
Agenda Item:	Community Engagement Report
Meeting Date:	Monday, 21 st September 2026
Contact Officer:	Communications and Community Engagement Officer

The purpose of this report is to update councillors on various community engagement matters.

Current Situation

This is the second report of the new financial year.

Heritage Open Day wash up- LIVES IN STONE

Staffing levels were appropriate, ensuring that there was no lone working and that individual staff were not left responsible for historic items without support. The Works Team were also able to assist with the transportation of larger and more difficult items, which was particularly helpful during the set-up and clear-down.

One area identified for improvement is the labelling of displays. While staff were available to provide additional information, not all items were individually labelled. Going forward, non-self-explanatory items will be labelled to enhance the visitor experience.

The event required a significant amount of preparation, but the positive response from visitors indicated that this was worthwhile. Staff also enjoyed being involved in the event. The Friday evening and Saturday timings appeared to help reach people who would normally be at work, with several visitors commenting on this, while another described it as a lovely opportunity to find the event during an evening walk. A number of local residents also attended who had never previously seen inside the chapel and particularly appreciated the opportunity to do so.

Christmas Competitions, Sponsorship & Engagement

The Council's Christmas activities are progressing. The Christmas light competition winner has been selected, and the winning design is currently under construction. The Christmas card competition is being issued this week to the same groups as the light and an invitation has been sent to local care homes inviting them to provide illustrations to feature on the cover of the Mayor's Christmas carol sheet.

The Witney Ice Centre has also been invited to view the Christmas Light Switch-On from the Gallery Room. The Town Council will provide an activity, decorations, and refreshments. The evening will be supervised by the Ice Centre's own staff.

Christmas tree sponsorship has now been taken on by the team reporting to the Stronger Communities Committee. Information has been provided in response to an enquiry from a local organisation interested in sponsoring one of the trees, and a wider sponsorship campaign will begin from 28 September.

Eco Fair

Witney's Eco Fair will take place on Thursday 24 September, from 2pm to 6pm at the Corn Exchange. The event will bring together local businesses, charities, and community groups to share practical ideas and solutions for living more sustainably.

Visitors will be able to find advice on recycling and waste reduction, saving energy at home, active travel, and greener transport, caring for the countryside, supporting local wildlife and community environmental campaigns. The event organised, by the Administrative Support Assistant Communities and Planning officer will also highlight practical ways residents can live more sustainably while potentially saving money in their everyday lives.

World Mental Health Day

World Mental Health Day takes place on 10 October. This year, it is proposed that the council promotes the World Mental Health Day organisations resources focusing on managing the impact of social media and negative news, including advice on reducing social media use, avoiding doomscrolling, and coping with feelings of overwhelm in an increasingly unstable world and in the face of relentless negative news. **(Appendix A i and ii)**

These resources will be shared through the Council's noticeboards and social media channels, as well as on table cards at the café in 1863.

Internally, activities will also be arranged for staff and Councillors to support awareness and wellbeing.

Citizen of the Year 2026

It is now time to launch this year's Citizen Awards, with nominations opening shortly. This year, a new Best Allotment category will be introduced, recognising the contribution of allotment holders and aligning with the Council's green initiatives and Climate Action Plan, including the benefits of growing and producing food locally.

Officers would also like to encourage nominations for the Young Citizen category, which received no nominations last year. To help identify suitable candidates, it is proposed that the Council contacts local organisations, including The Station, Yellow Submarine and Aspire, inviting them to nominate a young person who has achieved something notable, demonstrated leadership, or made a positive contribution through a project, activity, or creative achievement.

Big Lunch -Sat 5/Sun 6 June 2027

Planning and budgeting would now need to begin for a Big Lunch event, should Councillors wish to support one. As noted in a previous report, holding the event in June falls during a particularly busy period for the Council, and officers do not have capacity to deliver this as a Council-led event.

An alternative would be to support a local organisation to deliver the event using grant funding, while coordinating some existing Council activities to take place on the same day. This could create a larger, well-resourced community event without requiring the Council to take on responsibility for delivering the whole programme.

