

**MEETING OF THE
WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL**

Held on Monday, 9 December 2024

At 7.00 pm in the Gallery Room, The Corn Exchange, Witney

Present:

Councillor O Collins (Chair)

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| Councillors: | G Meadows | J Doughty |
| | J Aitman | D Edwards-Hughes |
| | T Ashby | D Newcombe |
| | D Enright | J Robertshaw |
| | R Smith | S Simpson |
| | D Temple | J Treloar |
| | R Crouch | A Mubin |
| | G Doughty | |
| Officers: | Adam Clapton | Deputy Town Clerk |
| | Derek Mackenzie | Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk |
| | Sharon Groth | Town Clerk |
| Others: | Four members of the public. | |

Prior to the meeting the Chair welcomed the newest Member to the Council, Cllr Abdul Mubin.

690 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor A Bailey.

Apologies were also received from Inspector Ball of Thames Valley Police who advised he may be late to join the meeting.

691 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest from Members or officers.

692 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the Council meeting held on 14 October 2024 were received.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Council meeting held on 14 October 2024 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the Chair.

Cllr D Enright joined the meeting at 7:04pm

693 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

The Committee adjourned for this item.

The Committee received representations from a spokesperson for Witney Flood Group concerning Agenda Item 15.

The Committee reconvened.

694 **WITNEY FLOODING 24 - 26 NOVEMBER 2024**

With the permission of the Chair, this item was moved up the agenda so the member of public could hear the discussion and outcome.

During public participation Members had heard from the spokesperson for Witney Flood Group (WFG) of the effects of the recent flooding event which had affected 24 properties in Eastfield Road, Hailey Road, West End Industrial Estate and the Bridge Street areas. The number of affected properties was known to be higher than the 24 figure however, residents were reluctant to report less destructive events, in particular those to garages and outbuildings due to the potential and perceived impact on their insurance cover and premiums.

In response to a Member's question, the WFG spokesman spoke on the "flood gates" that were often referred to being opened further upstream which resulted in the flooding in Witney, he advised this was a myth and that although historically sluice gates were used by mills for power this was no longer the case and certainly not a contributory factor to flooding events in Witney.

One issue identified was with the West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) team that provide and laid sandbags, though the support was warmly welcomed, lack of knowledge of the laying of the sandbags meant the barriers were compromised. Additionally, the sandbags remained once the flooding events were over and assistance to remove them was required.

Secondly, the Town Council did not have a single point of telephone contact and it was asked that Officers review this to simplify the emergency support such as the access to its Halls as places of refuge.

As greater than 5 properties were affected a Section 19 report would be drawn up by Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) as the lead local flood authority. This would investigate the reasons for the flooding however, it was proposed by Cllr D Edward Huges and seconded by Cllr J Treloar that the Town Clerk write to WODC, OCC and the (EA) to emphasise the need for flooding to be specifically detailed in the Local Plan 2041 so that it was evidenced when consideration was given to new building developments. The letter should also ask that training is provided to those members of the Council's work team who were engaged in the deployment of sandbags. Members were unanimous in agreement of the proposal.

Additionally, a proposal was made again by Cllr D Edwards Hughes and seconded by Cllr J Treloar for a member of the Town Council to be appointed as a representative on the Witney Flood Group. All members were in agreement.

Resolved:

1. That, the Town Clerk write to WODC, OCC and EA and,
2. That, Officers share the Council's Emergency Protocol with all members and,
3. That, the Councils Works Team collect sandbags post flooding events,
4. That, a Council representative on the Witney Flood Group be agreed at the next meeting of the Council on 17 February 2025 and,
5. That, a link to Witney Flood Group is added to the Council's website partners page and,
6. That, Officers investigate a single point of contact for use by Flood Wardens and residents.

All members of the public left at 7:45pm

During the following item Cllr J Treloar left the meeting at 7:50pm and rejoined at 7:55pm

695 **AN UPDATE FROM WITNEY OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCILLORS AND WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCILLORS**

Oxfordshire County Council (OCC)

Cllr D Enright updated Members on the developments of the Shore Green Junction, the construction of which was due to commence in early 2025.

West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC)

Cllr D Enright expressed his happiness at how well the recent Christmas Market at Marriott's Walk had been received despite the bad weather over the main weekend of the event. He also advised of the proposed planting scheme that WODC were looking to carry out to make the area greener, it was noted that with the Town Council now owning Underhaching Park that WODC should be asked to ensure the planting schemes complement each other.

