

**MEETING OF THE
WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL**

Held on Monday, 4 December 2023

At 7.00 pm in the Gallery Room, The Corn Exchange, Witney

Present:

Councillor O Collins (Chair)

Councillors:	G Meadows	R Crouch
	J Aitman	G Doughty
	T Ashby	J Doughty
	D Enright	D Edwards-Hughes
	R Smith	D Newcombe
	D Temple	J Robertshaw
	A Bailey	J Treloar
Officers:	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
	Derek Mackenzie	Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk
Others:	Four members of the public.	

643 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S Simpson & L Cherry.

644 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest from Members or Officers.

645 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the Full Council meetings held on 9 October and 16 October were received.

Minute Item: 545 – Members were advised that a copy of the response received from the Police & Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley had been circulated to all Members earlier that day.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Full Council meetings held on 9 October and 16 October be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the Chair.

646 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

The meeting adjourned for this item.

The Council received representations from residents regarding their proposed project titled “A Witney Dove of Peace”, a street art project for a large dove-like canopy in Market Square. The participation was allowed under Agenda Item 16 as The Leader had received this communication directly.

Members highlighted the principal authorities for the project would be West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) as the planning authority and Oxfordshire County Council as both the highway authority and landowner of Market Square.

It was agreed that Councillor J Aitman would assist the group in establishing contact with WODC to discuss the proposal further with their Officers and relevant Committee(s).

The meeting reconvened.

During the discussion under Public Participation:

Councillor D Enright left the meeting briefly at 7:20pm returning at 7:22pm

Councillor T Ashby left the meeting briefly at 7:21pm returning at 7:22pm

Councillor D Temple left the meeting briefly at 7:25pm returning at 7:27pm

647 **WITNEY COMMUNITY POLICING ISSUES**

Apologies were received from Inspector Chris Ball of Thames Valley Police as he was unable to attend and present an update.

The Committee Clerk advised members that Inspector Ball had been provided with dates of upcoming meetings and that he was aware that an update to Council was overdue to the Council regarding a previous assurance that he would update on Neighbourhood Watch and Mental Health related incidents.

648 **AN UPDATE FROM WITNEY OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCILLORS AND WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCILLORS**

West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC)

Cllr D Enright advised that the Christmas Market at Marriott Walk was to be held later that week and encouraged members to promote this, he expanded to say that WODC would have liked to use the High Street for stalls but faced opposition to the idea. However, they would continue to work to encourage and support business opportunities and work with the newly established Town Centre Partnership.

Cllr J Doughty visited the Richmond Village advent fayre and received positive comments about the town from residents, she also reported that she was pleased to take part in the Town Council’s Advent fayre along with the Christmas lights switch on event. She thanked all those involved for their efforts to put on these brilliant events.

Cllr J Aitman reported on the Oxfordshire Association of Local Council (OALC) survey which was circulated by the Town Clerk to members with the aim of gathering views ahead of establishing a charter to cover all levels of council. Replies were low and therefore she urged members to respond.

Cllr Aitman also reported that OALC were pleased to see that Witney Town Council had signed up to the Civility & Respect pledge as only 20% of town/parish councils had done so far.

649 **REPORT BACK FROM THE COUNCILLORS ON THE WORK WITH EXTERNAL BODIES WHERE THEY SERVE AS THE TOWN COUNCIL'S NOMINATED REPRESENTATIVE**

Witney & District Twinning Association

Cllr O Collins reported that he had recently visited Unterhaching for Volkstrauertag with the President of the Association and they had a most pleasant time. He also reported individuals from Unterhaching expressed their gratitude for the welcome they received in Witney over the Remembrance weekend and that they too enjoyed the visit very much.

650 **CLIMATE, BIODIVERSITY & PLANNING COMMITTEE 26 SEPTEMBER, 17 OCTOBER AND 7 NOVEMBER 2023**

The Chair of the Climate, Biodiversity & Planning Committee presented the above minutes to council and moved their acceptance.

It was advised the minutes from the meeting held on 28 November would be presented to the next Council meeting.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Climate, Biodiversity & Planning Committee meetings held on 26 September, 17 October and 7 November 2023 be received, and any recommendations therein approved.

651 **PARKS & RECREATION 30 OCTOBER 2023**

The Chair of the Parks & Recreation committee presented the above minutes to council and moved their acceptance.

