

**MEETING OF THE
WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL**

Held on Monday, 23 June 2025

At 7.05 pm in the Gallery Room, The Corn Exchange, Witney

Present:

Councillor A Bailey (Chair)

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

349 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Cllr O Collins.

350 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors J Doughty, R Crouch, J Aitman, R Smith, J Robertshaw, T Ashby and D Enright declared a Pecuniary interest in Agenda item 19 – Future of Local Government in Oxfordshire owing to them being an elected Member of either West Oxfordshire District Council or Oxfordshire County Council or both, receiving remuneration.

There were no other declarations from Members or Officers

351 MINUTES

The minutes of the Annual Council meeting held on 7 May 2025 were received.

Minute 254 – Cllr T Ashby was not appointed a member of the Disciplinary & Grievance Panel; a correction was therefore requested to update the minute.

Resolved:

1. That, a correction be made to remove Cllr Ashby from the Disciplinary & Grievance Panel
2. That, the minutes of the Annual Council meeting held on 7 May 2025 be approved as a correct record of the meetings and be signed by the Chair.

352 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

The Committee adjourned for this item.

The Committee received representations from a resident of Corn Street concerning Agenda Item 5.

The resident was concerned about the speed and noise from motorcycles around the town, in particular at Corn Street and Church Green. An accident had occurred recently at the junction of Holloway Road and Corn Street and the resident believed speed to be a contributing factor.

The Committee reconvened.

353 **WITNEY COMMUNITY POLICING ISSUES**

The Council heard from Inspector C Ball who first acknowledged the issues of bikes in the town however, explained that it was difficult to bring prosecution as the noise caused was not illegal and in terms of speeding this would need to be evidenced. He explained that the police's focus was targeted on the bigger issue of illegal e-bikes. Seizures of three bikes had recently taken place and he hoped more would follow.

Additionally, he advised that Officers had been targeting the town's highest rated problem makers with regular intervention to disrupt their activities, this included visits to their homes to reduce the possibility of anti-social activity.

He also updated members of plans for the summer when TVP would be working in conjunction with The Station to engage with young people. He hoped that this would be a successful venture as it was in 2024.

A presentation of the Pony & Trap racing on the A40 dual carriageway was provided to the Council which includes videos and images of the activity. TVP had considered the options available to them to discourage the use and were in the process of considering an application for a Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) which would prohibit the use of the A40 for racing.

The Council welcomed this approach and agreed unanimously, with the exemption of one abstention, to support a PSPO.

Members raised questions regarding issues of drug dealing, illegal use of e-scooters and harassment of residents of the Witney Hotel. In response Insp Ball advised that a number of arrests had taken place in relation to drug offences as well as engagement with users of e-scooters. He was not aware of the incident at the hotel and would further look into this following the meeting.

Resolved:

1. That, the verbal update be noted and,

2. That, the Council supports the PSPO when the formal consultation commences.

Inspector Ball and the member of the public left the meeting at 7:34pm

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

West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC)

Cllr D Enright provided updates on the launch of a **grant scheme for small businesses** as well as grants for the improvement of shop fronts. He also updated Members on the success of cross-party Business and Trade Select Committee visit on June 17 which was aimed at gathering evidence for an inquiry into revitalising town centres.

A Member noted that the visit by the select committee had not been widely advertised, particularly to members of the Witney Chamber of Commerce, Cllr Enright responded that wider notification would have been an increased security risk.

Cllr R Crouch advised that WODC had received a **Council of Sanctuary award** and made the suggestion that this may be something that the Town Council itself consider looking into.

She also provided an update on the **Community activity grants** which had a £22,000 budget and was open to aid small organisations with grants of between £500-1,000.

Cllr T Ashby advised that consultation would soon commence on the vision and policy direction of the new Local Plan, with opportunities to give feedback on specific development sites later in 2025.

Oxfordshire County Council (OCC)

Cllr T Ashby shared a comprehensive update on a variety of subjects. He began with confirmation that the **Councillor Priority Fund** had returned, with £10,000 allocated to each councillor to support local groups and initiatives during their May 2025 and May 2027 term.

A programme of **gully cleaning** had commenced with work already carried out in Witney South, ongoing in Witney East, and then due to move on to Witney North in August & West early in 2026. Additionally In terms of **highways** resurfacing and patching work had been completed or scheduled on key roads including Downs Road, Corn Street, and Hailey Road, and a new **zebra crossing** was planned near Sainsbury's on Station Lane.

Meanwhile, the long-awaited redevelopment of **Witney High Street** had been delayed, with construction now expected to begin in January 2026 and ANPR cameras to be installed later in 2025.