Cllr Enright updated on the signage project which WODC were engaged in to assist visitors to the Town in the ability to navigate; it was hoped that this would also tie in with the High Street developments to be undertaken by OCC.

Cllr T Ashby spoke about the issues WODC were experiencing with trees in his ward, it was proposed that due to Ash die back that there would be a significant amount of work in the Deer Park estate area.

Cllr R Crouch updated on the work of the Refuge Steering Committee, which was working alongside Sanctuary Housing, she also advised of planning to support the "Tough To Talk" campaign which would engage with young men around mental health. Cllr J Doughty acknowledged her thanks to Cllr Crouch and expressed her pleasure in supporting the work.

Resolved:

That, the verbal updates be noted.

Inspector Chris Ball joined the meeting at 7:58pm

696 **WITNEY COMMUNITY POLICING ISSUES**

The Committee Clerk had provided a brief update earlier in the meeting when Inspector Ball was not in attendance, however as he had been able to attend, he re-capped and provided his own update and further expanded on points.

Members were pleased to hear an update on the successful apprehension of individuals involved in recent vehicle thefts as well as campaigns that the newly established Witney Team will be focusing on over the Christmas period to focus on Drink Driving and also the use of E Scooters. The new team was made up of 1 Sergeant, 3 PC's and 5 PCSO's.

Insp Ball also spoke of the partnership with The Station Detached Youth Group to provide the "Kick" sessions over the summer and that they were again looking to join up and provide some session over the Easter period in 2025. He emphasised how The Station was a great asset to the Town

In response to a Member's question about the theft of parcels from doorsteps in Deer Park Estate he advised that all incidents should be reported so that the necessary action could be taken, if video evidence was available then an appropriate press release could be issued by TVP.

Members thanked TVP for the support provided during the recent flooding events particularly in the Hailey Road area where an immediate response was needed to deal with the fast-changing level of water.

Resolved:

That, the verbal update be noted.

Inspector Chris Ball left the meeting at 8:06pm

697 **REPORT BACK FROM THE COUNCILLORS ON THE WORK WITH EXTERNAL BODIES WHERE THEY SERVE AS THE TOWN COUNCIL'S NOMINATED REPRESENTATIVE**

Witney Educational Foundation

Cllr D Enright & Cllr R Crouch advised that the WEF were searching for a new chairperson. Also, that the amount of grant funding they had for issue had reduced from £70,000 to £50,000 due to the returns of the Foundations investments which was how the grants were funded.

Cogges Welfare Trust Charity

Cllr J Aitman asked if Members were aware of any support required by residents within the Cogges boundary and that details be forwarded to her so they may be considered by the charity.

Witney & District Twinning Association

The Mayor updated on the visit of the representatives from Unterhaching and Le Touquet for Remembrance Day, also that the Deputy Town Mayor visited Unterhaching and participated in their Volkstrauertag event.

Witney Fair Trade Action Group

Cllr R Smith advised that the group now had a bank account and were very buoyant since the success of their anniversary event held in the Corn Exchange. They had also increased their membership with two new members.

Resolved:

That, the verbal updates be noted

Cllr D Edwards Hughes left the meeting at 8:10pm and re-joined the at 8:12pm

698 **CLIMATE, BIODIVERSITY & PLANNING - 5 NOVEMBER & 26 NOVEMBER 2024**

The Chair of the Committee presented the above minutes to Council and moved their acceptance.

P675 – The Council agreed that residents should be consulted on the introduction of a community orchard on King George V field.

P683 – Cllr G Doughty encouraged all members to engage in the A40 consultation and invite their ward members to do same.

Resolved:

1. That the minutes of the Climate, Biodiversity & Planning meetings held on 5 November & 26 November 2024 be received and any recommendations therein approved and,
2. That, Officers consult residents of Pens Close regarding the proposed Community Orchard.

699 **PARKS & RECREATION - 4 NOVEMBER 2024**

The Chair of the Committee presented the above minutes to Council and moved their acceptance.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the Parks & Recreation meeting held on 4 November 2024 be received and any recommendations therein approved.

700 **HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS - 11 NOVEMBER 2024**

The Chair of the Committee presented the above minutes to Council and moved their acceptance.

H624 – The Deputy Town Clerk apologised that the matter of the subsidised let had not been reported in the report to Policy, Governance & Finance on 25 November and therefore highlighted the matter so that it may be noted.

