

**PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE
WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL**

Held on Monday, 4 March 2024

At 6.00 pm in the Gallery Room, The Corn Exchange, Witney

Present:

Councillor D Newcombe (Chair)

Councillors:	J Aitman T Ashby O Collins R Crouch	D Edwards-Hughes R Smith S Simpson
Officers:	Sharon Groth Adam Clapton Mark Lewis Derek Mackenzie Angus Whitburn	Town Clerk Deputy Town Clerk Head of Estates & Operations Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk Operations Manager
Others:	Cllr J Robertshaw	

PR116 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

PR117 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor J Aitman declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 8 as her spouse held the title of Keeper of the Tiny Forest.

There were no other declarations from Members or Officers

PR118 MINUTES

The minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee meeting held on 15 January 2024 were received.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee meeting held on 15 January 2024 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the Chair.

PR119 PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC

There was no public participation.

PR120 LEYS SPLASH PARK

The Committee received the report of the Operation Manager along with a verbal update from the Head of Estates & Operations (HE&O) to update on the progress of the Leys Splash Park works.

The HE&O advised the scheme was at the exploration stage with officers seeking any potential external funding which could be maximised and to ensure the council was prudent with its spending.

Even if construction of a new splash park commenced immediately, then completion would not be until late summer 2024. Therefore, officers were considering what temporary arrangements could be put in place for 2024 whilst the Courtside Hubs CIC development at The Leys was ongoing. This would allow time to consult with users of the park and the plan would be to then commence after the summer season and have a new provision in place for opening for the 2025 season.

Resolved:

1. That, the report and verbal update be noted.
2. That, any decision be communicated ahead of the Easter School Holidays as the Splash Park would not be open at that time.

PR121 LEYS PARKING RESTRICTIONS

The Committee received the report of the Head of Estates & Operations regarding the proposed introduction of parking restrictions at The Leys.

The report updated Members on the project following issues which arose from Oxfordshire County Council's legal team. This resulted in slow progress of the matters under consideration. The HE&O confirmed that OCC were still keen to enforce the scheme once a Traffic Regulation Order was in place.

The HE&O would continue to press OCC for a decision with the simplest solution as possible.

Resolved:

That, the report be noted.

PR122 TINY FOREST – REQUEST TO INSTALL A WOODEN MONOLITH

The Committee received and considered the report of the Biodiversity & Green Spaces Officer (B&GSO) following a request from Earthwatch to install a wooden monolith at the site of the Tiny Forest which acknowledged their legacy donors.

In response to a question from a Member, the Deputy Town Clerk confirmed the reason for the items being brought to this Committee rather than the Climate, Biodiversity & Planning Committee was due to the short timescale prior to a ceremony to be held by Earthwatch on 21 March 2024 where they would like the monolith to be in place.

Members were pleased to see a simple and stylish design and were unanimously in favour of supporting the installation, provided it would be conducted under the supervision of the B&GSO.

A Member noted that Earthwatch were due to replace the signage and asked that information be included to help with species recognition by way of leaf silhouettes or similar.

Resolved:

1. That, the report and verbal update be noted and,
2. That, the installation of a wooden monolith be approved and,
3. That, request that Earthwatch include leaf recognition on the replacement signage.

(The Town Clerk/C.E.O joined the meeting at 6:18pm)

PR123 CRICKET AT THE LEYS RECREATION GROUND AND WEST WITNEY SPORTS GROUND

The Committee received and considered the report along with a verbal update from the Operations Manager.

Members were initially concerned about the retention of a cricket wicket at the Leys. The surrounding area was now frequently used by families and individuals to sit and enjoy the area recreationally, however a Member advised that if the wicket was in use then the events field would usually be free for park users to utilise and once removed it would be difficult to reintroduce in the future; it was also unlikely it would be used for anything other than amateur and junior cricket

Members were hesitant to provide a lease to Witney Swifts CC at West Witney Sports & Social Ground due to the loss of control this would bring over the ground and maintenance, although the possibility of a maintenance agreement should be explored. There was also the risk that the cricket and football seasons could clash causing issues between sporting groups.

A proposal to maintain The Leys cricket square and postpone any decision on its future until 2025 to allow the cricket teams time to explore the need for a wicket was made by Cllr Collins and seconded by Cllr Aitman. All members were in agreement.

Members also agreed with the proposal from Cllr Smith, seconded by Cllr Edwards Hughes to defer any decision again to 2025 to issue a lease to Witney Swifts CC in order to allow Officers to fully explore the options.

Resolved:

1. That, the report and verbal update be noted and,
2. That, the decision to no longer maintain a cricket wicket at the Leys recreation Ground be deferred to spring 2025 and,
3. That, the decision to issue a lease agreement at West Witney Sports Ground to Witney Swifts CC be deferred to spring 2025.

PR124 FINANCE REPORT

The Committee received and considered the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) detailing income and expenditure for budgets which were the responsibility of the committee.

Ahead of the meeting a non-committee member had asked a question regarding the £30,000 commuted sum shown against the cost centre for Unterhaching play area. The Town Clerk explained how this was derived and the terms attached to such amounts. On this occasion, as far as she was aware, this money was available to spend on the play area to maintain it. However, this did include the maintenance of the Copse as well as the play equipment, dry stone wall and lighting. The Town Clerk advised that at year-end this money would go into an earmarked reserve to ring fence it for future use.

Members were also advised how commuted sums were generally negotiated and how they used to be invested to maximise a return for use on the upkeep of such areas.

A Member asked for clarification as to what action would be taken if the £4,000 sport equipment 203/4046 budget line remained unused for the 2024/25 year to which the Town Clerk confirmed that it would be rolled over into an earmarked reserve.

Resolved:

That, the report and the verbal update by the Town Clerk be noted.

PR125 **MAJOR PROJECTS UPDATE**

The Head of Estates & Operations provided a verbal update to the Committee on the progress of the Councils major projects.

The Leys Stake Park – This was on track for completion at the end of March and therefore opening event arrangements were being put into place.

West Witney Sports & Social Club – Funding applications were being worked on by Officers to maximise the opportunities for the Council to make minimise financial input. The specification of the design was also in progress and the outcome of the funding would allow for this to be finalised.

Leys Masterplan – Work had commenced however, with the multitude of contractors on site officers had had to deal with some inappropriate behaviour in order to ensure compliance and to protect grassed areas of the park.

Courtside Hubs CIC had commenced trading from their temporary location within the Mini Golf area and even at this early stage propose a July 2024 completion of the project.

WTC Depot – Officers had entered the final legal stages of the agreement for the temporary depot facility and were in the process of moving equipment from The Leys Recreation Ground site.

Consultations were taking place with stakeholders ahead of planning applications being submitted for the new permanent depot.

Resolved:

That, the verbal update be noted.

The meeting closed at: 6.54 pm

Chair