

**MEETING OF THE
WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL**

Held on Monday, 17 February 2025

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

Present:

Councillor O Collins (Chair)

Councillors:	A Bailey	D Newcombe
	G Meadows	J Robertshaw
	R Crouch	S Simpson
	G Doughty	J Treloar
	J Doughty	A Mubin
	D Edwards-Hughes	
Officers:	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
	Derek Mackenzie	Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk
	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
Others:	Six members of the public.	
	Inspector C Ball (Thames Valley Police)	

94 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R Smith, J Aitman, D Enright, T Ashby & D Temple.

Prior to the meeting the Mayor welcomed two members of the Youth Council who were attending to observe the meeting.

95 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest from Members or officers.

96 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the Council meetings held on 9 and 16 December 2024 & 6 January 2025 were received.

Minute number 5, 6 January 2025 – Councillor David Edwards-Hughes asked that the words “both current and outgoing” in the 2nd paragraph be removed as they were not necessary. All Members were in agreement.

Resolved:

1. That, “both current and outgoing” be removed from minute no. 5 on 6 January 2025 and,

2. That, the minutes of the Council meetings held on 9 December, 16 December 2024 & 6 January 2025 be approved as a correct record of the meetings and be signed by the Chair.

97 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

Three additional members of the Youth Council along with Inspector Ball joined the meeting at 7:04pm

98 **WITNEY COMMUNITY POLICING ISSUES**

Members received a verbal update from Inspector Chris Ball of Thames Valley Police (TVP).

Inspector Ball advised the Christmas period had been relatively quiet across Witney and local businesses had been co-operative in resolving any issues. They had dealt with a number of keyless car thefts and an offer of faraday pouches was made should any resident wish to receive one.

A Member raised the issue of travellers on the A40 and in particular, pony and trap racing which had taken place the previous weekend along that road. There were real safety concerns for those taking part and the wider public using the road. In response, it was advised the police had limited powers to stop such incidents as no law was being broken. Safety was a concern and it would continue to be monitored.

Further questions were raised on the presence of numbers of police at the Witney Travelodge Hotel, TVP's slow response to a recent street assault, individuals impersonating gas engineers and latest figures on domestic crime and what strategies were in place on this. In response, Insp Ball advised the presence of police at the Travelodge was related to the pony and trap racing but had not been made aware of any impersonation, which if correct, was concerning. The figures relating to domestic violence were not to hand, but he would forward them to the Town Clerk however, charge rates were up in this area. He would also look into the circumstances of the response to the street assault as Officers should always be in and around the Town.

Finally, Insp Ball advised that £1,000 had been provided to TVP by the Deputy Lord Lieutenant towards a further KICK event over the summer, run by The Station Detached Youth. Figures on anti-social behaviour last year showed Witney was lower than other areas, and the success of the venture had been credited to this.

Resolved:

That, the verbal updates be noted.

Inspector Ball left the meeting at 7:25pm

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

West Oxfordshire District Council

Cllr R Crouch advised a new Youth Development Officer had been appointed and there was ongoing discussion on budgets, which was at the forefront of all meetings.

Cllr J Doughty advised she and Cllr Crouch had been collaborating on assisting asylum seekers in Witney.

Resolved:

That, the updates be noted.

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

Witney Twinning Association

Cllr R Crouch advised there would be a large celebration in Witney over the weekend of 2-4 May to mark twinning anniversaries with Unterhaching and Le Touquet.

Witney Town Charity

Cllr R Crouch advised there hadn't been a recent meeting so there was no update to provide.

Resolved:

That, the verbal updates be noted.

101 **CLIMATE, BIODIVERSITY & PLANNING COMMITTEE - 17 DECEMBER, 7 JANUARY, 28 JANUARY & 11 FEBRUARY**

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

P57 - The Committee Clerk advised Members of correspondence received earlier that day from Oxfordshire County Council advising that the proposals would be presented to the Cabinet Member for Transport Management at a public meeting on Thursday 27 February 2025. Details would be circulated to Members following the meeting

P88 – A response was yet to be submitted for the 25/00144/OUT Land at Peashell Farm, Downs Road, Curbridge. The response was due to be circulated to Members of the Climate, Biodiversity & Planning for approval prior to submission to the local planning authority by the deadline of 27 February.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the Climate, Biodiversity & Planning meeting held on 17 December 2024, 7 January, 28 January & 11 February 2025 be received and any recommendations therein approved.

102 **PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE - 13 JANUARY**

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

Resolved:

That the minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee meeting held on 13 January be received and any recommendations therein approved.

103 **HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE - 20 JANUARY**

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

Resolved:

That the minutes of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee meeting held on 20 January be received and any recommendations therein approved.