H630 – The Council was very disappointed to hear of the standard of works at the Churchyard and asked that Officers write to Oxfordshire County Council (OCC).

In response to a Members question, the Committee Clerk advised Members that they should report all issues relating to Highway defects to the FixMyStreet system.

Resolved:

1. That the minutes of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotment meeting held on 11 November 2024 be received and any recommendations therein approved and,
2. That, Officers write to OCC to express the Council disappointment in respect of the Pathway works at St Marys Church.

701 **STRONGER COMMUNITIES - 18 NOVEMBER 2024**

The Chair of the Committee presented the above minutes to Council and moved their acceptance.

SC641 – The Council was advised that Officers would need to review the agreed £3,000 budget as this would not be sufficient to accomplish the Council's request for two newsletters to be delivered. It was agreed that Officers would look for advertising options to support the cost.

Resolved:

1. That the minutes of the Stronger Communities meeting held on 18 November 2024 be received and any recommendations therein approved and,
2. That, Officers review the newsletter budget and explore advertising opportunities.

702 **POLICY, GOVERNANCE & FINANCE - 25 NOVEMBER 2024**

The Chair of the Committee presented the above minutes to Council and moved their acceptance.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance meeting held on 25 November 2024 be received and any recommendations therein approved.

703 **VE & VJ DAY 80TH ANNIVERSARY TASK & FINISH GROUP - 21 NOVEMBER 2024**

The Chair of the Task & Finish Group presented the above minutes to Council and moved their acceptance.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the VE & VJ Day 80th Anniversary Task & Finish Group meeting held on 21 November 2024 be received and any recommendations therein approved.

704 **YOUTH COUNCIL DRAFT MINUTES - 18 NOVEMBER 2024**

The Council received the above minutes.

Cllr J Aitman advised how pleased she was to see the Youth Council engage with residents, guest and dignitaries at the Christmas Light Switch On event as well as the Mayor Carol event at St Marys Church.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the Youth Council meeting held on 18 November 2024 be noted.

705 **CIVIC ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Council received the report of the Mayor and Mayor's Secretary which highlighted the civic engagements of the Mayor and Deputy since the last meeting.

The Mayor thanked those Members who had attended his Quiz Night and reported that approx. £500 had been raised to go towards his nominated Mayoral charities.

He also expressed his delight with the Mayor's Carol Service where a collection of £500 was made, this amount would be split equally between St Mary's Church and the mayor's charities.

Lastly, he reminded members of two upcoming events for their diaries, another Quiz on 31 Jan 2025 and the Mayors Gala Night on 25 April 2025.

Resolved:

That, the report be noted.

706 **HEALTH & SAFETY**

The Council received the report of the Head of Estates & Operations which provided an update to Members.

Members were reminded by the Deputy Town Clerk of the Council's responsibility to the corporate oversight of Health & Safety matters and were encouraged to report any concerns to Officers. The Leader thanked Officers for their continued work ensuring that the Council fulfils its obligations under the various Health & Safety statues.

Resolved:

That, the report be noted.

707 **VANDALISM & ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR**

The Council received an updated list of anti-social behaviour and vandalism incidents on its Estate since the last meeting.

Though the number of reports were low, the Committee Clerk advised that all staff were encouraged to reports incidents however, at times they just get on with the job of resolving them and therefore they went unreported.

He encouraged Members to also report any damage or vandalism that impacts on the Council's assets or estate to him so that they may be recorded.

Resolved:

That, the updates on vandalism and anti-social behaviour be noted.

708 **COMPLIMENTS & COMPLAINTS**

The Council received the report of the Deputy Town Clerk which outlined complaints, comments and compliments received since the last report in June 2024.

Members heard that a few of the complaints had resulted in freedom of information request which had all been fulfilled. Moving forward these requests would be monitored and reported to Council as part of this bi-annual report.

Members were very pleased to see the positive feedback from users of the recently refurbished Stake Park.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the verbal update from the Town Clerk/CEO be noted.

709 **NALC - LOCAL COUNCIL AWARD SCHEME**

The Council received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk in relation the Local Council Awards Scheme which was overseen by the National Association of Local Councils.

The Deputy Town Clerk advised that following amendments to the scheme since the agreement by the Council in July 2024 to proceed with an application for an award the Council now had in place the necessary requirements to allow for an application to be submitted for the Bronze Award, it was also close to achieving the necessary requirements to apply for the Silver Award.

