
Agenda Item:	Community Engagement Report
Meeting Date:	Monday, 15 September 2025
Contact Officer:	Communications & Community Engagement Officer

The purpose of this report is to inform Councillors about proposed projects, events and activities that will provide opportunities for engaging with the community.

Background

There has been much in the news recently and a direct approach to Witney Town Council from a member of the public about councils making a more visible statement of their heritage and national traditions, including the display of national and local flags. For many, flag-flying is seen as a visible symbol of pride, heritage and community identity and residents are increasingly looking to their councils to reflect these values.

Current Situation

While Witney Town Council already follows established protocols for ceremonial occasions, and frequently uses flags, there is now a wider expectation to embrace flag-flying more regularly as a way of celebrating shared traditions, national pride, celebration, or remembrance.

Brief ideas for the Council to find more occasions to display both civic and national pride are listed here and rounded out in **Appendix A** along with a general statement from Oxfordshire County Council to local councils about the approach they are taking to the current situation of spontaneous painting and placement of St George's flags.

Witney Town Council already does a lot to celebrate the town and its history and heritage and it should publicise that, while making additional plans to expand those activities, bearing in mind that anything that is added beyond what we do each year, will require a budget.

Ideas for WTC to support the desire to celebrate Englishness see full details (**Appendix A**)

- Flag flying and English identity heritage
- Best of English food
- Flying the Town Flag and other flags
- English Flag
- Union Flag/Jack

- Lighting up the Corn Exchange
- St George's Parade
- Corn Exchange St George themed offers
- St George Best Business Window
- Famous English Achievers
- Heritage Open Day - Street Names and Heritage
- Battle of Britain Day (see further details later in the report)

The Council's current flag-flying policy is attached as **Appendix B**

VJ Day 80 review

All feedback from the VJ Day 80 events was positive. People felt that it was respectful and marked the occasion in an appropriate way. The partnership with Witney and District Museum was very successful and the Cemetery Walks led by Sonia were greatly appreciated. A chance to see inside the chapel was also a hit with visitors.

The restoration of Arthur Titherington's bench and simple rededication ceremony and the decoration of this and the War memorials were well attended and valued by those came along.

SSE Priority Service Register

A representative from SSE has asked to attend the September meeting to highlight how the register works and who it is aimed at. It is a free service for vulnerable customers who may struggle without electricity during power cuts or planned outages when we are performing maintenance. Planned work, which may cause interruptions to supply, is likely to increase as work required to the UK's electricity networks to reach Net Zero takes place.

ASB at The Leys – Thames Valley Police Operation Just Update

Officers have been meeting regularly with a TVP stakeholder group concerning anti-social behaviour at West Oxon hotspots – The Leys and The Dell in Carterton. With funds available, TVP have suggested holding a 'Have a Go' day at the Leys in the first half of 2026 to facilitate several sports groups and other activities for young people to try out and potentially get involved in.

In addition, TVP are seeking other projects which would reduce ASB in these areas which may be able to be funded via this initiative.

Reception Community Window Policy Review

At this time annually, this Committee reviews the policy which follows this report.

Remaining Community Engagement Events & Requests for 2025

Battle of Britain 85th Anniversary – 15th September 2025 (and beyond)

This anniversary is not one the Town Council typically marks with large-scale activity. However, given it is a key milestone, and in keeping with the theme of celebrating all things British, which will be discussed at the Stronger Communities Committee that evening, we intend to mark the occasion by raising the Union Flag at the Town Hall, lighting the Corn Exchange in the evening, and sharing dedicated social media:

- Church Green Bombs Local History
- Memorial Stone Witney Aerodrome
- Local History
- WTC Commonwealth War Grave Commission commemoration walks at Tower Hill Cemetery Local History.

In light of the agenda item above, Members may like to consider including this date in the annual flag flying calendar.

International Car Free Day – 22nd September 2025

All online – plans are for a single, comprehensive post this year.

Witney Town Council Eco-Fair – Thursday 9th October 2025

Plans for this event are well underway and a press release will be issued shortly.

World Mental Health Day – Friday 10th October 2025

Officers intend to highlight this day. The Council's MHFA's will share something internally and will post some signposting groups on Social Media to help reach residents with a general support hub and other shared MH and Wellness items on SM.

