

STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Date: Monday, 12 June 2023

Title: Community Engagement Report

Contact Officer: Communications & Community Engagement Officer - Polly Inness

Background

It's traditional at this time of year to start looking at budget planning for events for next year and approving new ones that have arisen during the year.

Current Situation

An update on current plans and feedback

BIG GREEN WEEK EVENTS – 10th June 2023

Creepy Crawly Safari competition

Proposed as an alternative to the previously held Wild Witney competition, which though, successful the first year had no take up at all during 2022. Children will be asked to undertake a mini beast hunt in their own garden, a park or other green space in Witney and submit an A4 painting or drawing of one of the insects they find. These will be displayed in the Gallery Room at the Corn Exchange through the summer holidays, between 24th July and 4th September. During this time, the Council will select three winners who will receive a Corn Exchange cinema pass to admit four people each to one screening.

The competition will launch during Great Big Green Week and will run for around 4 weeks, closing on 15th July to allow time to get them ready for display. Information about insects from the Woodland Trust (which is free to share) will be used in the social media posts and press release.

<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/blog/2019/04/minibeast-hunt/>

<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/media/48349/minibeast-hunt.pdf>

Spider Talk Saturday 17th June 7:30pm

Having been commissioned to survey the meadows that form part of Witney's Lake and Country Park, local Ecological & Environmental Education Consultant and author, Lawrence Bee will be presenting a talk and images on Britain's spiders with a local perspective. This is a free event with tickets available through Eventbrite. It lasts around an hour.

Car Free Day - Friday 22nd September

Officers propose that this runs for four hours from 12noon to 4pm in Market Square, with a focus on children's activities between 2 and 4pm as they come out of school, with a pavement game, wrist snappers, bubble wands, active travel pencils and Road safety focus. The Council could look at producing local walk leaflets based on those it has previously promoted for Car Free Day –with the production of these outsourced. The Town Council could approach the District & County Councils to ask if they would waive the fee if people wanted to close their roads, though this is unlikely with it falling on a term time weekday. Those to be invited include:

- Bus museum
- Cycling without Age
- Thames Valley Police bike marking
- Road safety Officer from OCC promoting road safety and cycling proficiency
- Corn Exchange to do mocktails and free coffees for cyclists
- Windrush Bike project
- WODC health walk
- OCC – High Street Consultation Stand

Mental Health Day 10th October

The Corn Exchange is booked provisionally for this date. It is proposed that this is an event where the Council supports relevant agencies and experts in their field to host their own event.

Interest in this can be gauged at the regular Witney Forum meeting and through organisations that the Council currently support with Youth Grants and other grant funding for example, APCAM, Witney Pride, Got 2B, The Shed.

Christmas Competitions

These are annual competitions usually launched now for commissioning at the end of July – the Children's Christmas Light competition is open to all primary aged children who live in the town, attend a Witney primary school or are a member of one of the town's youth organisations, beavers, cubs or brownies, for example. The Winning design is made into a light and mounted on the Town Hall as part of the Town's Christmas Light display, then moved to the Como Lounge wall for the next few years before being provided to the winning entrants family, if required.

Later in the year (Autumn Term) the Council usually runs competitions for the Witney Town Council official Christmas Card (primary years) and the service sheet cover for the Mayor's Carol Service (care homes).

Christmas Market Saturday 25th November

This would be for local charity/volunteer groups and youth groups as a fundraiser in the Corn Exchange to help their causes. Interest in this can be gauged at the regular Witney Forum meeting and through invitation to organisations the Council currently supports or are known to officers/Members, Yellow Submarine, Witney Pride, Got 2B, The Shed, Synolos, for example.

Christmas Lights Switch-On and Advent Fayre (added by Deputy Town Clerk)

The Town Council is responsible for paying for and installing the Christmas Lights across the town. Historically, an agreement has existed whereby the Rotary Club of Witney has been given grant funding to manage and run the switch on event held in Market Square on the last Friday of November (this year, Friday 24th November).

Additionally, the Sunday of this weekend has seen the Town Council provide a Children's Advent Fayre (Sunday 26th November). This is run from 11-3pm in the Corn Exchange and provides free activities for children in Witney to make advent and Christmas gifts.

Members are asked to consider whether these events should go ahead as they have previously so arrangements can be made.

Synolos Community Wellbeing Centre

Synolos is currently fundraising for £35k startup funding to create a West Oxfordshire-based community wellbeing centre to open in September 2024, It is intended that this will support the growing mental health needs of the community. It will operate in a non-clinical setting and offer a mapping and signposting service. They will almost certainly make an approach to Council for funding at some point. They have the information below online and are currently recruiting volunteers to fulfil admin, marketing and fundraising roles.

http://www.synolos.co.uk/uploads/4/9/2/9/49292053/synolos_community_wellbeing_a_powerhouse_of_change_barry_ingleton_copyright_2019_002_8.pdf

The Council may wish to nominate a Councillor to attend the regular meetings on the project.

Coronation attraction hire charge reimbursement for the Vikings

As one of the attractions at the Coronation Big Lunch (and a very popular one as it turns out) the Vikings brought along an inflatable dartboard. At the time there was no request from them for payment for this, and it was only after the event the Communications & Community Engagement Officer was made aware of a hire cost of £450 (see appendix 1). The Vikings Manager also purchased 150 medals from his own money to present on the day. This was a very generous thing to do.

Their contribution on the day was busy and enjoyed by many. The Council paid for Windrush Radio to attend and for many of the other attractions and activities that were provided over the weekend. It seems only fair that having discovered this outlay that the Council considers reimbursing the club for it. If members agree, the Communications and Community Engagement officer will check the circumstances, who the refund should go to and work with the accounts department to find the best solution.

Twinning Window

As one of the occasional displays that Witney Town Council places in the 'spare' admin window, the Communications and Community Engagement officer is proposing that we include a display of items and information that illustrate and celebrate our town's special links with Unterhaching and Le Touquet if Members are in agreement.

NHS 75th Anniversary Events – 5th July (added by the Deputy Town Clerk)

The Council has already agreed to support the day by raising a flag at the Town Hall and providing discounted drinks at the Corn Exchange on the day for NHS workers.

St Mary's Church have been working with the Council on hosting a Civic Drinks Reception on the evening. Entertainment and light refreshments are provided for this event. Members are asked to consider if they would provide £500 as a discretionary grant towards helping to facilitate this event.

Witney Forum (added by the Deputy Town Clerk)

The Forum is a meeting point where representatives from several groups and organisations across Witney (and West Oxfordshire) come together to discuss what they are currently providing and any issues they may have. In September last year, the Council was approached to see if it could take on the administration of the group but decided it should stay with the District Council due to resources and its elevated position to oversee community activities as a whole.

The notes from the meeting held on 5th April are attached for information. The most recent meeting was held in the Corn Exchange on 8th June. Members are asked if they consider this should be free, with the sum of £42.25 being taken from the subsidised letting budget.

Community Safety Charter

Councillors are invited to consider the benefits of signing up for the Community Safety Charter (**See Appendix 2**) and <https://www.ourwatch.org.uk/charter>

The aim of the Community Safety Charter is to involve a wider range of local organisations, charities, businesses and groups in crime prevention activity and extend the scope of this work towards a goal of eliminating harassment, antisocial behaviour, and intimidation experienced by anyone who lives, works, studies, or visits anywhere in England and Wales.

Those who sign up to the Charter will receive an information pack on a specific topic or crime in PDF or an interactive format every two months to share with staff and /or volunteers. The topics covered in the first year are:

- harassment
- hate crime
- antisocial behaviour
- being an active bystander
- dealing with confrontation
- leading the change in our communities

Individual downloadable pledges to share on social media will also be made available, together with a downloadable poster to exhibit in our premises.

Community Engagement – Where Next?

Following the results of the Annual Residents Satisfaction Survey, it is apparent that the Council is not hearing from our young people anywhere near enough. The Communications and Community Engagement Officer is researching ways to motivate young people to get actively engaged with the democratic process through both global issues (such as tackling climate change and local level involvement with campaigning and or fundraising to improve local facilities and amenities).

Officers are in the process of setting up a new Youth Council, but only certain sorts of young people will engage in this way, and it is the vast majority that will remain unheard, so officers need to look at exploiting opportunities to consult and engage in innovative ways, working with third sector organisations, rather than trying and failing with traditional approaches. Badged council events are unlikely to attract a big enough cross section of our young people.

Perhaps we could look specifically for organisations working successfully with those who are excluded, disabled, in care, asylum seekers, travellers, have learning disabilities, or are carers themselves.

Along with hearing what they say, actions can be taken that demonstrate to them that they have been heard and what they say has value and is actioned where possible.

The government has a young person's engagement initiative called Rock Enrol which contains suggested activities designed to encourage thinking about how government works. The games and activities are aimed at getting young people to discuss and debate what they care about whilst considering why they should register to vote. One idea (Show Me the Money) asks groups taking part to allocate a budget to the areas that Central Govt does - Police and Security –Culture and Sport – Defence –Environment –Education – Health –International Aid and Welfare and Benefits.

Another game gives small groups power and no guidance or limits as to how that can be used.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/889070/2020-05-29-Rock_Enrol_Resource_Pack.pdf

While these activities sound very engaging, one first has to bring those groups together in order to get them to experience them.

The Communications and Community Engagement Officer will be undertaking a course in late October that aims to provide practical tips and guidance on new ways to engage with young people in your community, understand their needs, and gather their views on crucial local topics.

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/empowering-young-voices-in-your-community-tickets-625171684337?aff=website>

Inclusivity and Diversity Webpage

This page still sits in the back end of the Witney Town Council website. It was never launched due to a number of delays. If members wish to make use of the page officers could look at doing a launch this year. Things to consider are:

- Scope and purpose
- How to remove barriers to being part of the democratic process in the town
- How to Hear from, understand and strive to meet the needs of different groups
- Why become an Inclusion Panel Member?
- How to create a supportive network and environment
- How the Panel will work
- How often it will meet and where?
- How will it attract members
- Access

Environmental impact

Having declared a Climate Change Emergency at its Council meeting on 26 June 2019. Councillors should have due regard to the environmental impact of any decisions they make with regard to its facilities and services it operates.

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.

If the Council does not do more to foster community engagement with historically hard-to reach age ranges and groups it risks not representing the whole of the town and only catering for those who are more confident to make their feelings known.

Financial implications

Described here or as stated in the report above.

- As with all Community Events and initiatives, the main cost is that of officer resources – the planning and execution on the day.
- Community events such as Car Free Day, Christmas Competitions, Mental Health Day and the Creepy Crawly Competition are budgeted at £4,000 in line 4141/408
- The Advent Fayre has a budget of £2,000 (4170/408)
- The Council budgets £2,000 toward the Christmas Lights Switch-On Event (4104/408)
- There was an underspend in the Coronation budget which would cover any reimbursement to Witney Vikings FC.
- No grants have been awarded from the Discretionary Grants fund in the new fiscal year, so it has a full budget of £20,000 (4100/407). Any award will be ratified by the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee.

Recommendations

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

1. To agree to the launch of the Creepy Crawly Safari Hunt and,
2. To agree the plans and activities for Car Free Day 2023 and,
3. To support and facilitate groups who want to put together a Mental Health event and,
4. To run the Christmas competitions as in previous years and,
5. To facilitate an indoor Christmas Market for local groups if there is sufficient interest and,
6. To agree that the Christmas Lights Switch On Event and Advent Fayre be held on 24th and 26th November and,
7. To ask the Rotary Club of Witney if they would manage and run the Switch-on event along the same lines as before with £2,000 grant funding and,
8. To consider nominating a Councillor to attend the Synolos Community Wellbeing Centre meetings and,
9. To reimburse Witney Vikings FC a sum of £450 and,
10. To sign up to the Community Safety Charter and,
11. For members to consider how they might like to improve community engagement based on the comments in the report and,

12. To re-launch the Inclusivity & Diversity Webpage.
13. To consider providing a grant towards the Civic Drinks Reception marking the NHS 75th Anniversary at St Mary's Church on 5th July.
14. To consider subsidised letting for the Witney Forum meeting held in the Corn Exchange on 8th June.