

WITNEY ANNUAL TOWN MEETING 2024

REPORT TO THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING FROM THE CHAIR OF THE TOWN COUNCIL'S PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE

CLlr Denis Newcombe

Committee Overview

This Committee has responsibility for all recreation grounds, parks, public open spaces and sports activities upon any ground under the control of the Town Council. The Committee is currently overseeing a number of projects in Witney.

Parks

Open Spaces Strategy (OSS)

The Council's OSS provides a framework for developing a number of projects and longer-term ambitions for a wide range of open spaces in the town. The committee remains committed to this strategy, as a means of transparently setting and prioritising objectives and allowing it to move forward with a clear sense of direction and purpose.

Play Areas Work is continuing to improve existing play areas. The Council has in place the formal rolling programme for the replacement and upgrade of existing play areas, to ensure a planned, budgeted, and consistent strategy going forward. This includes the addition of an inclusive piece of play equipment in each park. The Splash Pad will be undergoing a major refresh to make it more reliable and economical to run. As part of ongoing management, repairs to existing equipment and bark replenishment have taken place through the year.

The Committee supported the Smoke Free Parks initiative to try and discourage park users from smoking in these valuable and well used community areas, signs, designed by local schoolchildren, have been installed.

Playing Pitches

The Council has continued its focus on bringing unused pitches on-line as soon as possible to support local sports teams. Over the last few months, the Council has continued working alongside West Oxfordshire District Council to discuss improvements to existing sites, and the development of new sites, including locating the new Astro-turf pitch. It also continues negotiations to get the much-delayed Windrush pitch and pavilion completed and is in discussion with cricket clubs about their pitch requirements in the coming years.

Since the Town Council's grounds maintenance contract has been brought in house, it has been able to improve the maintenance regime and invest in new equipment. Extensive annual maintenance has taken place - pitches have been linearly aerated and seeded and pitch goal mouths have been heavily sanded to help with surface drainage and impact damage. In a report by the STRI (Former Sports Turf Research Institute) the executive summary stated, *'general conditions of the natural turf sports facilities have improved considerably across all inspected sites'* under its direct stewardship.

A defibrillator is imminently due to be installed at King George V playing field. This will mean all playing pitches will have access to life-saving pieces of equipment, maintained by the town council.

Three swamp-variety trees have been planted at West Witney to establish if this could be a partial solution to the excess water around one of the pitches.

Sports Facilities

Facilities, including playing pitches, remain heavily subsidised by Witney Town Council. It has continued to work with consultants and local stakeholders to try and bring about much needed improvements to existing facilities, including large scale projects at West Witney and the Leys and informing plans for new facilities at Windrush Place. Work is underway on the skatepark and there is much excitement for completion later this month.

Work is also underway on our Leys project in partnership with Courtside Hubs CIC. This will improve the facilities for the whole community. There is a lot of interest in the Paddl ball courts, and we are delighted to bring a new sport to the town.

At West Witney, the Council is working with the Sports and Social Club committee to upgrade the facilities and make it a more fitting home for their teams. The plans are looking great, and we look forward to the work starting later this year. The hugely successful Witney Parkrun has been granted a 4-year licence extension to run until March 2027 and we have been able to provide an area for storage of their equipment. We have undertaken bowls green renovation work at West Witney and the Leys, installed new ditch liners and new boarding.

The Lake & Country Park

In addition to the work undertaken under the remit of the Climate, Biodiversity & Planning Committee to improve the site, the pathway around the lake is being widened and stabilised to assist users with limited mobility.

Overall signage has been improved, new no-swimming signs have been installed and fencing is being upgraded along the Windrush River to aid the safety of users. There has been work done to stabilise the banks of the lake and a survey to establish the depth of the lake. We have been delighted to see an influx of flora and fauna which have attracted more visitors and increase the biodiversity of the area.

General Maintenance & Improvements

There is continuing maintenance and improvements to the Burwell Recreation ground. In spring there will be new planting. Remedial work has also been undertaken on any tree damage in our recent storms. A memorial and bench have been installed on The Leys as a Covid Memorial and in bringing grounds maintenance in-house, the Council has been able to manage the emptying of litter, waste and recycling bins on its land.