
Agenda Item: Summary of Town Centre Issues raised by the Chamber of Commerce

Meeting Date: Monday, 17 February 2025

Contact Officer: Town Clerk/CEO

The purpose of this report is to provide an update following the attendance of Officers at a meeting with the Chamber of Commerce on 4 February 2025.

Background

The meeting was by invitation of the Chair of the Chamber of Commerce as an opportunity to explain the roles and duties of the different tiers of local government and discuss key issues relevant to Witney's development and visitor experience.

Current Situation

Key Discussion Points:

1. Wayfinding and UK Prosperity Fund Projects:

Discussions centred on the need to effectively allocate the remaining UK Prosperity Fund by the end of the current financial year.

Potential projects included improved wayfinding measures, such as signage and maps, to enhance the visitor experience. The District Council's Market Towns Officer had recently been in contact with the Town Clerk to update her on this project.

2. Data Collection for Visitor Insights:

It was recognised that data collection is essential for understanding why visitors come to Witney and what they value about the town.

This information will be crucial for shaping future strategies and planning efforts aimed at boosting local tourism and economic development.

The Chamber has been offered a space in the Town Council's Spring Newsletter to include a QR code linking to a short survey, with confirmation pending.

3. Welcome to Witney Media and Information:

Suggestions were made to improve the Welcome to Witney web pages and other media outlets.

Enhanced online resources and physical maps were identified as tools to better inform and guide visitors.

4. Visitor Encouragement and Coach Parking:

The ongoing issue of coach drop-off and parking was highlighted.

This challenge continues to affect visitor access and requires creative solutions.

5. Marriotts Walk Shopping Centre and Public Realm Improvements:

The group discussed the proposed enhancements to the public realm around Marriotts Walk to attract more visitors and improve the overall shopping experience.

6. High Street, Corn Street, and Traffic Flow:

Traffic flow around the town, particularly on the High Street and Corn Street, remains a concern.

Strategies to improve vehicle movement and pedestrian safety were briefly discussed.

7. Section 106 Funding:

Guidance was sought on how to effectively bid for and utilise Section 106 funding.

There was an emphasis on ensuring that the town maximises the benefits of these funds for infrastructure and community projects.

8. Cash is King:

Concern that some retailers are choosing to no longer accept cash payments, and how this could be overcome to encourage the use/acceptance.

9. Bins and the appearance of the town:

Concerns were raised regarding the removal of WODC-controlled bins near the seating area outside Mountain Warehouse and across the road at Part'n'Parcel. This has negatively impacted the town's appearance.

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 initiatives discussed aim to enhance town centre accessibility, particularly through improved wayfinding and signage. Ensuring cash payment options supports financial inclusion for residents and visitors who rely on cash transactions.
- b) Biodiversity - Public realm improvements should incorporate green infrastructure and sustainable planting, while effective bin placement and waste management are essential for protecting wildlife and maintaining cleanliness.
- c) Crime & Disorder - Enhancing public spaces with better lighting, improved wayfinding, and effective bin placement can reduce anti-social behaviour, minimise unsafe congregation points, and prevent littering.

d) Environment & Climate Emergency - Enhancing traffic flow can also reduce emissions, benefiting air quality and local biodiversity.

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.

This report provides an update from a meeting, for information only. It will help inform future agenda items through the Council's proper channels, posing minimal risk to the Town Council at this stage. However, potential risks include:

- **Partnership Risks:** Ineffective coordination between local government tiers.
- **Reputational Risks:** Public realm and wayfinding projects failing to meet community expectations.
- **Economic Risks:** A lack of visitor experience improvements potentially affecting local businesses.
- **Environmental Risks:** Inadequate waste management impacting the town's appearance.

Social Value

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

The initiatives discussed at the Chamber of Commerce meeting could enhance social value by improving the town's appearance, accessibility, and public spaces, fostering community pride and interaction. Increased visitor numbers and strategic funding use would support local businesses and economic growth, while strengthened partnerships between local government and businesses could create employment opportunities and reinforce a strong sense of place through better wayfinding and town promotion.

Financial implications

There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report.