104 **STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE - 27 JANUARY**

In absence of the Chair and as no Vice Chair was appointed to the Committee, The Mayor presented the above minutes to Council and moved their acceptance.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the Stronger Communities Committee meeting held on 27 January be received and any recommendations therein approved.

Cllr J Treloar left the meeting at 7:33pm.

105 **POLICY, GOVERNANCE & FINANCE COMMITTEE - 3 FEBRUARY**

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

F75 – The Deputy Town Clerk advised of two additional £50 for Fifty grant applications which had been received from Oxfordshire Girl Guides and ARCh, an organisation that supported reading in schools, both which had been presented to and recommended by the Chair of the Committee for approval. Members were also unanimous in agreement.

Resolved:

1. That, the two £50 for Fifty grants to Oxfordshire Girl Guiding and ARCh be provided under the General Power of Competence and the recipients be asked to acknowledge the Town Council in any promotional material and,
2. That the minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 3 February be received and any recommendations therein approved.

106 **VE & VJ DAY TASK & FINISH GROUP - 23 JANUARY**

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

Resolved:

That the minutes of the VE & VJ Day Task & Finish Group meeting held on 23 January be received and any event and financial recommendations therein approved.

Cllr J Treloar rejoined the meeting at 7:36pm.

107 **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 noted highlights and reminded Members he would be hosting the Mayors Gala Night on 25 April 2025 at the Corn Exchange.

Resolved:

That, the report be noted.

A member of the public left the meeting at 7:37pm

108 **ANNUAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY**

The Council received the Annual Investment Strategy from the Responsible Financial Officer (R.F.O) which had been recommended for adoption by the Policy, Governance and Finance Committee, subject to minor alterations which were included.

Resolved:

That, the Annual Investment Strategy as amended, be adopted by the Town Council.

109 **CALENDAR OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS 2025-26**

The Council received the Calendar of Committee meetings for the 2025/26 municipal year, as recommended for approval by the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee.

Resolved:

That, the Calendar of Committee meetings for 2025/26 be adopted by the Council.

110 **APPOINTMENT TO OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS**

The Council received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk concerning the appointment of a Council representative assigned to the Witney Flood Group.

The role of the position was outlined in the report and the appointed Member would act as a liaison between the Flood Group and Witney Town Council when certain issues needed discussing.

There were two recommendations for the appointment.

Cllr J Robertshaw was proposed by Cllr D Edwards-Hughes, seconded by Cllr J Treloar and, Cllr G Meadows was proposed herself, seconded by Cllr R Crouch.

A vote was taken:

Appointment of Cllr J Robertshaw	7
Appointment of Cllr G Meadows	5
Abstentions	0

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, Cllr J Robertshaw be appointed as the Town Council's liaison with Witney Flood Group.

111 **HEALTH & SAFETY**

The Council received the report of the Head of Estates & Operations which provided an update to Members on health and safety matters.

Members were pleased to see the progress and actions being undertaken in this area.

Resolved:

That, the report be noted.

112 **VANDALISM & ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR**

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

Members thanked Officers for their work and in raising awareness of these issues via social media communications.

Resolved:

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

113 **SUMMARY OF TOWN CENTRE ISSUES RAISED BY THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**

The Council received and considered the report of the Town Clerk & Chief Executive Officer which provided an update on a meeting held with the Witney Chamber of Commerce.

Members were encouraged to hear of a renewed partnership with the Chamber and the Town Council and welcomed the updates on items raised at the meeting.

Resolved:

That, the report be noted.

114 **MOTION - OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

The Council received the following Motion, proposed by Cllr J Doughty and seconded by Cllr D Edwards-Hughes.

‘Witney Town Council notes that Oxfordshire County Council in a statement published on 13 November 2024 said that it will consult with local communities on whether to switch off streetlights.

This council is concerned about the safety - and confidence - of women and vulnerable members of the public, particularly on a night out. It is not just the risk of crime that may increase but also the fear of crime, as many people cite poor lighting as one of the reasons, they can feel unsafe.

Witney Town Council resolves to write to Oxfordshire County Council requesting that no further consideration be given to turning the lights off in Witney - they must remain on to protect our residents.’

Members were in agreement that for resident safety, streetlighting should remain on throughout the night. There were some reflections on the harm lighting did to wildlife and that it would be ideal if lights could be set with motion detectors, but this would be a future conversation.

There was agreement the motion should be amended to include timings, per the original County Council thoughts and that the motion should refer to safety of all members of the public, not just females.

