

WITNEY ANNUAL TOWN MEETING 2023

REPORT TO THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING FROM CHAIR OF THE TOWN COUNCIL'S CLIMATE, BIODIVERSITY AND PLANNING COMMITTEE CLLR RUTH SMITH

The climate emergency, declared by the Town Council in 2019, is the key theme which underpins all planning applications and biodiversity matters considered by this Committee. The Council has a target of being Carbon neutral across its operations by 2028. The intention is to do our bit to improve Witney's emissions and to lead and inspire residents and businesses to do the same.

Planning

Witney Town Council is a statutory consultee on all planning applications inside Witney's boundaries, and is consulted on some neighbouring applications, too. The Committee meets every three weeks to deal with the volume of applications.

As a Committee, we regularly tailor our planning responses to represent Witney's best interests on themes of flooding prevention (including adequate drainage and acknowledgement that the EA's flooding maps are openly agreed to be in need of updating); sewerage (given the fact that Witney's sewage treatment plant cannot cope with current capacity never mind hundreds of new bathrooms); green energy and energy efficiency to address the climate crisis; and infrastructure for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport so that children, older people and people trying to be healthy and green can traverse our town safely, with clean air.

Between 1 April 2022 and 31 January 2023, the Town Council was consulted on:

- 149 planning applications
- 5 planning appeals
- 6 licensing applications (pavement licences & premises licences)
- 1 Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) consultation
- 2 road closure consultations

Approximately 70% of the Town Council responses are endorsed by the District Council at the planning decision stage.

Planning Officers at the District Council benefit from the advice of technical consultees. Sometimes technical consultees are able to identify reasons for refusal that might be outside of the expertise of our Town Councillors. This can lead to applications being refused by the Local Planning Authority when Witney Town Council have not raised objection comments, and vice versa. The difference in opinion or additional expertise might include the following matters of interest: protection in Conservation Areas, protection of Heritage assets, drainage issues, highway safety, threat to biodiversity, poor design, non-compliance with planning policy or NPPF, and many other constraints that are identified by District Planning Officers.

Climate

New energy performance audits are underway and partly completed at Langdale Hall, Burwell Hall, Town Hall, Reception Office and the Corn Exchange in Market Square.

Work on making these buildings more energy efficient has begun which includes, repairing windows at the Town Hall and heating system changes at Burwell Hall. The Council estate is also provided by a 100% green energy supplier.

The Council's Grounds Maintenance service will benefit from the introduction of electric vehicles into its fleet over the next five years and all new tools are procured as electric ones where possible.

The Council purchased a Thermal Imaging Camera which is managed by a local community group, for use by residents on request, to check their home insulation.

Biodiversity

The Committee receives regular updates from the Park Ranger, who was appointed during this year to help spearhead the Council's biodiversity aspirations. Some of the biodiversity work carried out by the Council over the last year are listed below:

- Remedial work has been undertaken on a number of trees arounds the Country Park that were damaged in the winter storms.
- 12 trees have been planted across Witney, 5 of which are replacement trees. There are a further 2 trees to plant. Of the 16 trees planted in 2021, all have survived very well. 14 trees planted between 3-5 years ago are now established and have had stakes and watering bags removed.
- The wildflower beds at Oxlease and Burwell are showing good results but the beds at Eton Close have been resown.
- Autumn & winter bedding has been planted.
- Slow worm habitat works are taking place at the old Allotment site Park Road.
- Lake & Country Park - Work has continued on the bank stabilization.

The Committee wrote to WODC to advocate for swift bricks, along the lines of the Petition to Government to "Make swift bricks compulsory in new housing to help red-listed birds", after being addressed by a local activist.

Agenda Items in the Year April 2022-2023

The committee responded to the following large Infrastructure and policy consultations:

- A40 access to Witney Shores Green - Planning Reference R3.0039/22.
- Consultation on Proposed Main Modifications to the Salt Cross Garden Village Area Action Plan.
- Developer contributions (Supplementary Planning Document) Consultation, West Oxfordshire District Council.
- Botley West Solar Farm - Public Consultation.

Witney-Specific Projects

- The 20mph Working Party worked with Oxfordshire County Council to design Witney's speed limit changes.
- The Committee had input into Witney's Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP).
- The Committee responded to the consultation on Traffic Calming at The Leys.
- Several Street naming requests were considered.
- Notice of a Definitive Map Notice of landowner deposit was received in relation to land at Langel Common, and the footpath across it.

Cllr Ruth Smith, Chair of Climate, Biodiversity & Planning Committee