He expressed his concerns around delays to infrastructure projects, particularly the **Madley Park, Windrush Place & Deer Park paths and road crossings**, which had been postponed again, with consultations expected in late 2025 or early 2026.

The **temporary Witney Library** at the fire station continued to operate successfully, with positive feedback and welcomed the new community hire space.

Resolved:

That, the updates be noted.

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

Witney Fairtrade Action Group

Cllr R Smith noted that comments had been raised regarding the extent of Fairtrade items available in the Corn Exchange Café. s=She explained that she had spoken with the Café manager to understand the supply issues and the wish to remain using local suppliers also in line with the Council's procurement policy

Witney Town Charity

Cllr R Crouch confirmed that the Almshouses under its remit had all be checked and no issues had arisen.

Resolved:

That, the updates be noted.

356 **CLIMATE, BIODIVERSITY & PLANNING COMMITTEE - 22 APRIL 2025**

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

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Climate, Biodiversity & Planning Committee meeting held on 22 April 2025 be received and any recommendations therein approved.

357 **PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE - 13 MAY & 3 JUNE 2025**

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

Resolved:

That the minutes of the Planning & Development Committee meeting held on 13 May & 3 June 2025 be received and any recommendations therein approved.

358 **CLIMATE & BIODIVERSITY COMMITTEE - 20 MAY 2025**

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

Resolved:

That the minutes of the Climate & Biodiversity Committee meeting held on 20 May 2025 be received and any recommendations therein approved.

359 **PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE - 12 MAY 2025**

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

PR265 – In response to a Member's question, it was advised no further update was available on the issues encountered around Basketball.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee meeting held on 12 May 2025 be received and any recommendations therein approved.

360 **HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE - 19 MAY 2025**

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

H284 – The Deputy Town Clerk advised no action had yet been taken in respect of engaging with Thames Water.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee meeting held on 19 May 2025 be received and any recommendations therein approved.

361 **STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE - 2 JUNE 2025**

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

SC310 – In response to a Member's question, the Chair of the Committee confirmed that it was still his intention to attend the Witney Forum meeting on 24 June.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Stronger Communities Committee meeting held on 2 June 2025 be received and any recommendations therein approved.

362 **POLICY GOVERNANCE & FINANCE COMMITTEE - 9 JUNE & 23 JUNE 2025 (VERBAL UPDATE)**

The Chair of the Committee presented the minutes of the Committee's meeting of 9 June to Council and moved their acceptance.

They also provided a verbal update of the Special meeting held earlier that evening summarising the recommendations made to approve Committee terms of reference, objectives for the year and the award of a £1,080 grant to Apollos Clothing.

The Committee also approved the Annual Governance & Accountability Return which would be discussed later in the meeting and to further advance the work to desilting the River Windrush at Bridge Street.

Resolved:

1. That, the minutes of the Policy Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 9 June be received and any recommendations therein approved.
2. That, the recommendations of the Special Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 23 June, provided verbally, be noted and approved.

363 **STANDING ORDERS**

The Council received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk which re-presented revised Standing Orders for the Council.

The revised document had stood adjourned following its agreement at the Annual Council Meeting on 7 May 2025 (Minute no:256 refers) to allow sufficient time for Members to review and reflect on the revisions.

With no amendments being requested their acceptance was proposed with all Members in agreement.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the Standing Orders as presented be adopted by Witney Town Council.

364 **COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Council received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk which provided the agreed Terms of Reference for each of the Council's Committees.

Additionally, a verbal update was provided which updated Members on the recommendation of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committees Terms of Reference which had been agreed earlier that evening.

Members thanked Officers for their diligence in the preparation of the Terms of Reference reports which has been presented to each Committee and provided clarity in each case.

It was proposed by Cllr D Enright, seconded by Cllr R Crouch that the Terms of Reference be adopted with Members unanimous in agreement.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the Committee terms of reference for the 2025-26 municipal year as presented be approved.

365 **SCHEME OF DELEGATION**

The Council received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk which was last reviewed in 2019 however, a more regular review would now be put in place.

Members welcomed the confirmation of the extent of the responsibilities of the Council, Committees, Officers and those in a role of responsibility.

Acceptance, as presented was proposed by Cllr J Aitman, seconded by Cllr G Meadows with all members in favour.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the Scheme of Delegation as presented be adopted by Witney Town Council

366 **ANNUAL GOVERNANCE & ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN (AGAR) 2025**

The Council received a verbal update from the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) in respect of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) for 2024/25 under its obligations to the Accounts & Audit (England) Regulations 2015.

The Policy, Governance and Finance Committee had scrutinised the documents and recommended approval and adoption at the meeting held earlier that evening.