80th Anniversary of the United Nations – Friday 24th October 2025

A suggestion has been received that the Council should celebrate this anniversary which is also International UN Day by way of a flag-raising and themed coffee morning with the following reasoning:

- It is the 80th Anniversary of the UN this year.
- It is an opportunity to celebrate women in leadership as the UN was championed and helped created by Eleanor Roosevelt.
- We have marked the end of WW2 with VE & VJ Day, considering making the Battle of Britain. These events marked those who sacrificed for peace. The UN Anniversary celebrates that peace.
- It is a chance to focus on peace building and, as we didn't mark Peacekeepers day, remember those who have served as Peacekeepers.
- We have a large peacebuilding/ex diplomatic community in Witney, and it would be a chance to involve them.
- Other local councils also mark this day - one being Chipping Norton who celebrate it each year.

Remembrance Sunday Museum Cemetery Walks – Sunday 9th November 2025

Following the successful Commonwealth graves guided walk, hosted by Witney Museum, they have requested to facilitate a further guided walk at Tower Hill on the afternoon of remembrance Sunday. Their suggestion is that this is a free event with donations provided to the Museum.

As they wanted to go ahead and advertise this and it is something the Council has allowed before, officers have agreed the walk, so long as it is after all the remembrance Sunday services but the Committee should decide on whether it is acceptable to ask for donations.

International Men's Day – Wednesday 19th November 2025

As in previous years, the Council will support this initiative by way of social media posts on the day and will share something in support of our male colleagues. The general themes for this are:

- Making a positive difference to the wellbeing and lives of men and boys
- Raising awareness and/or funds for [charities](#) supporting men and boys' wellbeing
- Promoting a positive conversation about men, manhood and masculinity
- Togetherness ("looking out for our mates" or "making time for old mates" or making time to make new mates" or "reaching out to mates who are finding it tough")

Witney in Orange – 25th November – 10th December 2025

A request has been received from a local organisation to see if the Council will support the United Nations initiative to turn the world orange in support of ending violence against women and girls. November 25th being Stop VAWG day and the 10th December being Human Rights Day.

At this stage, the request is in principle as the details have yet to be finalised but it could be akin to the Witney In Pink charity event and any funds the town council could provide. Please see the attached draft flier as **Appendix C**.

Members should note this is separate to **White Ribbon Day**, supported by the National Association of Local Councils and the town council on 25th November but should note the similar aim to raise awareness about preventing gender-based violence.

Christmas Light Switch On - Gallery Room – Friday 28th November 2025

This year we once again invited young carers for this event and have had a very positive response. We just need to risk assess numbers for safety and can then issue an invitation to a specific number of people.

"Thank you so much for getting in touch. This is such an amazing opportunity for our Young Carers and their families! It's always so wonderful when our young carers are recognised and offered experiences like this.

We would love to have some places for Be Free Young Carers and their family members. Many of our families often miss out on opportunities like this due to accessibility challenges, so this would be an incredible chance for them to spend quality time together and create lasting memories.

Please let me know how many spaces you are able to offer us and I will begin to fill them.

Thank you again!"

Mayors Carols Service - Friday 5th December 2025

The C&CEO has asked the church to stream this and publicise that those who cannot get there can watch from home accessibility as they did for civic VJ Day 80th Anniversary service.

Competitions

Christmas Card Competition 2025

This usually runs from September to the end of November and is due to be advertised shortly.

Citizen of the Year 2025

It is time to launch this now with a closing date at the end of December/beginning of January and a view to selecting a winner in early January. Councillors are encouraged to remind people to use the online form where possible to ensure that entries are received in good time and in a way that means they arrive directly to the right place and cannot be missed.

The guidance for submissions is as follows: <https://www.witney-tc.gov.uk/coy/#guidance>

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 – no direct implications but everyone should feel included in the celebrations of our heritage and sense of belonging in the town.
- b) Biodiversity
- c) Crime & Disorder – no direct implications.
- d) Environment & Climate Emergency– no direct implications, but a positive impact in terms of the Witney Town Council Eco-Fair.

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.

Offering the Gallery Room for the Christmas Switch on this year to young carers has been much appreciated.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and,

1. Consider how best the Town Council can celebrate English culture and Britishness.
2. Consider incorporating the anniversary of the Battle of Britain into the regular town council flag flying calendar
3. Consider whether the Town Council should celebrate the 80th Anniversary of the UN in the ways presented.
4. Consider the request from Witney Museum to ask for donations for a guided walk around Tower Hill cemetery on Remembrance Sunday.

5. Consider the request to help with turning Witney orange supporting stopping violence against women and girls.
6. Note the updates and potential presented engagement concerning, Witney VJ Day 80, the SSE Priority Register, ASB at The Leys, Car Free Day, WTC Eco-day, World Mental Health Day, International Men's Day, Christmas Lights switch-on, Mayor's Carol Service, Christmas Card competition and the Citizen of the Year launch.