
Agenda Item:	Communications Report
Meeting Date:	Monday, 23 September 2024
Contact Officer:	Communications & Community Engagement Officer

This report examines the current status of elements of Witney Town Council's Communication Strategy.

Background

Witney Town Council's website has undergone a rebuild and this is nearing completion. The team is also currently very busy with press and media and promoting the positive achievements of the Council.

Current Situation

Witney Town Council Reputation

In recent years Witney Town Council has benefited from some very successful partnerships with external organisations and contributed to and delivered some important projects that improve many aspects of the town and its community for residents.

However, with partnership working it is incumbent on the Town Council to assess and consider the risks associated with this. Recently, the Communications and Community Engagement officer has encountered a number of misdirected, negative comments made on social media, in the press, and in comments made in person at events.

These comments indicate that the commenters hold the council in poor regard and often they are fuelled by a lack of distinction between different tiers of local government and their differing responsibilities. This leads to a blame culture of 'the council' in general for everything perceived to be their fault, whether or not they are in any way managing a project or a service.

In some cases, it might be desirable to make a clear statement of the level of involvement of the council in certain projects, for example that we have only provided grant funding, or we are the landlord and this is a tenant led project, or indeed, we are project managing on behalf another organisation.

Website

The update to the website has been completed in-house. Regular checks are scheduled to check links, images and content to ensure the site is well maintained and in good order. Please continue to report any issues you uncover.

In June this year the Central Digital & Data Office (CDDO), a part of the Department for Science, Innovation & Technology. CDDO introduced stricter requirements for being a domain registrar within the *.gov.uk* registry. Nominet operate this for and on their behalf.

Our current domain registrar, Fasthosts do not meet the criteria required to continue to act as our domain name registrar and this is required to be transferred to a Nominet approved registrar by 30th September.

Our IT support supplier will therefore carry out the transfer to a registrar with whom they have an existing relationship, 20i Ltd, which makes sense. There should be no cost associated with transferring our domain from Fasthosts and no renewal is required during the transfer process.

Our website and other associated services will continue to be hosted by them which is reassuring since their customer service has been exemplary throughout the time we have been with them.

Surveys

Staff have used recent events such as the VR and Arcade Day to capture more data by creating and launching surveys including surveys aimed at gathering opinions and feedback from young people, parents of young people and lake users. The lake user survey is embedded in the Lake and Country Park pages and the other surveys are taken along to any appropriate events as cards with codes on to make filling them in as simple as possible. The Biodiversity and Green Spaces team also have a stock of very brief feedback cards that they carry around and these have regularly provided useful feedback.

Newsletter

The Autumn newsletter will be issued at the end of October and will contain information about the schedule of events for autumn and winter for Witney Town Council and the Corn Exchange, along with other news stories.

Lake and Country Park Awareness Raising

The Communications and Community Engagement Officer has considered the reported lack of knowledge from residents about the lake and its location. Signage is usually the remit of OCC and WODC, but there is nothing to prevent Witney Town Council installing signage on its own land. It could, for example, work with the Witney Shed to produce some finger posts or other signage such as a map board. This would direct people down the avenue of trees on the Leys and towards Avenue Two at Station Lane and include written directions and distances.

We also now have a map and written directions to lake entrances and routes from town on our L&CP pages on the website:

<https://www.witney-tc.gov.uk/parks-open-spaces/witney-lake-and-country-park-biodiversity-page/maps-and-leaflets/>

<https://www.witney-tc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Witney-Lake-and-Country-Park-Entrances-and-Access-1.png>

Update on Disabling Comments on Facebook

Officers have continued to apply this to many posts and have noticed that on the occasions when people are able to comment even on very positive posts a number of people will take the opportunity to complain about the most popular gripes, potholes, verges, the High Street closure and their perception of Oxfordshire County Council's policies.

Officers will continue to disable comments, but on those where they do they will add a comment by us encouraging people to email the Council on info@witney-tc.gov.uk if they wish to comment or discuss the content of a particular post relating to a town council service.

Impact Assessments

The Town Council has a duty to consider the effects of its decisions, functions and activities on equality, biodiversity, and crime & disorder. Consideration should also be given to effects on the environment, given the Council's Climate Emergency declaration in 2019.

- a) Equality - None
- b) Biodiversity - None
- c) Crime & Disorder - None
- d) Environment & Climate Emergency - None

Risk

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

None

Social Value

Social value is the positive change the Council creates in the local community within which it operates.

Financial implications

- There is no budget for signage

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and

1. Consider whether to install signage on the Leys to direct people to the Lake and Country Park. There is no budget set for this so wood would need to be provided for the signage from our own stocks.
2. Consider the merits of clear signposting of the involvement of the Town Council in partnership projects.