

**PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE
WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL**

Held on Monday, 12 May 2025

At 6.03 pm in the Gallery Room, The Corn Exchange, Witney

Present:

Councillor J Aitman (Chair)

Councillors:	S Simpson	D Edwards-Hughes
	A Bailey	R Smith
	J Doughty	J Treloar
Officers:	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
	Derek Mackenzie	Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk
Others:	3 members of the public.	

PR260 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor T Ashby, Councillor G Doughty attended as a substitute.

PR261 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members or Officers.

PR262 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

The Chair called for nominations for the position of Vice-Chair of the Committee.

It was proposed by Cllr R Smith and seconded by Cllr J Treloar that Cllr S Simpson be elected. There being no other nominations it was:

Resolved:

That, Councillor Sandra Simpson be elected Vice-Chair of the Committee for the 2025/26 municipal year.

PR263 MINUTES

The minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee meeting held on 10 March 2025 were received.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee meeting held on 10 March 2025 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the Chair.

PR264 **PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC**

The Committee adjourned for this item.

The Committee received representations from Members of Witney Wolves Basketball Club concerning Agenda Item 10

The Committee reconvened.

During the following item:

Cllr J Treloar left the meeting at 6:08pm rejoining at 6:10pm

Cllr D Edwards-Hughes left the meeting at 6:35pm rejoining at 6:38pm.

PR265 **WITNEY BASKETBALL**

With the permission of the Chair, this item was moved up the agenda so the members of public could hear the discussion and outcome.

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk as to the current position of the provision for Basketball in Witney. Members had earlier heard from the members of the Witney Wolves Basketball Club of their own lived experiences.

It was clear to the Committee that the available basketball facilities were either of poor standard or non-existent, with particular issues around access to an acceptable indoor court, notably Windrush Leisure Centre. This resulted in the club currently having to play at Carterton leisure centre which came at a significant higher hire cost as their regular indoor court at Wood Green School was unavailable at times for example at exam periods. The Club had also had to host games and training sessions across multiple locations to satisfy the desire of their 60-80 players.

The Town Clerk confirmed that following an earlier exploratory meeting with the club held in April 2025, the Town Council had passed information to West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC), the club thanked the Town Council for this and reported that WODC had been in contact and a time to meet was being arranged.

Members also discussed the various ways it could help raise the profile and assistance to help improve the facilities, including the court, colloquially known as "The Cage" situated behind the Oxfordshire County Council Family Centre on Witan Way, which provided a centrally located outdoor court. It was thought that this area was owned and under the responsibility of OCC however attempts by the club to enter discussions had failed. It was agreed that Officers would look to obtain confirmation and enter discussions as to the potential for improvement to be made.

Other ideas to provide support were to consider the inclusion of basketball courts/hoops in the design of multi-use games areas, financial support for summer holiday youth sessions, integration with The Station detached youth provision, collaborations with Witney Hockey Club and use of the WODC Spacehive fundraising scheme.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,

2. That, Officers establish the ownership of the outdoor court on Witan Way and,
3. That, Officers explore options to support the promotion and improve the provision of Basketball in Witney.

PR266 **COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk which outlined the current Terms of Reference for the Committee along with changes for consideration.

Following the Members discussions, it was agreed that the following amendments and additions be made:

That the wording of (c) be amended to read “To keep under review/updated the sports strategy within the Council’s adopted Open Spaces Strategy to meet the changing needs of the community, sporting governing bodies recommendations and West Oxfordshire District Council’s Playing Pitch Strategy in the Local Plan.

That (d) and (e) be amended as noted in the report.

That two additional terms be added and read:

(f) Within all its decision making ensure that the green environment and biodiversity of public open spaces is protected and enhanced in line with the Council’s Climate Emergency aspirations.

(g) To oversee any development and investment of Council owned recreation ground sites and its supporting infrastructure meets the needs of the community, ensuring they remain safe and compliant

That the current Terms of Reference (f) and (g) be relisted as (h) and (i).

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and
2. That, the amendments noted above be made and
3. That, the recommended changes be approved at the meeting of the Council on 23 June 2025.

PR267 **COMMITTEE OBJECTIVES & WORK PROGRAMME FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR**

The Committee received the tabled report of the Town Clerk/CEO along with a verbal update concerning the Committee Objectives & Work Plan for 2025/26.

Following the discussions regarding the provision for Basketball in Witney it was agreed that an objective be added.

To support the development of basketball provision in Witney by:

- (i) Collaborating with Oxfordshire County Council on the future of ‘the Cage’ facility at Witan Way to explore opportunities for Witney Wolves Basketball Club to establish a home base; and
- (ii) Reviewing existing Witney Town Council-owned recreational facilities and planned projects to assess and integrate provision for basketball where appropriate.

In response to a Member's query regarding the capacity of Officers to manage and deliver what was a significant portfolio of projects, the Head of Estates & Operations confirmed the team were ambitious and looking forward to bringing about the completion of the projects for the town.

