

WITNEY: PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE WORKING PARTY



Agenda Item: Terms of Reference Progress Review

Meeting Date: Wednesday, 18th February 2026

Contact Officer: Deputy Town Clerk

The purpose of this report is to invite Members of the Working Party to consider progress on the objectives of this Working Party.

Background

The terms of reference for the Working Party were agreed at its initial meeting on 13 November 2025 with the following purpose and objectives:

The purpose of this Working Party is to redefine and strengthen how Witney Town Council promotes Witney's identity locally within Oxfordshire, nationally within England and Great Britain (UK), by exploring and celebrating the town's character, heritage, and cultural significance. The Working Party will:

1. **Identify and articulate Witney's distinct identity;** its history, values, traditions, and contemporary character and how these can be expressed.
2. **Consider how to position Witney within wider contexts,** highlighting its role and relevance at county (Oxfordshire), national (England and Great Britain) level.
3. **Explore and develop initiatives that celebrate Britishness and national pride,** ensuring that local expressions of identity contribute to and reflect broader cultural narratives.
4. **Promote and celebrate culture in all its forms,** including heritage, arts, community life, and civic pride, to foster a shared sense of belonging and recognition for all residents, irrespective of their background or ethnicity.
5. **Encourage community engagement and collaboration,** ensuring that the redefinition of Witney's identity reflects the voices and aspirations of all residents, businesses, and institutions.

Current Situation

This Working Party is asked to consider progress on these objectives and to report to Witney Town Council.

1. **How can Witney Town Council express Witney's history, values, traditions, and contemporary character?**
 - Flying the Witney town crest from the Town Hall (daily apart from other designated flag flying days). Promotion on social media and in the Council's reception window (agreed)
 - Heritage Open Days. September 2026 event re: local history with Museum (agreed)

- May Fair, Witney Carnival, Witney Feast
- Remembrance Day and Citizen of the Year Awards
- Official ceremonial events

2. How can Witney Town Council highlight Witney's role and relevance at county (Oxfordshire), national (England and Great Britain) level?

- Fly the Oxfordshire flag on Oxfordshire Day and Historic Counties Day (agreed)
- Fly the Union flag on designated days to maintain significance (agreed)
- Fly England flag for St George's Day and other key sporting events for national sporting occasions (agreed)
- Fly the Council of Europe flag, Commonwealth Flag, UN flag on relevant anniversary dates
- Fly the refugee flag on World Refugee Day (agreed)
- Support for national campaigns

3. How can Witney Town Council develop initiatives that celebrate Britishness and national pride, ensuring that local expressions of identity contribute to and reflect broader cultural narratives?

- Celebrate national occasions of pride:
 - Observe and welcome Union flag-flying days at the Town Hall (agreed)
 - Battle of Britain Day, VE & VJ Days, Armistice Day – Union Flag raising (agreed)
 - St George's Day – an event to celebrate England and its valued institutions (agreed)
 - Armed Forces Day – an event at The Leys to pay tribute to our local and national armed forces groups (agreed)
 - Fly the NHS flag on its anniversary date, marking its national importance (agreed)

4. How can Witney Town Council promote and celebrate culture in all its forms, including heritage, arts, community life, and civic pride, to foster a shared sense of belonging and recognition for all residents, irrespective of their background or ethnicity?

- Meeting diverse needs
 - An inclusive and diverse Youth Council
 - Play Days & Advent Fayre – providing free family fun regardless of income
 - Community Voices Panel
 - Support for Witney Pride
 - Marking Windrush Day
 - Community Grants and support

5. How can Witney Town Council encourage community engagement and collaboration, ensuring that the redefinition of Witney's identity reflects the voices and aspirations of all residents, businesses, and institutions?

See above for some items relating to this question.

The Working Party should review the questions outlined above, offer direction on the proposed responses, and begin formulating draft statements for potential adoption by Witney Town Council as its position on these issues.

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 – Celebrating British values can enhance equality by promoting shared fairness, respect, and participation. However, without inclusive engagement, there is a risk of exclusion or alienation for minority groups. The Council must ensure that “British values” are understood as inclusive civic values that belong to everyone who calls Witney and the UK their home.
- b) Crime & Disorder – If implemented responsibly, the celebration of British values is likely to have a positive impact on crime and disorder, strengthening civic pride and shared responsibility for safety. However, without inclusive planning and pro-active management, there is a minimal risk of social tension or antisocial behaviour.
- c) Environment & Climate Emergency – Celebrating British values in Witney can have both positive and negative environmental impacts, depending on how events are organised and the sustainability of their offering.

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.

- Celebrating British values in Witney carries low to moderate risks when planned inclusively and transparently. Challenges arise around perception, inclusion, and community cohesion. However, these risks can be effectively mitigated allowing the celebration to deliver strong social, educational, and civic benefits.

Social Value

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

Celebrating British values in Witney could create social value by promoting unity, understanding, and civic pride/participation. When inclusive and sensitive, they help strengthen local identity, enhance wellbeing, and builds trust between communities. The key to maximising social value is in ensuring that any celebrations reflect the diversity, equality, and shared aspirations of residents.

Financial implications

- There are no financial implications at this point.
- Any additional events beyond the Council's current events calendar will need additional resources.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and:

1. Consider progress against the purpose and objectives of the Working Party as set out in its agreed terms of reference.
2. Recommend any further actions and draft stance to be considered by Witney Town Council.