A Member raised that it was unclear what action had taken in respect of Councillor T Ashby at 7:14pm. Councillor Ashby recalled he left the meeting at that time.

Resolved:

1. That, the minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee meeting held on 30 October 2023 be received, and any recommendations therein approved and,
2. That, the minutes are amended to reflect that Councillor T Ashby left the meeting at 7:14pm.

652 **HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS 6 NOVEMBER 2023**

The Chair of the Halls , Cemeteries & Allotments committee presented the above minutes to council and moved their acceptance be adopted as a correct record the proposal was seconded by Cllr G Meadows and all Members were in agreement.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Halls , Cemeteries & Allotments Committee meeting held on 6 November 2023 be received, and any recommendations therein approved.

Councillor D Edwards-Hughes left the meeting at 7:48pm

653 **STRONGER COMMUNITIES 13 NOVEMBER 2023**

The Vice Chair of the Stronger Communities committee presented the above minutes to council and moved their acceptance.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Stronger Communities Committee meeting held on 13 November 2023 be received, and any recommendations therein approved.

654 **POLICY, GOVERNANCE & FINANCE 20 NOVEMBER 2023**

The Chair of the Policy, Governance & Finance committee presented the above minutes to council and moved their acceptance to be adopted as a correct record; the proposal was seconded by Cllr G Meadows and all Members were in agreement.

Members received and considered payment schedules and copies of Bank Statements which were attached, The Deputy Town Clerk apologised for these being missing from the original 20 November meeting pack.

Resolved:

1. That, the additional report, payment schedules, bank reconciliations and statements be noted and,
2. That, the minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 20 November 2023 be received, and any recommendations therein approved.

Councillor D Edwards-Hughes rejoined the meeting at 7:52pm

655 **CHRISTMAS LIGHTS WORKING PARTY, 13 NOVEMBER 2023**

The Chair of the Christmas Lights Working Party presented the above minutes to the Council and moved their acceptance.

The Chair also gave a verbal update on a walkaround carried out by Members of the Working Party on 27 November 2023 which further allowed members to provide their thoughts to Officers so that initial conversations could commence with prospective suppliers.

Members commented that it was good to see both trees sponsored and asked that Officers consider other ways to encourage engagement with local businesses, perhaps by way of encouraging them to decorate small trees and windows displays.

Resolved:

1. That, the verbal update be noted and,
2. That, Officers consider options to encourage local business to participate during the Christmas period and,
3. That, the minutes of the Christmas Lights Working Party meeting held on 13 November 2023 be received, and any recommendations therein approved.

656 **D-DAY 80TH ANNIVERSARY TASK & FINISH GROUP, 20 NOVEMBER 2023**

The Chair of the 80th D-Day Anniversary Task & Finish Group presented the above minutes to council and moved their acceptance.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the 80th D-Day Anniversary Task & Finish Group meeting held on 20 November 2023 be received, and any recommendations therein approved.

657 **LEYS SKATE PARK**

The Council received a verbal report from the Deputy Town Clerk on behalf of the Project Officer in respect to the recent developments with the Skate Park.

A final consultation event was held with users on 14 November which resulted in some amendments and an improved and final design was created, copies of which were circulated to members. Additional funding had been awarded by FCC Communities Foundation of £15,000 which allowed for some additional enhancements shown in the plans.

Members were pleased to see that the project was now in the final stages and welcomed seeing the final plan put into place.

Resolved:

That, the verbal update and final plans be noted.

658 **YOUTH SERVICES**

The Council received a verbal update from the Deputy Town Clerk following his meeting last week with Bright Futures representative. Due to a delay in recruitment of a lead for the project, they propose to commence the project in February/March 2024.

Resolved:

That, the verbal update be noted.

659 **ANNUAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY**

The Council received and considered the draft Investment Strategy submitted to the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee, an apology was offered by Officers that the requested sustainability statement was yet to be added. Members requested that they have sight of the final version prior to granting their approval.

It was proposed to defer the agreement of the Annual Investment Strategy until the RFO amends it to include a statement regarding sustainability. This was proposed by Cllr Bailey and seconded by Cllr Smith. All members were in agreement.

