
Agenda Item:	Community Engagement Report
Meeting Date:	Monday, 18 November 2024
Contact Officer:	Communications & Community Engagement Officer

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on current and upcoming community engagement matters.

Background

There have been several successful engagement opportunities during the summer/autumn with all ages on projects, events and with other local stakeholders. This has helped gain an understanding of the community and its needs.

Current Situation

Suggestions for further projects and spending for 2025/26 have been submitted in the last committee meeting cycle and in the report below.

Community Engagement Strategy

It is hoped the C&CEO will have a draft version ready meeting on 27 January 2025 based on discussions at Council and with others.

On the subject of Community Engagement, there are still many missed opportunities to garner feedback at events such as the Advent Fayre which is for the most part staffed by officers rather than councillors.

Annual Residents' Survey 2024-25 (For publication February 2025)

This is usually launched to coincide with the February/March newsletter and is a survey which ascertains residents' satisfaction on the services provided by the Council.

Does the council wish to have a specific focus this year? Previously, additional questions about three priorities for spending, or projects, what services best supported people during Covid etc. have been included. This could be offered to the Youth Council to come up with their own question/s.

Youth Council

There will be an update from Deputy Town Clerk under a separate agenda item. There is a dedicated email address set up youthcouncil@witney-tc.gov.uk and this will be monitored by Council officers in order to afford some protection to our young councillors. Please quote this email address in any external discussions.

If members would like to attend a youth council meeting please advise and this can be arranged.

Citizen of the Year 2024

This was launched in October and so far, five nominations have been received which include individuals and organisations who are quietly providing something for the people of Witney.

Event Furniture and Storage

As agreed at the last meeting a budget will need setting as per the report in September to cover Portable tables and chairs and a storage unit at the Leys for events.

50th Anniversary Events

A Decades Disco covering the 1970s to the 2020s will take place on Saturday 22nd February 2025 at the Corn Exchange.

Windrush Radio will be providing the music. They are charging £300 and this will come from the existing 50th anniversary budget.

Witney Town Band Concerts

Following the success of the concert held on The Leys in August 2024, the Committee may like to consider a budget towards a series of concerts at its parks over the summer of 2025. This could be targeted at an older age demographic to help meet the need for events for that age range of residents.

Eurovision Night

Initial exploration of this indicates that the Corn Exchange TV licence will cover streaming of the show, but the Council may not be able to charge for watching and might need to rely purely on bar takings to cover the cost of the event. It might be possible to make a charge for tickets for prebooked food and refreshments which also might help with bar management on the evening.

The C&CEO officer will provide an update at the January meeting. There will be need of a small budget for decorations and accessories to make the evening more fun.

In Bloom

It is recommended that the community gardening voucher amounts remain the same for 2025 (£40 for community gardeners and £50 for schools) as it seemed sufficient for the barrows and the community gardeners are maintaining rather than establishing their gardens now. Officers will remain open to requests for additional equipment.

Some of the underspend could be used soon to purchase some suitable winter and spring woodland bulbs for Unterhaching park and volunteers could be invited to help with planting. There may be a need for fertiliser since the ground has been dominated by trees and very little else.

Bulbs including Wild Garlic, Native Bluebells, Lily of the Valley, Winter Aconite and Wild Cyclamen could be included but the Biodiversity & Green Spaces Officer will be asked to create a suitable planting list. The cost of the bulbs and the fertiliser is covered by the In Bloom budget.

VE& VJ 80th Anniversary Task & Finish Group

The first meeting of this Group is scheduled for Thursday 21st November so an update will be available in January.

Christmas Lights Switch-on Event

The Council has a mix of young carers and guardians and non-wheelchair using clients and their carers from the Ice Centre attending the Christmas Light Switch-on, taking advantage of the safe, calm and uncrowded space in the Gallery Room. These are people who would not usually be able to attend because of the noise and crowds.

Members of the Youth Council who previously expressed an interest in doing things to help people with disabilities and neurodiverse conditions will be invited to come along and host them and help with refreshments on the evening.

Meeting with WODC Youth Development Officer

The Deputy Town Clerk and Communications and Community Engagement officer met with the newly appointed Youth Development Officer from WODC on Thursday 7th November.

She has a wealth of experience in Higher Education and is making great progress at getting around towns and villages in the district and engaging with local groups working with young people.

She seemed very impressed with what Witney Town Council has done/is doing and has shared some statistics and resources. Officers will ask for some of the statistics in detail but as a taster here are the numbers of young people in the town based on the 2021 census.

As at the 2021 census there were:

Age 10-15	1413
Age 15-19	1529
Total	2942

Approximately 2350 of these attend either Henry Box or Woodgreen Schools.

She gave some interesting information about young offenders to us as in the attached **(Appendix A)**. Witney has the second highest number of young people entering the justice system for the first time.

She also introduced officers to the Tell Mi App – a mental health peer to peer resource app. The Communications and Community Engagement officer has ordered some free resources to share with the Youth Council and have to hand in the Admin Office and 1863. Tell Mi also offers free training workshops and councillors might want to offer these to Youth Councillors.

<https://www.tellmi.help/shop/workshops>

Witney Forum

The minutes from the meeting held on 22 October 2024 are attached for information. **(Appendix B).**

Witney Community Insight Profile Steering Group

The minutes from the meeting held on 18 September 2024 are attached for information. **(Appendix C).**

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 –the Council's community engagement strategy will focus on social inclusion, reducing disparities in access to services and help foster meaningful, long-term change – items which run through the contents of this report.
- b) Biodiversity – The biodiversity of the wooded area at Unterhaching Park and central Witney will be enhanced by the introduction of native bulbs.
- c) Crime & Disorder – Understanding the statistics behind young people entering the youth justice system helps builds a picture of where community engagement needs to be focussed.
- d) Environment & Climate Emergency – By involving communities and young people and raising awareness around environmental issues, the Council can create more effective climate solutions.

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.

There is always reputational risk concerned with community engagement. While the Council attempts to reach all people and provide inclusive services this is not always possible to do so and satisfy all groups in the community.

As community engagement and the Council's offer expands, Members must consider the operational risk due to the resources it has available.

Social Value

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

Generally, by involving people in the decisions and actions that shape their environment and their lives, communities can create lasting, positive impacts that enhance well-being, reduce inequalities, and contribute to sustainable development.

Financial implications

- All costs are funded from existing budgets except,
- Witney Town Band Summer Concerts – 3 concerts would be approximately £700.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and,

1. Consider how to proceed with questions for the Annual Residents survey,
2. Consider whether to utilise some of the In Bloom underspend on bulb planting at Unterhaching Park
3. Consider whether to budget for a series of summer Witney Town Band Concerts
4. Note the minutes of the Witney Forum held on 18 October and Witney Community Insight Profile Steering Group held on 18 September.