
Agenda Item: Community Engagement Report

Meeting Date: Monday, 2 June 2025

Contact Officer: Communications & Community Engagement Officer

The purpose of this report is to update councillors on general communication matters and progress made since the last meeting of the Stronger Communities Committee.

Current Situation

VE Day 80th Anniversary – 8th May 2025

The events held during the day all ran as planned and expected with overwhelmingly positive feedback received. The BBC South Today team were very complimentary and thanked everyone for their support, apologising for any intrusiveness which occurred. Officers have held a wash-up meeting and will report verbally at the meeting, but any comments from members are welcome.

VJ Day 80th Anniversary – 15th August 2025

The task and finish group has agreed smaller plans from VE Day and felt this should be more of a remembrance, rather than a large celebration. The Corn Exchange has been booked in its entirety for the whole of the day. There are no other events booked in, and councillors should consider whether plans suggest that the café needs to operate as usual or be closed at any point.

A verbal update from the next T&F Group meeting on 29th May will be provided. Feedback from some who attended the VE Day celebrations indicated they hoped for something more substantial for VJ Day too. Planned events could include:

- Voices of War stories as part of a display of Arthur Titherington items with Witney Museum
- Vintage vehicles on the Market Square
- Poppy sellers
- Each of the town's memorials to be cleaned in the weeks ahead by groups such as air and army cadets and another group to plan litter pick and clean, spot plant any bare patches and decorate each memorial as they see fit and within a budget. (poppies, ribbons, wreaths etc). Cadets would be tasked with Leys and Newland so they are not working in the road and officers will take volunteer picnics to them as a reward and to the third group at the main Market Square memorial.
- Bonfire beacon on the Leys
- Film Screening
- Repost our self-led walk of our Commonwealth War Graves

- Civic Service at St Mary's – invite leaders from, Sikh, Hindu and Muslim communities as they fought in considerable numbers in the Far East
- Repair Mr Titherington's Bench on Church Green
- Promote CWCG virtual tours app
- Will there be an official cry?
- Open the chapel in Tower Hill for the day?
- CWGC do talks and will visit and talk about its cemeteries – book one for Corn Exchange (may not be possible on the day as likely to be very busy)

The budget for the two events was reduced when the budget/precept were set, so there are less funds remaining to hold anything more substantial than the initially agreed items. The Communications and Community Engagement Officer is on leave that week, so there will be less of an officer resource.

Dates for the remaining task and finish group meetings are:

29th May – Initial discussion – this is ahead of the 2 June SC Committee where we could give a verbal update (PGF for initial agreement to budget 9th June)

3rd July – Final sign off of plans ahead of SC on 14th July – which can be a written report/summary (PGF for budget agreement 21st July)

The Station Detached Youth – BREAK & KICK

The Station detached youth group held three afternoons of activities at The Leys during the May half-term week and are intending to run KICK again at the ATP during the summer holidays. Two days in the Station report around 50 young people turning up for the events at the Leys.

Witney Carnival – 12th July 2025

The Council's stall will focus on promoting the Youth Council and further recruitment and there will be a craft stall run by the Youth Council, supported by officers that will include painted rocks and making wooden bead bracelets. Members are invited to attend as a community engagement exercise.

Members are also asked to confirm if they are taking part in the parade.

Schools In Bloom

The wheelbarrows are in schools and will be collected shortly before the carnival for voting. They have all been offered out to Care Homes. The Ice Centre is the Council's Guest barrow this year.

Upcoming Community Engagement Initiatives

- Climate roadshow is under discussion with officers (proposed by the Climate & Biodiversity Committee).
- Volunteer picnics there are plans for one to reward the L&CP volunteers plus the VJ day ones.
- Car Free Day – recommended online only again.

- Heritage Open Day falls just a month after VJ Day so unless it fits with something the Council is already doing it will be difficult to arrange another event unless in partnership with someone else.

Notes from the Community Insight Profile Group held on 6th May are attached as **Appendix A**.

Community Engagement Strategy

An updated and final draft of the Council's Community Engagement Strategy follows as Part A to this report in the agenda pack.

The updated draft encompasses the point raised by the Committee at the meeting held earlier in the year.

Annual Satisfaction Survey 2025

A summary of the results of the survey which ran until May 1st prepared by the Administrative Support Assistant Communities & Planning follows as Part B to this report in the agenda pack.

Individual comments will be issued to individual committees during the next cycle of meetings.

Witney Forum

The confidential notes of the Forum meeting held on 25th March 2025 follow as a Part C to this 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 – the provision of free, accessible community initiatives ensures all residents are all able to enjoy these opportunities. The feedback survey provides a platform to hear the voices of those who may be harder to reach and the community engagement strategy will enshrine this in the work of the Council.
- b) Biodiversity – Schools In Bloom helps promote biodiversity in schools.
- c) Crime & Disorder – no direct implications.
- d) Environment & Climate Emergency – no direct implications.

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.

There is social value to the community from all initiatives in the report for all age ranges in Witney which celebrate heritage, barriers to services and biodiversity. They provide a broad appeal to all demographics in leading more fulfilling lives.

Financial Implications

- The Council budgeted £1,500 towards both VE & VJ Day 80th Anniversaries. There is approximately £500 remaining for VJ Day.
- All other items can be funded from existing budgets if pursued.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and,

1. Note the updates concerning the VE Day 80th Anniversary, the Station activities, and Schools In Bloom.
2. Consider the proposals for the 80th Anniversary of VJ Day (taking into account the verbal update from the task and finish group meeting on 29th May).
3. Confirm involvement at Witney Carnival.
4. Consider the upcoming community engagement initiatives and plans.