
Agenda Item: Witney Chamber of Commerce Survey

Meeting Date: Monday, 14th July 2025

Contact Officer: Deputy Town Clerk

The purpose of this report is to inform the Committee of the findings from a survey conducted by the Witney Chamber of Commerce and to seek a resolution on appropriate actions the town council may take in response.

Background

Following discussions held in February 2025, the Town Council partnered with the Witney Chamber of Commerce to conduct an electronic survey. The survey was developed by Council officers using Survey Monkey, incorporating questions provided by the Chamber. It was promoted through the Council's annual newsletter and shared via the Council's online channels while being more widely promoted by the Chamber.

Current Situation

The survey results have been analysed by the Witney Chamber of Commerce, incorporating detailed AI-generated analysis. A summary report, along with key recommendations, is included as **Appendix A**. The survey received over 500 responses and outlines a range of insights, including strengths, areas for improvement, and ongoing challenges.

The findings have now been shared with Witney Town Council for consideration, to explore how the Council may further support or contribute to the implementation of the report's recommendations

This Committee set the following objectives at the last meeting (Minute no. SC305 refers):

'Possible partnership working with the Chamber of Commerce to support initiatives to:

- improve the Welcome to Witney web pages and information resources to better guide visitors*
- Explore opportunities to enhance data collection on visitor insights to understand what draws people to Witney and inform future strategy development*
- Consider coach parking and drop-off solutions as part of broader visitor accessibility improvements*

Explore opportunities for collaborative projects with local businesses and the Chamber of Commerce to strengthen the town's economic vitality.'

While the town council does not have a statutory duty or direct powers relating to economic development—responsibility for which lies with the Economic Development section at West Oxfordshire District Council—there are key areas identified in the survey report where the Town Council could play a supportive or enabling role. These include:

- Leveraging the town’s heritage through improved signage and promotion
- Addressing growth by advocating for increased local facilities
- Enhancing floral displays and green spaces
- Creating more regular events in town centre locations
- Exploring family-friendly attractions to encourage longer visitor stays
- Installing more public art and heritage interpretation
- Developing spaces for teenagers and young adults
- Supporting arts and cultural venues

The Town Council exercises the General Power of Competence which enables it to “do anything that an individual may do, provided it is not prohibited by law.” This allows the Council to act in support of local initiatives, including those that contribute to the vibrancy and success of local businesses—within the limits of its resources.

The Committee is invited to consider establishing a framework for closer collaborative working with the Witney Chamber of Commerce, and to explore how the Town Council might assist in progressing the recommendations outlined in the survey report.

One option for consideration is the re-establishment of a Town Centre Forum, to be administered by Witney Town Council. This would serve as a successor/enhancement to the Town Centre Partnership, which is managed by West Oxfordshire District Council

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 - Positively, working with the Chamber on the issues in the survey would help promote economic inclusion, support diverse local businesses, and improve accessibility, especially if underrepresented groups are actively engaged. However, there is a risk that business-driven priorities may overshadow broader community needs.
- b) Biodiversity – Collaborative working could help ingrain environmentally sustainable practices, such as green infrastructure, reducing urban pollution, or enhancing green spaces. However, the council should be mindful there may be ecological impacts from decisions made.
- c) Crime & Disorder – A joint approach could focus on initiatives that improve public safety and community cohesion. Actions such as better street lighting, increased foot traffic in the town centre, support for local employment, and business-led community programmes could help deter anti-social behaviour and reduce crime. However, underlying social issues or not ensuring equitable access to improvements may leave certain areas or groups may feel neglected, potentially contributing to feelings of exclusion.

- d) Environment & Climate Emergency – If partnership work promotes green business practices, low-carbon transport, energy efficiency, waste reduction, and protection of green spaces, it can contribute positively to the Council’s environmental objectives.

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 a reputational risk if the Council does not collaboratively work with the Chamber of Commerce for the benefit of the town, its residents and businesses.

The Council’s Committees have competing demands on the overall Council budgets; additional resources to any projects must be considered to reduce any financial risk.

Social Value

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

As with the town council’s own survey, listening to residents’ feedback delivers significant social value by showing empowerment, inclusion, trust, and community wellbeing. In this instance it shows a commitment to improve the overall vibrancy of the town and its economy.

Financial implications

- There is no specific agreed budget for any actions resulting from this survey
- There will be a cost of officer resource for any actions resulting from this item
- Members should consider whether a budget needs to be recommended for any actions in budget-setting for the 2026-27 fiscal year.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and consider the following:

1. How the Council can work collaboratively with Witney Chamber of Commerce.
2. The re-establishment of a Town Centre forum, administered by Witney Town Council.