

**STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE
WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL**

Held on Monday, 26 January 2026

At 6.00 pm in the Gallery Room, The Corn Exchange, Witney

Present:

Councillor T Ashby (Chair)

Councillors:	R Smith	D Enright
	G Meadows	A Mubin
	A Bailey	J Treloar
	D Edwards-Hughes	
Officers:	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
	Derek Mackenzie	Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk
	Mark Lewis	Head of Estates & Operations
Others:	3 members of the public.	

SC39 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

SC40 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members or officers.

SC41 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Stronger Communities committee held on 17 November 2025 were received.

SC659 – The Deputy Town Clerk reported that the Town Council had been notified of its successful application for a £1,000 Community Resilience Grant towards the replacement bus shelter at Oxford Hill.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Stronger Communities Committee meeting held on 17 November 2025 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the Chair.

SC42 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Committee adjourned for this item.

The Committee received representations from a resident of Farmers Close, Witney, who spoke in support of the installation of a bollard under agenda item 11, and from a representative of the Oxford for Europe Group, who attended in relation to agenda item 6.

The Committee reconvened.

SC43 REQUEST TO INSTALL BOLLARD - FARMERS CLOSE

With the permission of the Chair, this item was raised up the agenda.

The Committee received and considered the report of the Head of Estates & Operations concerning the installation of a bollard at Farmers Close, Witney.

Members welcomed the request, noting that it would provide greater protection to well-used amenity land in the Council's ownership from existing maintenance budgets. They were satisfied that the proposed improvement would not impede pedestrians and that the path would remain accessible for bicycles, mobility aids and the Council's grounds maintenance equipment.

Officers advised that installation would be subject to approval from Oxfordshire County Council and the emergency services.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the installation of a bollard in the area presented at Farmers Close in the report be agreed, subject to the necessary permissions being granted.

Cllr D Edward-Hughes briefly left the meeting from 6:41 to 6:44pm during the next item.

SC44 COMMUNICATIONS REPORT

The Committee received and considered the report from the Communications & Community Engagement Officer (C&CEO).

Members agreed that the residents' communication preferences survey and the annual satisfaction survey should be included in the spring newsletter, and that a quotation be sought from a local leaflet delivery company to improve delivery across Witney.

Updates were received on the Council's website, including performance improvements, potential streamlining of the biodiversity page, and proposed updates to the Youth Council page.

The Committee agreed that the Councillors @ The Café initiative remained an effective engagement activity aligned with Council strategies and should continue with increased Councillor involvement. Current press coverage, provided as an appendix, was noted.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and
2. That, the communications preference survey be included in the annual newsletter and,
3. That, a further quote be sought for local delivery of the annual newsletter and,
4. That, Councillors @ The Café should continue on the first Saturday of each month and,
5. That, the updates on the website and press coverage be noted.

SC45 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT

The Committee received and considered the report of the Communications & Community Engagement Officer (C&CEO).

Members received an update on the Witney: Past, Present and Future Working Party, together with the notes of the previous meeting. The Committee noted some apprehension expressed by young people about the event and reiterated its intention for the event to be celebratory and inclusive, per what was being planned.

Further updates were provided on engagement for the Advent Fayre in November, Witney Carnival 2026 and Heritage Open Day.

It was agreed that the Council should facilitate SEND sessions at this year's Advent Fayre, retain the wheelbarrow competition at the Carnival with the necessary resources in place, and mark Heritage Open Day in collaboration with local heritage contacts. A wider Visit Witney project was also noted.

Finally, the Committee considered a request to fly the Council of Europe flag annually in May from the Town Hall. The request was assessed against the Council's flag-flying criteria and, subject to the flag being donated and no planning legislation being contravened, the Committee agreed that the flag could be flown.

The Committee also noted the Community Insight Profile Steering Group notes from 2 December 2025 which were appended to the report.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the proposed small-scale, family friendly format for St George's Day events, with activities split across 23rd and 26th April 2026, be approved and,
3. That, the introduction of dedicated SEND friendly sessions at future Advent Fayres be approved and,
4. That, the success of the Christmas Lights Engagement event in the Gallery Room be noted and use by the ICE Centre in 2026 be approved, subject to capacity and,
5. That, the Schools in Bloom wheelbarrow competition be judged at Witney Carnival, subject to officers being delegated responsibility for agreeing a pragmatic solution for storage and staff facilitation and,
6. That, officers develop a low-cost partnership event for Heritage Open Days 2026, working with local heritage partners and,
7. That, the Council of Europe flag be flown from the Town Hall annually, subject to its donation and appropriate planning consent, if required.

SC46 WITNEY: PAST PRESENT & FUTURE WORKING PARTY

The Committee received and considered the notes of the meeting held on 14 January 2026.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the meeting held on 14 January be noted and the recommendations therein approved.

SC47 **IN BLOOM**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Communications & Community Engagement Officer (C&CEO).

It was confirmed that the Council would not be entering the Thames in Chiltern Bloom competition in 2026 as resources would be diverted to improving Unterhaching Park and preparing it for future planting.

In relation to the Schools in Bloom wheelbarrows, the Committee was presented with theme options for this year's challenge and invited to nominate an organisation to be offered a guest wheelbarrow, in line with recent practice.