The members agreed unanimously that the application be submitted prior to the next deadline of 3rd January 2025. They also agreed that a further application be made and understood that no additional registration fee would be applied should this occur within 12 months of the application for the Bronze award.

The Chair offered his thanks to Officers for their perseverance in ensuring the Council meet the necessary criteria, he was aware this had been challenging due to changes to criteria and changes to staffing and membership across the Council.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the Council confirms it has the required documents, information and conditions in place to meet the Bronze Local Council Award Scheme Award requirements and,
3. That, the information be published on the Council's website, where applicable and,
4. That, an application be submitted to NALC for consideration for the Bronze Award and,
5. That, a further application be submitted once the necessary requirements have been attained for the Silver Award.

710 **REMOTE & HYBRID MEETINGS CONSULTATION**

The Council received and considered the request for a submission in respect of the Government consultation on remote and hybrid meetings for local authorities.

The Chair outlined the options open to the Council to provide their thoughts on the consultation and encouraged Members to make individual submissions irrespective of the decision by the Council as a whole at the meeting.

Initially it was suggested by Cllr D Enright that individual responses be submitted in place of a Council response as it would be clear that there would be many differing opinions. This was a thought supported by other members.

It was decided after debate that answers should be agreed and submitted for Questions 1,2,3,5,9 & 10 and a vote was taken to agree the response for all of those questions.

Resolved:

1. That, a response be submitted on behalf of the Council to Questions 1,2,3,5,9 & 10 and as agreed by votes on each during the meeting,
2. That, the online link be circulated to members with a request that they submit their individual responses before the deadline of 19 December 2024.

711 **SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS**

As the meeting would surpass 2 hours in length, the Committee agreed to suspend standing order 48 in order to allow the meeting to continue for a further 30 minutes.

712 **COMMUNICATION FROM THE LEADER**

The Leader welcomed Cllr A Mubin to the Council and offered her thanks to him for stepping forward to represent his ward.

She thanked Officers and staff for their efforts in the arrangements for the Christmas Light Switch on event. She also thanked the members of staff and Councillors that had turned out early on a Sunday morning to prepare and run the Children's Advent Fayre at the Corn Exchange.

Further thanks followed to the Mayor and the Mayor's Secretary who arranged a wonderful Carol Service which had filled St Mary's Church.

Members also received an update from the Town Clerk in relation to the lighting at St Mary's which was not functioning correctly, she advised this would be investigated by the Council's electrical contractor with hopes of a speedy resolution.

Resolved:

That, the communications from the Leader and Town Clerk be noted.

713 **PCC CORRESPONDENCE**

The Council received the Thames Valley Police & Crime Commissioner's monthly bulletin updates for October & November.

Resolved:

That, the correspondence be noted.

714 **ENVIRONMENT AGENCY**

The Council received correspondence from the Environment Agency in respect of their decision to cease investigations into the use of the Witney Lake & Country Park for flood storage.

Resolved

That, the correspondence be noted.

715 **WITNEY LIBRARY**

The Committee Clerk advised that correspondence had been received from Oxfordshire County Council advising of the temporary closure of Witney Library to allow for a renovation of the facility. Temporary arrangements would be put in place to run services from Witney Fire Station whilst the refurbishment took place.

OCC would be issuing further details shortly to inform users.

Resolved:

That, the verbal update be noted.

716 **QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

In response to a Member's question requesting an update on the progress of enforcement of traffic in Witney High Street, the Town Clerk advised that feedback from the online consultation and in person events held by Oxfordshire County Council had not been received however, she understood it was being collated and hoped therefore that information would follow soon.

In response to a question from a Member about litter in the Town the Deputy Town Clerk advised that West Oxfordshire District Council do have the power to fine individuals for littering however, it was unknown if they exercised this.

A Member expressed her frustration at the attendance of Members to assist with the Advent Fayre, this has resulted in at least 21 hours of additional staff time. The Leaders shared these sentiments particularly as it was such a rewarding event to participate in.

Lastly, a Member raised whether Councillors should be creating their own advertisements for events arranged by the Town Council, the leader encouraged all Members to promote the official communications posted by Officers rather than creating their own in order that consistency and accuracy is maintained.

Resolved:

That, the questions be noted, and any appropriate follow-up points be actioned.

717 **SEALING OF DOCUMENTS**

There were no items sealed since the last meeting.

Resolved:

That the seal of the Council be affixed to any documents arising from decisions taken by this meeting of the Council.

The meeting closed at: 9.28 pm

Chair