

WITNEY ANNUAL TOWN MEETING 2024

REPORT TO THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING FROM THE CHAIR OF THE TOWN COUNCIL'S HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE

Cllr Rachel Crouch

Committee Overview

This Committee has responsibility for all aspects relating to the Public Halls, Cemeteries, Closed Churchyards and Allotments under the control of the Town Council.

Halls

Corn Exchange

The continued focus in the last year has been on building upon the Council's vision for the Corn Exchange, 'to maintain a modern, accessible, and affordable venue for Witney and its community, capable of facilitating both local and professional arts and performances.' A Business Plan has been produced in the current year which contains the costed aspirations to run and expand the business of the hall for years to come.

The Gallery room, Café 1863 and the main corridors have recently been decorated with the works being funded by Witney Town Council. They have been re-painted in heritage colours to be in keeping with the history of the building and complimentary carpeting has been upgraded in the Gallery Room, on the landing and staircase. The Gallery room is now used for many more meetings, parties, functions and indeed, this includes wedding bookings. The Council has also restored the blue plaque on the exterior of the building.

Through the efforts of staff, there has been a real surge in event bookings including children's film afternoons, a Classic film club, Jazz evenings, the showing of sports events including the Women's World Cup, the regular Tribute bands and the yearly panto!

The 1863 Café continues to flourish as a warm/cool and safe space for so many people. A monthly 'Councillors at the Café' event has been introduced which has become popular, enabling families to talk to Councillors about their concerns and suggestions to continue to make Witney an even better place. This Café is a great hub for meetings and a friendly place to meet up, offering immeasurable social value to the community at the heart of the town.

Burwell Hall

The Hall continues to be a well-used asset of the Council for regular bookings and for one-off family events and parties.

The Council has invested in a new energy efficient heating system which has been installed this year, along with upgrades to the sanitaryware in toilets and general redecoration throughout.

New blinds have been installed into the Hall and they have certainly shown an improvement to the setting.

The Hall was used for the first Christmas Lunch event which took place in December for over sixty residents. This was a great success and should now become a yearly event. The residents of Burwell and the Witney Day Centre team indeed ran this.

The Town Hall

The area around the Buttercross has been tidied and the natural Flag stones underneath the Town Hall have been repaired as have the old Town Hall door and the sash windows, helping to maintain this piece of town heritage.

Redecoration has taken place and signage has been added to promote the accessible Town Council reception and administration office adjacent to the Bus stops on Market Square.

The Town Council also continues to work with its tenants at Langdale Hall and Madley Park Hall to maintain these buildings for residents.

Cemeteries & Closed Churchyards

The upkeep and enhancement of Tower Hill and Windrush Cemeteries continues to remain a key focus of this Committee's work.

- The Commonwealth War Grave Commission have agreed to install signs at Tower Hill Cemetery.
- The Windrush cemetery was entered into a Cemetery of the Year Award. The feedback will help improve the service offered.
- Cream 'post boxes to heaven' have been placed in both Cemeteries. This is for families to write letters to their loved ones.
- The Friends of the Cemeteries group continues to meet to support the Town Council's work moving forward.
- Grave mapping is underway at Windrush Cemetery to plan the future availability of grave plots in Witney.
- New signs are being erected in both cemeteries to remind visitors to always keep their dogs on leads.
- A Children's Memorial Garden is being constructed at Windrush Cemetery to allow grieving parents a quiet reflective setting.

The Council also has responsibility to maintain the 'closed churchyards' at St Mary's and Holy Trinity churches. Cycle racks have been installed at St Mary's Church and works on repairing the historic boundary wall are underway. A Commonwealth War Graves sign is also to be installed at Holy Trinity Church to signpost the War Graves there and the Council will be conducting repairs to the pillars and arch.

Allotments

The Town Council owns the allotment sites at Lakeside, Hailey Road, Newland and at Windrush Place which are administered by the Witney Allotment Association.

Improvements have taken place in the last year to make sure the allotments are well maintained and run.

In June 2023, the Chair of this Committee attended the first WAA committee meeting after election and offered to gather feedback from the WAA committee and tenants and be a direct link between the WAA and WTC. She then visited Lakeside to familiarise herself with the site and assess the issues with gates, boundaries, and access to the site.

The Chair also visited Newland and took photos of the gate that needed replacing and the boundary that needed higher fencing to prevent intruders to the site. The Council has:

- Supported the removal of debris and an old gate from Newland.
- Provided an Asgard shed and Lawnmower for Lakeside, to store site equipment.
- Delivered two benches from The Leys to Lakeside.
- Erected fencing on the lane at Lakeside bridging the gap that had been created in the hedge, meaning the lane is now only good for access to the allotments.
- Fitted a new gate to Newland and removed rubbish.
- Delivered fallen leaves to allotment sites to be used as leaf mould in Autumn 2023.

Accessible allotment plots/planting beds at Windrush Place allotments continue to be used by the Windrush Church of England Primary School and the ICE Centre.

The Council is aware of the size of the Waiting List for an allotment and the need for further allotment sites. The Chair continues to visit the Windrush Allotment and meet with the Chair and secretary of WAA to liaise on the future of what is needed.