

WITNEY ANNUAL TOWN MEETING 2023

REPORT TO THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING FROM CHAIR OF THE TOWN COUNCIL'S HALLS, CEMETERIES AND ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE CLLR MEL JONES

This Committee has responsibility for all aspects relating to the public halls, cemeteries, and allotments under the control of the Town Council.

Public Halls

Corn Exchange

The focus in the last year has been on delivering the Council's vision for the Corn Exchange, 'to create a modern, accessible, and affordable arts venue for Witney and its community, capable of facilitating both local and professional arts and performances.'

Through the efforts of the Corn Exchange Working Party, audio and lighting enhancements were introduced during the summer and retractable seating was installed in December. The works were funded by Witney Town Council, Section 106 Developer funding and a grant from West Oxfordshire District Council. In addition, several areas have been re-carpeted and projection equipment for film viewing has been installed. An Open Day was held at the end of February which showcased the refurbishment and the Gallery Room set as a wedding venue.

A programme of events is now being finalised with many bookings and enquiries already coming in. Aladdin by Buttercross Theatre Productions was a great success, as were the new Open Mic Nights and other music performances. We hope it will become a very well used and loved part of the community where it has been for 160 years this year. We look forward to welcoming local performing groups and artistes to the Hall in particular.

Burwell Hall

The Hall has not been forgotten and plans and budgets are in place which will see the introduction of an energy efficient heating system and upgrades to the toilets and sports team changing rooms in the next year.

The Town Hall

The sash windows have been repaired and are due to be painted later this year. Plans for the fascia and window vinyls at the accessible Town Hall reception on Market Square are underway. This window provides the opportunity to advise on Council services, Corn Exchange events and offers charities and local groups an area to advertise what they do.

The area around the Buttercross has been tidied and the natural Flag stones underneath the Town Hall have been repaired.

Cemeteries & Closed Churchyards

The upkeep and enhancement of Tower Hill and Windrush Cemeteries continues to remain a key focus of this Committee's work.

- Re levelling work at Tower Hill cemetery has taken place to ensure the lawn areas look as good as possible.
- The trees have been assessed to ensure their future viability and safety.
- Memorial Stability testing has taken place at St Mary's & Holy Trinity Churchyards.
- A wisteria has been planted at the Windrush cemetery.
- A wildflower area has been created in conjunction with the rotary club of Witney at Tower Hill Cemetery.
- A review of cemetery regulations has been carried out to ensure the cemeteries are managed to best practice and are able to provide grave spaces for as long as possible.
- A wildflower area at St Mary's churchyard has been established which the Council cuts and collects throughout the year.

Allotments

The Town Council owns the allotment sites at Lakeside, Hailey Road, Newland and at Windrush Place which are administered by the Witney Allotment Association.

Improvements have taken place in the last year to make sure the allotments are well maintained and run; these include the following:

- Hedging has been maintained around Lakeside allotments.
- A shed has been provided for equipment at Windrush Place.
- New vehicle and pedestrian gates at all allotments sites to improve security are imminent.

Accessible allotment plots/planting beds at Windrush Place allotments have been taken up by the Windrush Church of England Primary School and the ICE Centre.

Cllr Mel Jones, Chair of Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee