

STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Date: Monday, 17 July 2023

Title: Community Engagement Report

Contact Officer: Communications & Community Engagement Officer

Background

At the last committee meeting Councillors were asked to consider ways in which Witney Town Council might improve engagement with different sections of the community that it has least success with engaging such as younger people. There has been a strategy meeting with heads of committees with that in mind and we are awaiting some suggestions to explore.

Minutes of the Witney Forum meeting held on 8 June 2023 are attached for information.

Current Situation

Youth Services Strategy Meeting

A Youth Services strategy meeting has also taken place where the Council heard from organisations that can either offer or already have services available that might be augmented or extended if funding and venues are available. It was pleasing to see so many organisations able to attend and willing to offer their time, volunteers and other resources to try to address gaps in provision, where identified.

The Town Council has built strong relationships with these groups over a period of time, and it is gratifying to see that they continue to come forward with all the diversity and experience they have to offer and generously give their own time and energy. They know and respect each other from many years of working side by side and show a great willingness to work together to make things happen for the town's young people. In that respect we are in a good position to make some advances.

The Deputy Town Clerk's report will have more details of what has been put forward. A Youth Council task and finish group meeting will also take place later in the summer.

Schools in Bloom/The Carnival

The Town Council had a very successful stall at the Carnival. It was one of the only interactive stalls and of course voting and pebble painting were completely free to do. There were some lovely conversations and comments, and everyone seemed to really enjoy what the Council was doing on the day.

However, the stand was large and much of the equipment was heavy or difficult to move, a large gazebo, tables, chairs, an A Board and sacks of rocks is a big ask. There needs to be more support to help with set up and takedown. Town Council community events can sometimes be on quite a big scale and would benefit from assistance from Councillors who could commit to being there a little before the start or after the finish (not both ends of the day).

Barrows of Love

The Communications and Engagement officer has also been considering better ways of enjoying the barrows once voting has taken place. Traditionally they are chained up near the depot on the Leys for members of the public to enjoy. Unfortunately, this requires the Council's already busy maintenance team need to water them and keep an eye on them to check for vandalism etc.

A future proposal is that once they have visited the Carnival the schools are invited to present their barrows to a care home in their catchment area so that the residents can enjoy them and tend them over the summer. This would be useful when there is an edible theme as they could make use of the produce as a bonus. Barrows of Love or Friendship is just a working title – perhaps Councillors would like to suggest something suitable for 2024.

The Council could then collect the barrows in autumn for storage ahead of the following year. Schools could follow up with a 'cards of kindness' project where those involved in creating the barrows write to the residents to explain what they planted and why so there is a story and some connection. The schools probably have existing relationships where they go in and sing at Christmas or have stay and play days.

There is a logistics and time implication in that the barrows are making an extra two journeys. Out to Schools, Back for judging, Out to Care Homes and Back for storage.

Councillor Engagement

A way of Councillors engaging directly with residents is currently being devised and is likely to be one Saturday morning a month at the 1863 Café Bar. Further details and publication will follow once preparations have been made.

Witney High Street – Public Engagement (added by the Deputy Town Clerk)

At the Full Council meeting held on 26 June, the possibility of town council engagement on the above subject was discussed. The County Council hopes to hold a series of public feedback exhibitions and stakeholder workshops later in the summer. Members are asked whether they would like to engage with the public and ask for ideas which can be fed into the initial discussions.

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.

Financial implications

Described here or as stated in the report above.

- Future changes to the In Bloom Competition can be covered from the existing budget.

Recommendations

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

1. The Barrow of Love change to the In Bloom competition for 2024.
2. If the town council asks the public for ideas ahead of the Witney High Street consultation.