

WITNEY ANNUAL TOWN MEETING 2024

REPORT TO THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING FROM THE VICE CHAIR OF THE TOWN COUNCIL'S STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Cllr Georgia Meadows

Committee Overview

The Stronger Communities Committee is responsible for improving the community environment including, trees, floral displays, Christmas lights, working with voluntary groups, and arranging or facilitating events on Town Council premises.

Community & Civic Events

In the last year, the Town Council held a series of free events to mark the King's coronation and continued to support other community events run throughout the year. We have been happy to welcome back the usual annual events such as Witney Music Festival, Witney Pride, Witney Carnival, and Witney Feast back onto The Leys.

We also held the annual remembrance service at the war memorial, Citizen of The Year Awards earlier this month, in which we awarded members of our community who have truly gone above and beyond in supporting and contributing to it. In the summer we welcomed a contingent from the Council's twinned German town of Unterhaching to Witney.

The Council supported the Rotary Club of Witney in their running of the Christmas light switch-on and has held its annual competitions for local schools in which students submitted designs for the Council's Christmas card and designs for the Christmas light that hangs on the Town Hall along with a Creepy crawly safari hunt competition.

The free children's Advent Fayre was also hugely successful again this year, with 242 attendees over the day, engaging in activities such as creating Christmas tree decorations and making reindeer food. The Council also hosted a Car Free Day in September. There will be further events in the forthcoming year to mark 50 years of Witney Town Council and the 80th anniversary of D-Day.

Communications

This year, the Council resolved that a digital poster be placed in the window of the town council administration offices adjacent to the Market Square bus stops; this came after concern from some residents who were unable to access the information provided on the Council's social media channels as an alternative for them to find important information regarding what events are going on around the town.

Also at the Town Hall reception office, the Community window, in which local charities and organisations are able to promote their services has gone from strength to strength.

The Town Council sent out its annual newsletter in early March with a satisfaction survey that the Chair would actively encourage residents to complete, as it helps the Council understand what areas it can improve in as a Council and what issues matter to our residents.

The Council also started a TikTok account to reach younger members of our community. Youth representation is as important as ever, and encouraging young people to get involved with our community is one of this Council's foremost ambitions.

Young people

Along with broadening our reach on social media, the Council have been looking at other ways of engaging with, supporting, and increasing the representation of young people.

In February, 'The Station' initiative launched, run by Bright Futures Oxfordshire and funded by the town council; the service will see detached youth workers being deployed across Witney to aid our young people, especially after the devastating closure of Got2B. This initiative was spawned after the Council resolved that it should provide funding for detached youth work following a meeting it spearheaded with local stakeholders during the summer. The Council also created a list of all activities open to young people during the summer and employed the services of APCAM to offer health and wellbeing sessions to young people and their families during the crucial holiday period. Further funding was provided to Home-Start Oxford to help provide the best start in life for young people.

The Council has also put together a Task & Finish group to restart the Witney Youth Council, which will give young people the opportunity to start projects with a small amount of funding from the Council, and support from the Council to apply for further grant funding if required. The Youth Council will be an incredibly unique way for young people to represent themselves and will provide a unique way to apply themselves in our community.

Community Infrastructure

The Council agreed to take ownership of four new bus shelters for the Windrush Estate, along with providing four replacement shelters on Thorney Leys, in the High Street, and by Staple Hall; this being a jointly funded project with Oxfordshire County Council to provide better access to these stops.

The Council also agreed to fund two new grit bins for the newly built Kingfisher Meadows, but the developer unfortunately refused to site them. The Council also had the privilege of installing the "Together but Apart" covid memorial on The Leys, along with a bench providing a beautiful view of St Mary's Church behind the stones. It is a wonderful reminder of the beauty we see in collaboration and togetherness whenever an event like the covid pandemic seeks to tear us apart. A further group was set up to explore opportunities for a new Christmas Lights Contract which will come on line for this Christmas.

The last year also saw the town council achieve silver for Witney Lake & Country Park in the Thames & Chiltern In Bloom competition and the town's primary schools create wheelbarrows for Schools In Bloom which were judged at Witney Carnival.

Cllr Georgia Meadows, Vice-Chair, Stronger Communities Committee