here in Market Square supported by the wonderful Witney Town Band, and the very moving Civic Service held at St Mary's Church. Thanks are due to The Rector and Mayor's Chaplain, Toby Wright for his support throughout the year. At the very end of my year, in May, we are looking forward to celebrations for the Coronation of our new King.

As Mayor, I was keen to make contact with residents who had been particularly affected by Covid and have contacted and visited some of our care homes in Witney. We have included the care homes in our art competitions for the Jubilee and Christmas card competitions and it has been lovely to visit and present prizes as well as participating in coffee mornings and Christmas Fairs.

My visits to schools have also been very rewarding, presenting prizes for the Witney in Bloom and Jubilee competitions, attending Christmas celebrations, reading stories and answering all those wonderful questions. Thanks also to the many organisations for young people who have invited me to visit, such as the Churchill Beavers group and both the army and air cadets.

This year we also had the welcome return of so many well-loved events. It was a great honour to be asked to open the Witney Music Festival, Witney Pride Day, Witney in Pink, and to present the prizes at the Witney Carnival. The Christmas lights switch-on event was again a joyful event at the darkest time of the year. After the disruption of the pandemic it was wonderful for the town to see these events return. Thanks are due to the many organisations in the town who organise these events so perfectly, including Witney Rotary, Round Table, Witney Lions, Witney Pride and many others.

I was also very pleased to be invited to support the many volunteer organisations in the town at their events and AGMs. My two chosen charities are Volunteer Link Up and the Windrush Bike project, both of whom work hard to make a real difference to the lives of people in Witney. I also connected with many other organisations, such as Witney Day Centre, Witney Shed, West Oxfordshire Community Transport, Witney and West Oxfordshire Foodbank, Chatterbox, Got2B and many others. I enjoyed my day at the Witney Museum, helping at the

Heritage 'Have a go' day, and the Mayor's Christmas Carol service returned with some wonderful music and raised funds for the Mayor's charities.

I enjoyed my day at Witney Fire Station, presenting firefighters with their Platinum Jubilee medals on behalf of the Queen, and experiencing an exciting trip on the hydraulic platform – a very different view of Witney!

I have also represented Witney around the County, attending services in Oxford to commemorate the platinum jubilee and to celebrate Christmas at Christchurch Cathedral at the invitation of Thames Valley Police. I travelled to Reading to collect awards in the Witney in Bloom competition and attended the Civic Service and military parade in Bicester. The remembrance service and parade in Witney was incredibly moving and it was an honour to lay a wreath on behalf of our town. Deputy Mayor, Cllr Owen Collins, travelled to our twin town of Unterhaching in Germany and presented a wreath on behalf of the people of Witney at their remembrance ceremony on the same day.

There are so many people to thank who have supported the role of Mayor during the year. Our previous Mayor, Joy Aitman, did a wonderful job for two years during the challenging years of Covid and made a huge difference to many during that time. Her advice has been invaluable. Thanks also to the Deputy Mayor, Owen Collins, for his support throughout the year, and to all the staff and councillors at Witney Town Council who work tirelessly behind the scenes.

My main thanks go to the people of Witney who have done me the honour of including me in their celebrations, events and activities. We are so lucky to have such wonderful volunteers and organisations in the town who work so hard on our behalf to improve the life of everyone in Witney.

Cllr Liz Duncan, Mayor of Witney