
Agenda Item:	Community Engagement Report
Meeting Date:	27 January 2025
Contact Officer:	Communications & Community Engagement Officer

Background

The purpose of this report is to update councillors on the progress of Community Engagement projects and events.

Current Situation

Community Engagement Strategy

An early draft version is included in the pack as a confidential addendum later in the meeting. Please note any omissions, corrections, changes or suggestions and feed them back but this is a working document. The Communications & Community Engagement Officer will make changes before submitting a final version to this Committee in March.

The current structure, notes the aims and objectives and then lists:

- Who does the Council want to engage with?
- What it already does
- Barriers and challenges
- Exploring new ways and innovation
- Evaluating success and failure

Once this is complete and circulated, a review date should be set. This document should be considered alongside the Communication Strategy which will also be reviewed. The strategy is a requirement of the NALC Local Council Award Scheme silver award.

Annual Residents Survey

Will as usual, be included in the annual newsletter delivered to all households in March and published online. The survey will broadly be along similar lines as previous years with some minor amendments in response to comments last year. By sticking to the same questions similar data is captured which helps benchmark residents' satisfaction year on year.

The Youth Council have not had time to come up with any specific questions – one question could be, WTC now has a Youth Council – what would you like to see them working on?

Volunteers thank you picnic and Planting schemes- Community Orchard and Wildflowers.

The First volunteer picnic will happen at the community orchard planting day in Snipe Meadow in February.

Volunteers will be asked to join the Biodiversity and Green Spaces Officer and Green Spaces Operative, along with officers from the communications and administration team who will bring the gazebo and be providing hot soup and other refreshments at the first volunteer picnic of the year.

This will be an opportunity for community engagement and seeking feedback via surveys and also a time to recruit additional volunteers for the various wildflower planting areas due to be installed during April. The lake will be one of these areas.

Councillors are invited to join officers and take the opportunity to meet with volunteers and join in with the planting.

Other Community Thank-You Picnics.

There is a budget of £500 for three picnics in total throughout the year. The Communications & Community Engagement Officer is suggesting that some of the unsuccessful nominees for this year's Citizens of the Year who are volunteering in the community might be invited along to one of these (when the weather is a little warmer) as a small thank you for everything they do. There was a large number of entries this year (sixteen in total) and not everyone could win an award although they were all very deserving.

They do not need to know they were nominated so won't be disappointed, they will just receive a little recognition, and this will not preclude them from being nominated another time.

Local Film Maker Showcase

A local student media student has made his own full-length film called Los Bandidos of Ducklington Lake. Which will premiere at the Corn Exchange in June. It takes place entirely within Witney and features some very recognisable and iconic parts of the town.

In Bloom

The community Gardening and Schools In Bloom wheelbarrow initiatives will still be taking place whether or not the town makes an official entry or not. The Biodiversity and Green Spaces officer will update when he has spoken with the judges.

Unterhaching Park

The Biodiversity and Green Spaces officer is engaging with the In Bloom judges to determine whether the Council is close to getting a gold for the Lake and Country Park or if the level of work required means that this is a year or so off. If he is advised against entering this year then it is possible that along with the bulb planting that has already been agreed, the Council

might be able to use some of the In Bloom budget to install a story telling area, a low cost, low maintenance area with seating made from cut trees etc.

This is likely to be a long-term rejuvenation project as significant cleaning and clearance work is required – a potential entry to In Bloom in 2026/27 as a community project.

Witney Town Band Summer Concert Programme

The Band have thanked the Town Council for suggesting this and are enthusiastic about holding three outdoor concerts in different areas of the town during the summer. Details tbc.

Witney Carnival 2025

After a public poll, the theme of this year's Carnival is 'Musicals'. After the outstanding contribution by Members in the parade last year, Members are asked if they would like to participate again. The Town Council will ask for a stand as this provides an excellent opportunity to promote the Council and for Councillors to engage with the community.

VE & VJ Day 80th Anniversaries

At the time of writing, a meeting of the task and finish group is planned for Thursday 23 January. Notes or a verbal update from this will be provided at the meeting to communicate current plans.

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 Community Engagement Strategy is key to ensuring that all residents/customers are treated inclusively and fairly. By offering summer concert venues across the town, it makes it more likely residents unable to travel far can enjoy a summer concert.
- b) Biodiversity – The community orchard and wildflower planting days help communicate, educate and create interest in biodiversity as well as creating new sustainable and lasting habitats.
- c) Crime & Disorder – none.
- d) Environment & Climate Emergency – The planting of community orchards will help towards the Council's carbon neutrality objectives; this will be covered in reports on this subject by the lead officer.

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.

Social Value

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

- Inviting volunteers to a picnic creates social value by strengthening relationships, promoting inclusivity, enhancing well-being, and fostering a culture of appreciation and ongoing engagement.
- Community planting days create social value by fostering environmental sustainability, strengthening social bonds, improving health, and promoting a sense of collective ownership and responsibility. They offer long-term benefits that not only enhance the environment but also contribute to the well-being of the community as a whole.
- Engaging with others—whether through volunteering, attending planting days, participating in the carnival, creates a sense of belonging, builds trust, promotes inclusivity of the Council.

Financial implications

- There are no cost implications pertaining to this report that are not already covered in an existing budget

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and,

1. Consider the content of the Community Engagement Strategy.
2. Consider a Youth Council question for the annual survey.
3. Consider inviting Citizen of the Year nominees to Community Thank you picnics.
4. Consider using some of the balance of the unspent In Bloom budget if we do not enter an official entry this year to enliven Unterhaching Park.
5. To note updates on the Witney Town Band Summer Concert programme, local film maker showcase, and VE/VJ Day anniversaries.
6. To consider taking part in and engaging at the Witney Carnival.