

WITNEY: PAST PRESENT & FUTURE WORKING PARTY



Agenda Item:	St George's Day Events 2026
Meeting Date:	Wednesday, 14 January 2026
Contact Officer:	Communications & Community Engagement Officer

The purpose of this report is to update Councillors on the progress of planning events to celebrate St George's Day on 23rd April and Armed Forces Day in June 2026. The aim is to create a simple yet impactful celebration, comprising multiple smaller activities and contributions from local groups, organisations, and businesses. The intention is for these events to be repeatable each year, with minor adjustments as needed. While 2026 presents challenges in terms of location and timing, this year provides an opportunity to establish the framework and refine the approach for future celebrations.

Current Situation

Location and Date

The proposed focus is on a small, impactful event for the Market Square and Corn Exchange on Thursday 23rd April. Several logistical challenges need to be considered:

- Market Day means that the market stalls will not clear until at least 5:00 pm, limiting early access to the Square. This would limit the event to operating somewhere between 6:30 and 9:pm
- There is a long-standing booking for the Main Hall and Gallery Room of the Corn Exchange throughout the week for Buttercross Theatre, including all day on 23rd April.

These factors make it difficult to plan a Market Square-focused event that is weatherproof and flexible enough to move if rain or high winds are forecast.

Local Organisations and Businesses

Local organisations are being considered for involvement in the event:

- **Air and Army Cadets.** They can propose involvement for St George's Day if they wish to offer something on that date. *They have been written to and invited to use The Leys on Armed Forces Day for an activity of their choice.*
- **NHS** – The Council wishes to acknowledge their contribution; clarification is needed on whether this should extend to Police and Fire & Rescue services or focus solely on the NHS. Consideration needs to be given as to HOW they will be acknowledged.

- **Town Crier** has been written to – Invited to make an official cry during the event.
- **Sonia and the Museum** – Has been written to -to ascertain interest and invited to the 14th January meeting. Potential activity: Representative leading a St George's Day walk, with WTC support in providing refreshments at the 1863 Café afterwards.
- **Witney Town FC** – have been written to and invited to attend the 14th January meeting to discuss a football tournament challenge.
- **Twinned Towns** – Will be written to and invited, along with other local teams, if the football tournament idea is adopted.
- **Scouts** – have been written to -Invited to lead a litter pick; consideration needed on how the Council can support this activity.
- **Town Band** – have been written to and invited to perform; date and location to be confirmed.
- **Local businesses** – Plan to publicise to businesses via the Chamber of Commerce and social media, a "Best St George's Day window" competition.
- **Conroy Collective singers (formerly WOAPA)** have been written to and invited to perform; date and location to be confirmed.
- **Cllr Aitman** – To be contacted regarding the possibility of a post box topper by her associated group.

Additional Event Ideas and Flexibility

A range of activities could be considered that do not rely solely on the Market Square or Corn Exchange, allowing greater flexibility in planning and participation:

- 1863-themed menu and drinks – An afternoon tea could be offered, though it's likely to be very difficult due to the Buttercross Theatre booking in the Corn Exchange.
- Pub quiz – A remote quiz featuring "best guess" questions that cannot easily be cheated on. This could be circulated to pubs, care homes, and other interested organisations to encourage wider community involvement.
- St George's Day community window – A themed display running for a week, with local businesses decorating windows to celebrate the day. Large, illuminated dragon and knight
- Dragon Hunt – Businesses could participate by hosting a Dragon Hunt in their windows, engaging the public and encouraging footfall.
- Flag raising – A ceremonial flag raising will form a central, symbolic part of the celebrations along with bunting in areas where activity is taking place.

These ideas aim to spread participation across the town, engage local businesses and groups, and create a celebration that is adaptable and repeatable in future years.

Burwell Hall is available all day on 23rd April, all day on Saturday 25th and until early evening on Sunday 26th.

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 proposed projects and events aim to be inclusive and accessible to all residents, supporting equal participation across the community.

b) Biodiversity –

No direct impact on biodiversity is anticipated from these activities. Outdoor events will continue to use existing green spaces responsibly.

c) Crime & Disorder –

Community events and engagement activities promote civic pride and positive social interaction, contributing to a reduction in anti-social behaviour.

d) Environment & Climate Emergency –

Events and communications will consider environmental impact, minimising waste and promoting sustainable practices in line with the Council's Climate Emergency declaration.

Risk

Councillors should note potential risks relating to event management. Key risks include adverse weather affecting outdoor activities in the Market Square, timing conflicts with existing bookings at the Corn Exchange, and logistical challenges coordinating multiple groups and activities. Contingency plans will be required to ensure the event can proceed safely and effectively. Moving the celebrations to a day at the weekend might be sensible

Social Value

The event has the potential to strengthen community engagement by bringing together local groups, organisations, and businesses, building a sense of pride and belonging. It will also provide opportunities to celebrate public services such as the NHS, Armed Forces, and emergency services, while encouraging local participation and collaboration.

Financial Implications

All activities will be delivered within existing budgets. (£1500) Event costs and officer time will be managed to ensure best value for the community.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and:

1. Consider the updates provided and alternative events.
2. Consider alternative dates and locations.
3. Support continued collaboration with community groups such as Witney Town Band and Witney Food and Drink Festival to enhance engagement opportunities.