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

The purpose of this report is to consider pre planned events happening over the next few months and consider budgets that might be needed for events that will be proposed for 2025.

Background

Witney Town Council has successfully held the majority of its 50th Anniversary badged events and projects with just two remaining to organise and launch.

Current Situation

Completed Witney Town Council 50th Anniversary badged events

- Civic Reception with former Mayors and anniversary cake
- Volunteers thank you picnic at the lake
- Witney Town Council families stand at the Play Day at West Witney
- Fifty for £50 grants (there is quite a sum left from these which closes in November. This report contains a recommendation to use some of that money to benefit a particular group of residents at Christmas Lights Switch On.
- Arcade and VR event for young people

Coming Soon

- Seniors Cream Tea and showing of the Railway Children
- 1970s Disco

Use of Gallery Room for Christmas Light Switch On.

In the last couple of years Witney Day centre has used this for their members to have a fish and chip supper and have a special view of the Christmas lights. In the same way as the Council's Community Window, this is a valuable space and rather special community asset. There are many other groups that could use this once a year to provide something special. It's something that money cannot buy and so that alone makes it a unique experience.

One suggestion is that the council works with West Oxfordshire Community Transport (WOCT) and lists held by schools and other agencies to discover how many young and lone carers there are in Witney. Officers would then organise for them and the parents or siblings they care for to be collected by WOCT bus and brought to the Corn Exchange Gallery room, which is of course accessible. The unused budget from the Fifty for £50 grants could be used to provide transport and refreshments.

This is a group of people that get very few opportunities to meet others in the same situation throughout the year. Many of their support groups and networks have diminished and it would be fitting to be able to give them something so special as a reward for the huge commitment and sacrifices they make every day of the year.

80th anniversary VE Thursday 8th May 2025 and VJ day Friday 15th August 2025

This is a celebration rather than anything more solemn as D Day was. Unfortunately, it falls on a Thursday which is Market day so the Council is unable to make use of the Market Square during the daytime.

This could be an opportunity to have a beacon bonfire at the Leys with Town Band playing popular songs from 1945. Salsa, the Tea Dance and other groups could be invited to lead dancing and perhaps a singalong led by local singing groups. Fancy Dress is also an option. There is likely to be an official cry for the Town Crier.

There could be an opportunity for some events during the day in the Corn Exchange, perhaps a film or a history display. The nation's Pageant master has produced a leaflet containing ideas (**Appendix A**). The Council should consider organising a task and finish group or similar to decide and advise on suitable activities and content for the day/s and what budget is required.

Picnic Parties to Thank Volunteers

The Deputy Mayor, Cllr Andy Bailey has asked if it would be possible to have more small picnics to thank volunteers following the success of the Council's picnic at the lake for volunteers as part of the In Bloom and 50th Anniversary celebrations. A budget would need to be set for any groups outside of In Bloom that the Council wished to acknowledge.

Welcome to Witney New Residents' Leaflet

The Communications and Community Engagement officer has considered the reported lack of knowledge about the Lake and Country Park alongside the content for a forthcoming Community Engagement Strategy. One possibility is that the Town Council invests in a small booklet that goes to all residents that move into new build homes in Witney that provides information about the Services and events that the Town Council is responsible for and has a second section that signposts other services in the area.

The Council could work alongside the developers who might be persuaded to contribute some funding towards the booklet so that it can be designed and produced to a standard that makes it easy to keep and refer to.

Additional copies may be needed so that the Council can provide them to other residents who might wish to have them.

Typical contents could include

- What Witney Town Council does
- List the Council's 13 parks and Lake and Country Park with postcodes
- Public halls
- Cemeteries
- Allotments
- A street map
- What else is in town
- Defibs
- Shopping centres
- Retail/industrial parks
- Museums
- GP Practices
- Pharmacies
- Schools
- Library
- Leisure centre
- Cash points
- Banks
- Sports teams and pitches
- Useful contacts numbers
- Fix my street
- Who does what diagram
- Bin collection days
- Anything else?

Community Engagement Equipment Needed

This year the Council has made use of Corn Exchange tables and chairs - they have been used at lots of its community engagement events including Carnival, In Bloom Picnic, Play Day and Town Band on the Leys. What we have is very heavy and requires time from the works team and the use of their vehicle to transport gazebos, chairs and tables to and from the site. On some occasions it has not been possible for them to retrieve them on the same day and they have been stored outside behind locked gates at the new depot at West Witney and behind the locked gates that lead to the old depot on the Leys.

On occasion there has been quite a delay with teams too busy with their own work to get them back in a timely manner which has resulted in them being very wet, and on one occasion they were taken from the storage and thrown around and returned with bent and damaged legs, wet through and covered in bird faeces.



This is not acceptable for anyone involved and with this in mind the Communications and Community Events Officer would like to request that a sum of money is made available to purchase some lightweight folding chairs and tables that can easily be transported by car and stored in a relatively small space. This would certainly cut down on time and human resources required at our external events.

Suggested type of Equipment 4 of these table and chair sets. Ideally a used shipping container of around 10ft at £1800 to store them in at the Leys would be very useful too as storage at the Town Hall and Public Halls is at a premium.

[Click here for proposed Tables and Chairs](#)

Community Engagement Strategy

Councillors should be aware that work on this will be scheduled in to begin in the next few weeks.

The Ageing of Our Towns

The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) has made available the data collected and collated by Centre For Towns which highlights the impact that ageing populations have on towns and what needs to be considered when planning the use of resources. Please see **Appendix B**. This will be considered in the above strategy and the Council should start thinking about the services needed in the future.

Community Insight Profile Steering Group

The minutes from the meeting held on 3 July 2024 are attached for information. **(Appendix C)**

Parish Transport Meeting

The minutes from the meeting held on 16 July 2024 are attached for information, along with the notes of Witney's Independent Transport Representative. **(Appendix D)**

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.

The use of the Gallery Room as an available space for varied groups to use at Christmas is a positive move to giving as many groups as possible the chance to experience this event in a special way.

Financial implications

- Budgets required for Gallery Room, WOCT Bus and refreshments is likely to be covered by the unused grant funding for £50 for Fifty
- Depending on content, a budget should be allocated for the VE day 80th Anniversary. If the task and finish group is able to meet before budget setting that will help with formulating the amount needed.
- Picnic Parties. The previous party cost around £100 with food and table wear for 20 guests and councillors
- Welcome leaflet. Further research will be required for a decision on the cost.
- Tables and chairs/event equipment. Quotes will be needed but based on the costing in the link above. Four tables and 24 chairs will cost £1,343.92 plus a storage unit at £1,800

Recommendations

Member are invited to note the report and

1. Consider offering the use of the Gallery Room to carers and the people they look after for the Christmas Light Switch on this year,
2. Decide whether the Council wishes to commemorate the VE and VJ Day 80th anniversaries and whether a task and finish group should be formed and the membership for this.
3. How many picnic parties to thank volunteers we need to hold and what the budget is for these?
4. Does the council want to find a way to produce a Welcome to Witney leaflet for new homeowners and others?
5. Could a budget be set to allow for equipment and storage just for external events be provided and how much this would be.