The Committee also discussed community gardening and schools' vouchers. It was agreed that schools should be asked to retain receipts for purchased items. Community gardening groups would be asked to identify any items required, with vouchers issued only where items could not be sourced through the Council's suppliers. As a new garden bed, it was agreed that the Queen Emma's Community Garden group should be provided with a £50 voucher to support its establishment.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the decision not to enter Thames & Chiltern in Bloom be agreed and,
3. That, Yellow Submarine be invited to be the guest wheelbarrow organisation for the In Bloom Challenge 2026 and,
4. That, the theme for Schools in Bloom challenge for 2026 be Sensory Wheelbarrows (plants to stimulate the senses) and,
5. That, the voucher arrangements for community gardens and schools as presented in the report be approved.

SC48 **WITNEY YOUTH COUNCIL**

The Committee received the report of the Administrative Assistant – Communications & Engagement, which provided an update on their recent activities and notes of their meeting held on 8th January 2026.

Details were provided on meeting frequency, discussions, daily school slides, elected roles, a visit to the House of Commons and an event – A Taste of Witney which the group were planning to run in the spring.

Members welcomed the updates but expressed disappointment that a visit to Parliament was proving difficult to arrange. It was suggested that the Council could also consider informal engagement events hosted by the Youth Council, such as the recent Pizza and Politics evening in Witney, which was oversubscribed and well attended by young people.

Resolved:

1. That, the updates and notes of the Youth Council be noted and,
2. That, consideration be given to future informal engagement events.

*During the Following item Cllr J Treloar left the meeting briefly between 7:11pm and 7:13pm
Cllr A Bailey left the meeting between 7:17 pm and 7:20pm*

SC49 YOUTH SERVICES

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk on youth services in Witney and matters currently being addressed by the Town Council.

Members discussed the Youth Services Grant Scheme, as requested by the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee, and agreed that the criteria and timeframe should remain unchanged.

Updates were received on The Station detached youth group, the West Oxfordshire Youth Partnership, and youth club provision in Witney. Members agreed that youth clubs were needed but noted that the Town Council did not have the budget to support them directly. It was acknowledged that other stakeholders and existing groups, including uniformed organisations, already provided a mosaic of youth activities, and that further work should be informed by the Youth Needs Assessment.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the Youth Services grant and previous timeframes remain the same for the 2026 awards and,
3. That, the updates on Youth Club provision, The Station and the West Oxfordshire Youth Partnership be noted.

SC50 TOWN CENTRE FORUM

The Committee received an update on the Forum and delay in the process of holding the first meeting. Invitations had been sent to relevant stakeholders asking for their nominations to the group.

Members welcomed the update and expressed their enthusiasm to take forward this collaborative opportunity.

Resolved:

That, the update on the progress of the Town Centre Forum be noted.

SC51 MARKET SQUARE SEATING

The Committee received and considered correspondence from West Oxfordshire District Council concerning the installation of seating in the High Street, Witney.

Members were advised that the proposal had been under consideration at District Council level for some time and would be funded from a specified grant and was therefore entirely separate from the County Council's Witney High Street refurbishment project.

Concerns were raised regarding the ongoing cleaning, maintenance and suitability of the proposed circular benches around trees at the location. Instead, Members agreed that the Council would take on ownership and future maintenance only if two or more Eastgate benches were installed in the area.

Recommended:

1. That, the correspondence from West Oxfordshire District Council be noted and,

2. That approval be given for the Town Council to take on responsibility and future maintenance of two or more Eastgate benches in the High Street area, as presented, with the cost of installation being met by the District Council.

SC52 **BIKE RACKS & BIN STORES**

The Committee received and considered correspondence from West Oxfordshire District Council concerning a request to remove bike racks to allow the installation of a bin store in Market Square, Witney.

Members supported the proposal, noting that it would improve the appearance of this area of Market Square, but confirmed that the Council would not take on responsibility for bin store maintenance. In response, it was agreed that all cycle racks removed, together with additional racks, should be relocated elsewhere in the town centre, with all costs met by the District Council.

Recommended:

1. That, the correspondence be noted and,
2. That, approval be given for the removal of the cycle racks at the proposed location, subject to the same number (or more) being relocated within the town centre, with costs and any necessary pavement repairs funded by West Oxfordshire District Council as part of this scheme.

SC53 **WITNEY TOWN CENTRE IMPROVEMENTS - DISCUSSION ON POTENTIAL PROJECTS TO UTILISE S106 DEVELOPER FUNDING**

The Committee received and considered correspondence from the Infrastructure Delivery Team at West Oxfordshire District Council concerning unspent Section 106 developer funding for town centre improvements.

Members were advised that a proportion of the funding had been allocated to two other District Council projects, including wayfinding, which was agreed to be a high priority. Members expressed disappointment that the request had been received now, with funding needing to be spent by the end of autumn, making forward planning difficult, particularly given the lack of an agreed plan for the County Council's forthcoming High Street refurbishment.

There was no clarity on the town centre limits or the remaining funding available, but several options were discussed, including a bandstand, arts trail, additional High Street seating and benches incorporating public art. However, Members agreed that the preferred option was the creation of a parklet in the parking area to the north of Witney's War Memorial, noting that this had been considered previously but deemed too costly within earlier budgets.

Recommended:

1. That, the correspondence be noted and,
2. That, the town centre limits and approximate amount of remaining funding be clarified and,
3. That, a parklet on Market Square in front of the war memorial be proposed.

The meeting closed at: 7.57 pm

Chair