Resolved:

1. That, an objective be added to support the development of basketball provision in Witney by:
 - (i) Collaborating with Oxfordshire County Council on the future of 'the Cage' facility at Witan Way to explore opportunities for Witney Wolves Basketball Club to establish a home base; and
 - (ii) Reviewing existing Witney Town Council-owned recreational facilities and planned projects to assess and integrate provision for basketball where appropriate. be added and,
2. That, the Committee Objectives & Work Plan for 2025/26 be agreed.

PR268 WEST WITNEY CRICKET UPDATE

The Committee received and considered the report of the Operations Manager along with a verbal explanation from the Head of Estates & Operations (HE&O) which related to West Witney Sports & Social Club's cricket provision.

The HE&O explained that the table of costs was comprehensive however, as noted in the report, it did not include costs of equipment along with the proportion of costs that was spent during the football season. These cost calculations would continue to be worked on, and updated versions covering all costings would be made available to Members which would cover both Cricket and Football.

He also updated Members on the progress of the agreement with Swifts CC and confirmed it was hoped that the final agreement would be reached and signed in the coming weeks.

Recommended:

1. That, the report and verbal updates be noted and,
2. That, updated cost calculations be provided to the Committee.

PR269 UPDATE ON CRICKET PROVISION AT THE LEYS RECREATION GROUND

The Committee received a verbal update from the Town Clerk/CEO in respect of the progression of discussions with the Oxfordshire Cricket Board and Henry Box School regarding the desire for an artificial wicket at The Leys Recreation Ground.

Oxfordshire Cricket Board had confirmed ongoing interest in reintroducing cricket at The Leys. This included a renewed expression of interest from Henry Box school in using a proposed artificial pitch on the field adjacent to their premises, and general support from the OCB for facilitating cricket activities—including All Stars and women's sessions—once construction works at Courtside are completed. The OCB had emphasised that, due to the ongoing construction and the lack of available changing facilities, it had not been feasible to resume cricket activities during the current summer season.

Resolved:

That, the verbal update be noted.

*During the following item:
Cllr J Treloar left the meeting at 7:13pm rejoining at 7:16pm*

PR270 MAJOR STRATEGIC PROJECTS

The Committee received and considered the report of the Project Officer regarding the major projects within the Town along with a verbal update from the Head of Estates & Operations (HE&O).

The Leys Masterplan

Members were concerned to hear of a further delay to the delivery of the renovations and the proposed period of closure of the Skatepark however, they appreciated Officers actions to ensure that Courtside Hubs continued to provide regular clear communication and updates.

The Committee welcomed that the Splashpark was to be delivered ahead of time as had the skatepark, further adding to their confidence in the new operations and projects team. Members remarked on the positive comments they had received from residents who had closely watched the progress and looked forward to the official opening by the Mayor prior to the half term school holidays.

Raleigh Crescent Multi Use Games Area (MUGA)

Members received an illustration which depicted the potential for the new MUGA and were reminded of the need for confidentiality due to the commercial sensitivity of the document.

They heard progress had been slower than Officers would like to have seen, due to the number of projects West Oxfordshire District Council had in flight. Officers explained that due to the Section 106 funds held by WODC, it had to be included in the tender process however, it was thought that once the tender was awarded it could move with more pace under the project management of the Town Council.

West Witney – Portaloo

The Town Clerk/CEO provided an update on the grant made by the Council to facilitate the use of toilets within the West Witney Sports & Social Club by parkrun. An issue had arisen regarding parkrun gaining access as was believed to be agreed. The Town Clerk/CEO would be investigating further with the Social Club to resolve.

Resolved:

That, the report and verbal updates be noted.

PR271 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved:

That in accordance with section (1(2) of the Public Bodies (admission to Meetings) Act 1960, and as extended by Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public, including the press, be excluded from the meeting because of the confidential nature of the following business to be transacted.

PR272 PROJECT UPDATE

The Committee received and considered the report of the Project Officer.

The Head of Estates & Operation answered Members' questions regarding welfare provisions, insulation and cycle storage provision.

The report had outlined the building of the new works depot would be over one storey, rather than two storeys and would provide a saving of approximately £10,000 - £20,000 however, Members agreed that the additional storey would provide additional storage space and future proof the Council given the proposed changes to local government responsibilities with anticipated devolution.

Members were unanimously in agreement with proceeding with the option of building the new work depot with two storeys.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, Officers proceed with plans for construction of a new two storey works depot.

PR273 FINANCE REPORT

The Committee received and considered the report of the Responsible Financial Officer regarding the West Witney Clubhouse renovation project and the option to tax to ensure that Value Added Tax (VAT) would be able to be reclaimed.

Members heard that the Council would be taking professional advice ahead of progressing further to confirm the plan. The Committee was unanimous in support.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the Council engage professional services to advise on whether to opt-to-tax the West Witney Clubhouse and,
3. That, a budget for professional services be set at £5,000 and
4. That, authority be delegated to the Town Clerk/CEO to implement the above actions.

The meeting closed at: 7.43 pm

Chair