Resolved:

1. That, the draft Investment Strategy be noted and,
2. That, the Annual Investment Strategy be deferred to the next meeting of the Policy, Governance & Finance meeting on 5 February 2024 for approval.

660 **CIVIC ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Council received the report of the Mayor's Diary Secretary which listed the civic engagements of the Mayor & Deputy Mayor since the last meeting.

The Mayor offered his thanks to the Deputy Chair for filling in when he was unable to attend events and also thanked all Councillors that attended the Advent Fayre. He encouraged members to diarise now for the 2024 event which will be held on 1 December 2024.

He also offered special thanks to the Biodiversity & Green Spaces Officers for the tour conducted with Councillors around the Country Park.

Resolved:

That, the report be noted.

661 **VANDALISM & HEALTH & SAFETY**

The Council received the report of the Operations Manager concerning health & safety issues and vandalism since the last meeting.

Members also received a new Health & Safety Policy Statement along with a verbal update from the Town Clerk who explained it was necessary to update the policy following the council's decision to switch to the services of GH Safety to ensure the Council was complying with legislation.

Adoption of the policy was proposed by Cllr Collins, seconded by Cllr Meadows with all members in agreement.

The Town Clerk responded to a question raised regarding safeguarding issues to confirm that a separate policy will cover safeguarding issues.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the Health & Safety Policy Statement be adopted.

662 **COMPLIMENTS & COMPLAINTS**

The Council received the report of the Deputy Town Clerk which outlined complaints, comments and compliments received since the last report in June 2023.

Members were pleased to note that the number of compliments had increased significantly compared to the previous year's feedback.

Resolved:

That, the report be noted.

663 **PARISH BOUNDARY REVIEW**

The Council received and considered the correspondence received from the office of Electoral Services at West Oxfordshire District Council.

Members debated the options in which the boundaries of Witney could be best reflected in order that each ward was more evenly balanced and supported. They believed that multi-member wards better serve the community for which they are elected to represent, given the size and population of each ward. Although the Burwell parish/town ward has been a single member for some time members believe this was an anomaly should be rectified during this review.

Also, if the 'Windrush' ward remained following the review, further thought was needed on the name as it did not accurately reflect the area covered as the River Windrush flows through several wards and also could be easily confused with the new housing development in Witney West which was named Windrush Place.

There was concern that the data used in the review process did not provide an accurate reflection of Witney's planned growth and while members recognised the need to tie in with the proposed County boundaries, the council asked that a variation be considered.

Cllr R Smith proposed, seconded by Cllr J Aitman that the revised parish electoral arrangement be :

Witney Central 4 Councillors (including the geographical area proposed as Witney Windrush)	Witney East 4 Councillors	Witney South 3 Councillors (including the geographical area of Witney Burwell)
Witney West 4 Councillors (including the geographical area proposed as Witney Leys)	Witney North 2 Councillors	

The proposal also asked that consideration be given to increasing the number of Councillors to 18. If this was granted, then 3 Councillors would remain serving Witney North.

A Vote was called. The proposal was carried, with voting as follows:

In Favour 11

Against 4

Abstentions 0

The Four members voting against the proposal were Cllrs T Ashby, G Doughty, J Treloar and D Edwards-Hughes.

Resolved:

1. That, the correspondence be noted and,
2. That, a response be submitted outlining the council's proposal and,
3. That, the Cllrs voting against the proposal be listed in the minutes as a named vote.

Councillor D Enright left the meeting at 7:37pm

664 **COMMUNICATION FROM THE LEADER**

In addition to the item on 'Dove of Peace' heard under public participation, the Leader of the Council, Cllr Smith expressed her delight at how well received and productive the Councillors at the café event on 2 December had been. She also thanked everyone involved with the Christmas Light switch on and Children Advent Fayre.

Cllr Smith then reported that she had added her name on behalf of the Council to a communication to support those on dependence allowances becoming Councillors and increasing representation in local government.

Resolved:

That, the verbal report be noted.

665 **CORRESPONDENCE**

Correspondence received from Matthew Barber, Police & Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley was circulated to members earlier that day in response to the letter the Town Clerk sent requesting to be kept informed of hate crime incidents following the unrest in the Middle East.

666 **QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

There were no Questions for the Leader of the Council.

667 **SEALING OF DOCUMENTS**

There were no documents sealed.

The meeting closed at: 8.43 pm

Chair