
Agenda Item:	Community Engagement Report
Meeting Date:	Monday, 24 March 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 since the last meeting.

Current Situation

APCAM WeGame

There is no budget this year for a repeat of the VR and Arcade game event, but Councillors may want to consider finding some grant funding or budget that can be used to supplement what is on offer from APCAM (**Appendix A**) (Also see Youth Services Report, Agenda Item 8) to make it accessible to larger numbers of young people. Alternatively, the Council could invite them to provide their equipment, if available, for a separate occasion.

Witney Carnival

The Council has entered a team to walk in the Carnival Parade on the theme of musicals. Councillors should choose a musical and decide who is going to take part in the parade. The Council will have two stalls; one will host the Schools In Bloom wheelbarrow judging and a crafting activity and the other will be hosted by the Youth Council.

Gallery Room – Christmas Light Switch on.

Noting that the Christmas Lights Switch-on event, scheduled for Friday 28th November as usual, Councillors should give some thought to a repeat of last year's community engagement event in the gallery room. Last year the intention was to invite young carers but there was a lack of opportunities to contact them. This Year Be Free Young Carers will have a base in West Oxfordshire (thanks to a grant from Witney Town Council) and would be more likely to be able to come and bring young carers along to this.

Twining Reception - 2 May 2025 (added by the Deputy Town Clerk)

Representatives from Witney's twinned towns of Le Touquet & Unterhaching will be visiting Witney during the early May Bank Holiday weekend to celebrate the 35th and 45th anniversaries of twinning.

Following attendance at the opening of the Beer Festival at St Mary's Church on Friday, the Mayor will be hosting a reception in the Gallery Room during the afternoon for approximately 30 people with light refreshments.

The original twinning documents will be on display and the Mayor will re-sign new documents to re-affirm the partnerships. A5 Copies can be made available after the event and passed onto attendees. Formal invitations will be issued by the town council shortly.

Great Big Green Week 7th – 15th June

This week focuses on ways to reduce, reuse, recycle.

Suggested ideas are a Book Swap or suggestions for frugal recipes with leftovers -perhaps create a printable leaflet with best suggestions in.

Relaunch of Inclusivity & Diversity Panel

There are plans to relaunch the Inclusivity and Diversity Panel. The Communities and Planning Admin Support Assistant has the capacity to organise the meetings. Members will be looking to engage a broader range of contributors. Perhaps a new name might help to portray that.

Something along the lines of Community Perspectives, or Community Voices.

Residents' Satisfaction Survey

This is being circulated to each of the senior schools and to Abingdon and Witney College along with the same email that was used before as we had a good uptake from younger people for the first time. At the time of writing, 120 responses have so far been received.

In Bloom

The Biodiversity and Green Spaces and Communications & Community Engagement Officer have made a list of achievements in terms of projects and developments and considered planned projects and events. The conclusion is that for the cost of entry which is around £50 the Council should have a good chance of attaining Gold. The Council was just one point short last time.

The following have already been put in place or are underway:

- Fishing Platforms – in partnership with Witney Angling Society
- Community Orchard on Snipe Meadow
- Foot path reinstatement
- Dragonfly area, Mill Meadow reinstatement
- The Witney Lake & Country Park site is now a Local Nature Reserve
- We have applied for Green Flag Status
- The Scrapes have been installed in Snipe Meadow in partnership with Natural England

Suggestions for more Community Engagement include:

- Citizen Science at the Lake and Meadows
- The Council has invited the Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service to use the site for practice

- Gazebo meet and greet sessions with the Biodiversity and Green Spaces officer and Green Spaces Operative
- Update the Lake and Country Park leaflets and include a mindfulness one
- Invite Bridewell Gardens to visit/volunteer
- Corporate volunteering – a group from a business based on Worton Hall in Cassington are keen to volunteer with us
- School Visits
- Build a bird box day. £5 to build a box to take away. Working in partnership with The Shed

VE/VJ day updated notes

Notes from the meeting are attached (Appendix B)

Witney Forum notes 28.01.25

Notes from the meeting follow the report.

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 – By providing a free WeGame session or sessions the Council would be providing activities which may not be open to sections of the community.
- b) Biodiversity – An application for the Thames and Chiltern In Bloom competition would help promote the biodiversity projects which have taken place at Witney Lake & Country Park.
- c) Crime & Disorder – none.
- d) Environment & Climate Emergency – By supporting Big Green Week, the Council would be highlighting ways in which to help the community environmentally.

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 little known risk from the items outlined in the report.

Social Value

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

The social value of community engagement is vast, impacting individuals, relationships, and the broader society in numerous positive ways. By fostering inclusion, trust, collaboration, and empowerment, community engagement strengthens the social fabric and leads to healthier, and more resilient communities. It creates a sense of belonging and shared responsibility that benefits everyone, driving progress and improving well-being across society.

Financial implications

- The Council holds a budget line for use of the Halls by the Witney Twinning Association (4161/408) which will cover the cost of the hall. The cost of refreshments and any other items will be covered from the Civic Functions budget line (4150/401).
- There are no cost implications pertaining to any other items in this report that are not already covered in an existing budget, in particular the £50 In Bloom application fee.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and,

- Consider whether the Council should support APCAM WeGame session(s) and if yes, how these should be funded,
- Consider the musical theme of this year's Carnival Parade entry,
- Note the date of the 2025 Christmas Lights Switch on event as Friday 28th November and consider what engagement should take place in the Gallery Room,
- Note the details concerning the Twinning drinks reception at the Corn Exchange on 2 May 2025,
- Provide any alternative suggestions as to how the Council should mark Big Green Week,
- Consider the relaunch of the Inclusivity & Diversity Panel under the name of Community Perspectives,
- Consider approving entry to the Thames & Chiltern In Bloom competition for 2025 based on the updated projects which could result in gold award.
- Note the updates regarding the VE & VJ Day 80th Anniversaries Task & Finish Group.
- Note the Witney Forum notes.