The general public would have the right to inspection the documents which would be published following being signed by the Mayor, RFO and Town Clerk. These would be advertised via the Council's noticeboard and online.

Members were unanimous in agreement.

Resolved:

1. That, the verbal report be noted and,
2. That, the Annual Governance Statement at Section 1 be approved and adopted by the Council with questions 1 to 8 answered "yes" and question 9 "not applicable" and,
3. That, the Statement of Accounts at Section 2 of the Annual Return for the year ended 31 March 2025 be approved and adopted and,
4. That, the Notice of Public Rights and Publication for 2024/24 b5 approved and published.

During the following item Cllr R Crouch left the meeting at 8:03pm.

367 **PUBLIC WORKS LOAN BORROWING - WEST WITNEY SPORTS GROUND**

The Council received and considered the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) which provided a comprehensive summary of the proposal for the Council to make an application to the Public Works Loan Board (PWLb). The loan would facilitate the refurbishment of the West Witney Sports & Social Club and establish a new Works Depot.

Members were advised the necessary public consultation had been conducted earlier in the summer and the response overwhelmingly indicated support for the projects and for applying for a loan to complete the projects.

He confirmed that his report reflected the current and interest rate terms of the PWLB however, since the initial precept budget setting in December 2024, interest rates had changed to a more favourable rate and therefore the proposed costs of the loan were lower than originally

projected. The RFO also provided a mid-term financial forecast which was welcomed by Members and advised a five year plan would be coming to the next meeting.

The RFO responded to the questions of Members explaining that only a single application was needed as both projects were on the same site and therefore tied in together; also that if the full amount applied for was not required then the loan conditions allowed for this to remain undrawn, and interest would only fall due on the amount advanced. Finally, the interest rate to apply would be that applicable at the time of the initial drawdown of funds.

Members moved on to the consideration of which of the two options of repayment should be selected and, following a vote with 14 Members in favour and 1 against, the Equal Instalments of Principal method was chosen although it was acknowledged that inflation would have an effect however, the use of a fixed rate would prove prudent.

Resolved:

1. That, the report and verbal update be noted and,
 2. That, an application for a loan of £1,250,000 be made and,
 3. That, a preference of an Equal Instalments of Principal (EIP) loan be arranged and,
 4. That, Witney Town Council approves Officers to seek the approval from the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to apply for a PWLB loan of up to £1,250,000 over the borrowing term of 40 years for the delivery of the West Witney Project. The annual loan repayments will come to around £107,000 (EIP loan year one). It is not intended to increase the council tax precept for the purpose of the loan repayments as these have already been provided for in the Council's budget.
- That, the mid-term financial forecast be noted,

368 **CLIMATE ACTION WORKING PARTY**

The Council received the resolution of the Climate & Biodiversity Committee made on 20 May 2025 (Minute CB296 refers) and considered appointments to a Climate Action Working Party.

The appointment of Cllr S Simpson, Cllr D Edwards-Hughes, Cllr D Enright, Cllr J Aitman and Cllr J Robertshaw were proposed, seconded, and agreed unanimously:

Resolved:

That the membership of the Climate Action Working Party be agreed as detailed above.

369 **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.

Both the Mayor and his deputy confirmed that they were enjoying the commencement of their terms in the post and the Mayor thanked his Deputy for her assistance, it had been a very busy start to the year.

Resolved:

That, the report be noted.

370 **HEALTH & SAFETY**

The Council received the report of the Compliance and Environment Officer regarding Health & Safety matters.

Members welcomed the report. In response to a Member's question, it was confirmed that the surface of renovated Splashpark was installed as per the specification of the professional supplier.

Resolved:

That, the report be noted.

371 **VANDALISM**

The Council received a list of vandalism reports since the last meeting.

A Member noted the incorrect spelling of "Semitic"

Resolved:

That, the report be noted

Cllr D Edwards-Hughes left the meeting briefly between 8:35pm and 8:37pm

372 **COMPLAINTS & COMPLIMENTS**

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

Members heard from the Deputy Town Clerk who provided some additional specific details of the complaint received relating to the acceptance of support dogs into the Corn Exchange and were satisfied with the way in which Officers had dealt with the issue raised.

A concern was raised regarding a Councillor's role as administrator of a social media page that some residents felt presented a biased view and reflected poorly on the Council, particularly in light of the Committees the Councillor served on. The Councillor responded, stating that a recent review by the Monitoring Officer confirmed they had not breached any agreed standards. Members were very pleased to see the positive number of compliments and thanked Officers and Town Council staff for their continued efforts.

Resolved:

That, the report be noted.

373 **FUTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN OXFORDSHIRE**

The Council received notification of the proposals of Oxfordshire County Council (OCC), West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) and Oxford City Council in respect of the plans for the future of Local Government in Oxfordshire.

