
Agenda Item:	Third-Party Events Report
Meeting Date:	Monday, 17 November 2025
Contact Officer:	Venue & Events Officer

The purpose of this report is to update members on the Third-Party Events that have taken place on WTC land over the summer of 2025. This report comments on the comprehensive feedback report provided by Witney Music Festival.

Background

Witney Town Council facilitates a number of events throughout the year on council managed land such as The Leys, Burwell Recreation Ground and West Witney Playing Fields. Officers work with the organisers of these events to review their event plans to ensure; health and safety, licensing and legal compliance, protection from damage to our ground (through measures to limit damage and holding damage deposits) and to obtain their specific requirements for the grounds team to facilitate such as removing bollards for vehicle access etc.

Witney Town Council is also a partner of some of these events, including Witney Music Festival. Officers work in collaboration with the partner organisations by providing promotional support to help maximise the attendance of the event and to showcase the partnership between the council and the organisation.

Current Situation

Witney Music Festival (WMF)

Following a request from members at the previous meeting; Witney Music Festival have provided a comprehensive report providing feedback on this year's festival and looking ahead at plans for improvement going forward. The report includes key statistics from 2025, outlines how the festival met the partnership agreement obligations and planned improvements (including organisational structure, marketing and community engagement, potential grant sources etc.).

Thursday Night Partial Opening

The report also outlines the potential to explore opening the dance tent on the Thursday night to host a comedy evening. This proposal will help the festival increase footfall and income on

an evening they already occupy the field. Officers view this as potentially a strong move for the festival, with minimal impact to the Town Council – with a few considerations below.

- **Financial Potential** – Opening partially a day early is common practice across the festival industry to capitalise on the infrastructure already in place. Increased ticket sales, food and drink sales will have a positive impact on the festival's income. There is a risk that the extra day will operate at a loss due to increased staffing costs, however, that is to be considered by the festival before deciding to go ahead.
- **Cultural variety** – By adding a comedy evening to the program, it makes the festival a multi-arts event, not just music focused. This will appeal to a different audience demographic as the music festival, increasing the overall community reach of the festival.
- **Infrastructure** – Whilst operating a day early would make the most of the infrastructure in place, Officers would need to be satisfied that the Health and Safety plan of the festival considers the risk of a partially opened site. For example, out of bounds areas must be secured and the area opened to the public must be signed off as safe before opening.
- **Noise / Resident Disruption** – Noise levels should remain low due to the nature of the opening being just for comedy.

Officers are confident that this move will have a positive impact on the festival, without impacting the council financially. If the period occupying The Leys remains the same, there will be no additional subsidised let required to operate on the Thursday.

Partnership Agreement & Grant Funding

In the report provided, WMF outlined how they have met the obligations outlined in the partnership agreement which WTC and WMF entered into in February 2023.

Officers have maintained a good professional relationship with WMF over the last few years, working together to ensure a successful and safe event. Based on the 2025 event and the report provided, officers have no operational reason to suggest amendments to the partnership agreement and the grant amount that has been provided annually since 2023.

The annual grant outlined in the partnership agreement represents an investment in the local economy and community wellbeing. The event attracts significant visitor numbers (locally and nationally), generates income for local businesses, and enhances the town's cultural offering. It provides the local community with accessible top-quality entertainment, volunteering / working opportunities, and a platform for local artists to perform alongside nationally recognised names.

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 - All events should be equal and inclusive.
- b) Biodiversity - see below – environment and climate.
- c) Crime & Disorder - third party hirers should be including mitigation in their event plans.
- d) Environment & Climate Emergency - The Compliance & Environment Officer will be looking at third party hire, and the initiatives hirers should take in relation to these areas.

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.

The council already mitigates risk associated with working in partnership with WMF by outlining conditions and obligations within the partnership agreement. These include, requiring a mutually agreed safe event management plan ahead of the event each year and WMF providing the council with a damage deposit at the point of booking.

- **Event Viability:** Should WMF not be able to operate due to a lack of grant funding, WTC are not able to replace the event internally due to the high costs and organisational structure required, meaning the town would lose its only annual music festival.
- **Misuse or mismanagement of funds:** The festival organisers may not use the grant as intended, leading to poor accountability or non-delivery of outcomes. However, the likelihood of this risk is minimal and is mitigated by the partnership agreement itself, the in-depth report provided by WMF as well as regular contact with Officers in the planning phase of the event.
- **Economic Impact:** The report outlines the positive impact the festival has on the local economy. Withdrawing funding from the festival resulting in cancellation or scaling back will remove this positive impact on local businesses.
- **Reputation:** WTC and WMF are both publicly vocal about the partnership agreement and the event is largely popular with residents. The council could face negative publicity should the annual grant funding outlined be reduced or removed. Supporting the festival also poses its own reputational risk such as noise complaints, antisocial behaviour, litter etc. This risk is currently managed through thorough planning, monitoring of noise levels, security in place to deal with anti-social behaviour and a thorough clean up post-festival. Officers have not experienced litter being left on the leys post-event over the last few years and ground maintenance issues have been minimal with the risk managed by taking a damage deposit.

Social Value

Witney Music Festival delivers strong social value to the town by celebrating local culture, creativity, and community spirit. The event brings together residents of all ages to enjoy live music, arts, and family-friendly entertainment in a safe and welcoming environment. It provides a valuable platform for local musicians, performers, and traders to showcase their talents and businesses, supporting the area's creative economy.

Financial implications

- Witney Music Festival has received an annual grant of £10,000 since the partnership agreement in 2023.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and

1. Consider allowing the festival to partially open on the Thursday for a Comedy Night.
2. Consider recommending to the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee on the allocation of the partnership grant for the sum of £10,000 for the 2026 event.

Appendices

A – Witney Music Festival Report for 2025

B – Income & Expenditure

C – WMF & WTC Partnership Agreement