

STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Date: Monday, 20 March 2023

Title: Community Engagement Report

Contact Officer: Communications & Community Engagement Officer - Polly Inness

Background

The purpose of this report is to update members on the latest Community Engagement activities of the Town Council.

Current Situation

NHS 75th Birthday

The Town Clerk/CEO and Communications and Community Engagement Officer (CCEO) have had a brief meeting with Rev'd Toby Wright about a celebration event to mark the 75th anniversary of the NHS on 5th July. St Mary's Church has been reserved for this occasion.

Initial plans are for a drink's reception with entertainment. The Church would like Witney Town Council involvement/assistance and possible sponsorship towards this. The Town Clerk has suggested contact is made with the Communities Office at WODC to ascertain if there is any money available from the Healthy Communities budget. Rev'd Wright will make initial contact with hospital and GP Practices to enquire as to who to invite and how to share the message. The CCEO suggested contacting local radio to provide entertainment and the organisations that request Lighting up of the Corn Exchange for various medical conditions as potential guests.

There is no budget set aside for this and as yet no costings, so a budget implication cannot be given at this point. There will potentially be some money available in the events budget. The Town Clerk did however refer to it in her finance report to this committee in November.

There is a follow up meeting on 27th March so that next steps can be considered.

Great British Spring Clean 2023

Is due to take place imminently. The Council could initiate a Community Litter Pick with Councillors also taking part. The Ranger suggests consideration is given to the type of litter pick needed.

- Shallow – on hard standing and just off the path/road
- Deep – wellie/boots and into the undergrowth

The second is more needed as we keep on top of general litter around the town (no harm though in a thorough check) but lack deep cleans of public areas.

Tower Hill Cemetery - Wild Bank Planting

Last year the Council was approached by the Rotary Club of Witney to ask if they could take part in some wildflower planting or other green initiative. The Town Council had been planting wildflower test beds in various parks, but there is a particularly tricky piece of land in Tower Hill Cemetery that requires rejuvenation and that would fit well with In Bloom entries last year.

The 'wild bank' behind the cemetery chapel is steep and very difficult to mow and keep tidy in conventional ways. Much of the area had given way to cow parsley and little else. Rescued plants from town centre beds such as primulas and some bulbs were struggling to grow on and be visible. The area was suggested as a project and several meetings with the Rotarians, and officers followed.

The Rotarians stressed that as their members were generally advancing in age, they were not able to do much physical work but were willing to access funding and pass that on to allow planting to take place. In discussions with the Ranger, it was decided that the soil and conditions of the bank are unknown and test planting would need to happen ahead of deciding on a permanent solution.

With funding from the Rotary Club, the Ranger has purchased wildflower seed, seed matting and plug plants and these will be planted up in the next week or so. A press release is being prepared along with a comment from the Rotary Club about the partnership working on this project.

Witney Carnival

The theme for this year's Carnival is currently unknown. If the Council is considering a presence at it could be once again, to display the Schools In Bloom barrows unless any other ideas are put forward.

Smoke Free Play Areas

The Project Officer has included details of this competition in her report to the Committee.

Witney Forum

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 February 2023, are attached as Appendix 1

Environmental impact

The wildflower planting, litter pick and Smoke Free play areas are all positive impacts that the Council is contributing to the local area.

Risk

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

Financial implications

Described here or as stated in the report above.

- Funds towards the NHS 75th Anniversary event, held in conjunction with St Mary's Church

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and consider the following:

1. Agreement to support the NHS 75 event in principle and,
2. Decide if a community litter pick should take place and what sort of litter pick is required to highlight the Great British Spring Clean week and,
3. To note, the wildflower planting at Tower Hill Cemetery and,
4. Determine what presence, if any, it would like at the Witney Carnival in July and,
5. Note the minutes of the Witney Forum held on 2 February 2023.