Members agreed that at this stage, in order to ensure impartiality due to the number of Members whom sat on additional tiers of local government, the most appropriate approach would be for Officers to engage with the three authorities by way of letter and ask for them to specifically explain the effects on Witney of their proposals; they should also outline what Witney Town Council would expect to see by way of financial payments or service agreements from the devolution process.

It was additionally agreed that a standing item be added to meetings of the Council for Officers to report back to Members as the proposals progress.

Resolved:

1. That, the notifications from OCC, WODC and Oxford City Council regarding the future of Local Government in Oxfordshire be noted and,
2. That, the Town Clerk/CEO write to WODC, OCC and Oxford City Council requesting further details on their proposals and,
3. That, a standing agenda item be added to meetings of the Council.

374 **PART NIGHT-TIME LIGHTING**

The Council received notification of a consultation on the part-night time lighting framework from Oxfordshire County Council.

Following a Member's question, the Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that the consultation only related to the proposed framework and unless the Council made an application to request lighting to be amended, then no further changes would be implemented.

As the Council had previously resolved to write to Oxfordshire County Council requesting that no further consideration be given to turning the lights off in Witney (Full Council 17 Feb 2025 Minute 114 refers) it was agreed that a response be submitted to confirm acceptance of the framework in order to reinforce their agreement that Parishes would have to apply to amend the lighting within their area.

However, Members were encouraged to complete an individual response should they be minded.

Resolved:

1. That, the correspondence be noted and,
2. That, a response be submitted supporting the introduction of the proposed framework.

375 **SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER NO 5(W)**

Resolved

That, Standing Order 5(w) be suspended in order to allow the meeting to continue as it had now lasted for two hours.

376 **COMMUNICATION FROM THE LEADER**

The Leader offered their congratulations to the Town Clerk/CEO on her achievement of becoming an associate of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD).

Resolved:

That, the Leader's communication be noted.

377 **REMOTE ATTENDANCE AND PROXY VOTING IN LOCAL AUTHORITIES: CONSULTATION RESULTS AND GOVERNMENT RESPONSE**

The Council received notice of this government response following a consultation to town and parish Council's earlier in the year.

Members welcomed the summary and conclusion which indicated the Government would legislate for remote meetings in the future.

Resolved:

That, the correspondence be noted.

378 **WITNEY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE SURVEY RESULTS**

The Council received the results report provided by Witney Chamber of Commerce (WCoC) following the collaboration with the Council who facilitated the issuing of the survey.

Members welcomed the report and highlighted the insights that the Chamber's work provided. They emphasised the importance of a collaborative approach and were eager to engage further as the implementation work of the WCoC proceeded.

Members noted the points relating to young people in the survey and asked that the results and comments received from young people to the Council's own recent resident survey be shared with the Chamber of Commerce.

The Deputy Town Clerk advised Members that the Survey results would be further considered in detail at the next meeting of the Stronger Communities Committee on 14th July.

Resolved:

1. That, the survey results be noted and,
2. That, Officers write to thank the Chair of the WCoC and provide the details of the responses from young people to the Council's residents' survey.

379 **POLICE & CRIME COMMISSIONER - NEWSLETTERS**

The Council received the most recent Thames Valley Police & Crime Commissioner newsletters.

Resolved:

That, the PCC newsletters be noted.

380 **POLICE & CRIME COMMISSIONER - NEIGHBOURING POLICING ENGAGEMENT SURVEY**

The Council received the additional correspondence from the PCC relating to an engagement survey which Members were encouraged to complete individually.

Resolved:

That, the PCC correspondence be noted.

381 **QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

A Member raised a request that all Councillors be provided with details of upcoming flag raising events to which the Leader deferred to the Officers to respond. The Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that Officers would review the request however, flag raising was not a civic event and that the Council need to be conscious of any disturbance a large number of people may have on the distraction of motorists at the busy intersection outside the Town Hall.

A Member highlighted to the Leader his pleasure that West Oxfordshire District Council had been voted the second-best place to open a business in a recent survey.

A Member raised a question regarding replacement of vandalised bins on council-owned land. The Leader asked if officers could explore this issue further.

382 **SEALING OF DOCUMENTS**

The Town Clerk advised that the following documents were sealed by the Council.

Date	No of Seal	Nature of Document
29 April 2025	98	Tenancy at will – Courtside Hubs CIC re: Leys Recreation Ground
29 April 2025	99	Licence for alterations relating to land forming part of land on the northwest side of Station Lane – Courtside Hubs CIC

Resolved:

1. That, the above sealed documents be noted and,
2. 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: 9.15 pm

Chair