A Vote was then called for. The motion was passed, with voting as follows:

In Favour	10
Against	1
Abstentions	1

Resolved:

That, the motion be passed with the following amendments,

Witney Town Council notes that Oxfordshire County Council in a statement published on 13 November 2024 said that it will consult with local communities on whether to switch off streetlights between 11.30pm – 6.30am.

This council is concerned about the safety - and confidence - of members of the public, particularly on a night out. It is not just the risk of crime that may increase but also the fear of crime, as many people cite poor lighting as one of the reasons, they can feel unsafe.

Witney Town Council resolves to write to Oxfordshire County Council requesting that no further consideration be given to turning the lights off in Witney - they must remain on to protect our residents.

115 **STRENGTHENING THE STANDARDS AND CONDUCT FRAMEWORK FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN ENGLAND.**

The Council received notice of a government consultation concerning the strengthening of standards of Councillors for Local Authorities in England.

Members agreed with the sentiment of the consultation but felt there would be differing views on individual questions, and it would therefore be difficult to submit a 'corporate body' response. It would be more beneficial for Members and Officers to submit their own personal responses before the closing date.

Resolved:

1. That, Witney Town Council welcomes the consultation and its purpose and,
2. That, individual Councillors and Officers submit their own responses before the closing date.

116 **WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL FACEBOOK - META TERMS OF REFERENCE & STATEMENT**

The Council received and considered the report of the Communications & Community Engagement Officer which had been requested at the meeting of the Stronger Communities Committee in January.

The report highlighted global changes to the META terms of service, affecting platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Threads. The Council had several thousand followers on Facebook and it was recognised as a key tool for engagement with residents. The new terms of service, however, did not align with UK legislation and the ethos of the Town Council.

There was some thought that the Council should take no action on this issue however it was proposed by Cllr A Bailey, seconded by Cllr R Crouch that the following statement be added to the 'About' page of Facebook with immediate effect,

'Witney Town Council stands firmly against discrimination, and we fully support the LGBTQ+ community.

Hate has no place here, and we are committed to fostering an inclusive and respectful environment for all.'

A Vote was called for. The proposal was carried, with voting as follows:

In Favour	8
Against	3
Abstentions	1

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the above statement be added to the Town Council's Facebook about page.

The remaining Members of the youth Council and Member of the Public left the meeting at 8:23pm.

117 **COMMUNICATION FROM THE LEADER**

As the Council's Standing Orders did not dictate on whom should stand in for the Leader or Deputy Leader in their absence at Full Council meetings, the Mayor, as Chair of the Council confirmed no communications had been passed to him.

Resolved:

That, the update from the Chair be noted

118 **NALC - OPEN LETTER - COMMUNITY TIER OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT RISING TO THE CHALLENGE**

The Council received an open letter from the Chair of the National Association of Local Council's entitled, Community Tier of Local Government Rising to the Challenge.

Members welcomed the letter, and the Town Clerk confirmed she was already in discussions and had submitted a paper on devolution to the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee regarding the issue (Minute PGF 72 refers).

Resolved:

That, the correspondence be noted.

119 **RIVERSIDE GARDENS, WITNEY**

The Council received correspondence from the outgoing flood representative at Riverside Gardens thanking the Council for support in flooding events in previous years.

Members welcomed the response and recognised the thanks for those individually named.

Resolved:

That, the correspondence be noted.

120 **WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL - FLOODING & LOCAL PLAN 2041**

The Council received correspondence from the Head of Planning at West Oxfordshire District Council in response to its letter about addressing flooding in the emerging Local Plan 2041.

Resolved:

That, the correspondence be noted.

121 **OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL - WITNEY FOOTPATH NO. 32 (PART) MODIFICATION ORDER 2024**

The Council received correspondence from Oxfordshire County Council confirming a Modification Order to Witney Footpath no. 32 – Marlborough Lane.

Resolved:

That, the correspondence be noted.

122 **OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL - NOTICE OF DEFINITIVE MAP AND STATEMENT LEGAL EVENT MODIFICATION ORDER 2025**

The Council received further correspondence from Oxfordshire County Council on a Legal Event Modification Order to the Definitive Map & Statement concerning footpath 44 at West Witney.

Resolved:

That, the correspondence be noted.

123 **POLICE CRIME COMMISSIONER - NEWSLETTER**

The Council received notice of the Police & Crime Commissioner's December newsletter.

Resolved:

That, the correspondence be noted.

124 **QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

Members were advised the Council's Standing Orders did not dictate on whom should stand in for the Leader or Deputy Leader in their absence. Therefore, the Mayor as Chair of the Council advised questions could be directed to him and if they could not be answered on the evening by officers, he would forward them to the Leader/Deputy at the first available opportunity to reply.

There were no questions asked of the Chair.

125 **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: 8.30pm

Chair