A potential venue would be The Leys, providing space for families to picnic and for a range of activities to take place. It falls outside of the football season.

Possible elements could include a performance by the Town Band, with the Council's usual Play Day either moved to coincide with the event or an additional Play Day funded through the Community Grant (£1000). The Station could also be invited to attend with its hot chocolate milk float.

There may also be opportunities to work in partnership with Courtside, for example they might offer free mini golf, picnic hampers, or a special menu such as pizzas, and potentially performances from their buskers.

Further discussions would be needed with potential partners to establish what could be offered and the associated costs. Officers recommend this takes place on one of the days over that weekend but not both.

Bunting

Officers have explored costing and design for lengths of town council bunting, and these are included in **Appendix B**.

Separately, earlier this year the Town Council was able to support students at the Blake C of E Primary school who were exploring the meaning and history of the Town Crest and then used their learning to produce a modern version that reflects a modern take on the heritage and identifiable parts of the town and businesses and sports teams that are special to them and Witney such as The Shake Shop! These are available at the meeting for members to see.

Officers feel it would be a nice gesture to create a small length of bunting with each of their crests on. There are twenty of them, and this would cost just under £50

Corporate Strategy

The Council's Strategic Plan 2025–29 sets out the Council's long-term priorities and direction, supporting its mission to 'make Witney a great place to live, work and visit.' This report contributes to the delivery of the following strategic pillar of the plan:

2. An Engaged & Supported Community

The activities outlined in this report support community engagement, participation and access to Council activities and information, while also providing opportunities to work with local organisations, schools, and community groups.

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 – The activities outlined in this report seek to provide inclusive opportunities for residents to participate in Council activities and access information in different ways. The Christmas competitions, Citizen Awards, Heritage Open Day and proposed Big Lunch provide opportunities for engagement across different age groups and communities. World Mental Health Day resources will also provide accessible information on wellbeing.

b) Biodiversity – No significant direct impact on biodiversity is anticipated from the activities proposed. The introduction of a Best Allotment category also supports awareness of local food growing and the benefits of allotment gardening.

c) Crime & Disorder – No significant direct impact is anticipated. Community events and engagement activities provide opportunities for positive social interaction and community participation.

d) Environment & Climate Emergency – Environmental considerations will be incorporated into relevant activities. The Eco Fair promotes practical ways for residents to reduce waste, save energy and adopt more sustainable forms of transport. The Best Allotment category also supports the Council's green initiatives and Climate Action Plan.

Risk

The principal risks relate to the availability of officer resources, event delivery, weather conditions for outdoor activities and the ability to secure appropriate partners or funding. These will be considered as individual activities progress, with appropriate risk assessments undertaken where required. For the proposed Big Lunch, working in partnership with another organisation would reduce the requirement for the Council to lead and resource the whole event.

Social Value

The activities outlined in this report provide opportunities to strengthen community connections, encourage participation, and support local organisations and community groups. Events such as the Heritage Open Day and proposed Big Lunch can bring residents together, while initiatives such as the Citizen Awards and Christmas competitions recognise and celebrate contributions made by individuals and community organisations. Partnership working also provides opportunities for local businesses, charities, schools, and community groups to contribute to Council-led activities.

Financial implications

The activities outlined in this report have varying financial implications.

- The proposed Big Lunch would require consideration of grant funding of up to £1,000 if an additional Play Day were supported through the Community Grant scheme, alongside any other costs associated with the event.
- The cost of 80 metres of town bunting varies between £252 and £720
- The cost of producing the proposed bunting featuring the 20 Blake School students' designs would be just under £50.

Other activities will be delivered within existing budgets where possible. Any expenditure associated with future events, activities or partnerships will be considered through the appropriate budget-setting or approval process.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and;

1. Note the update on current and forthcoming community engagement activities.
2. Consider whether to support planning for a Big Lunch event in June 2027, including the proposed partnership approach and potential use of Community Grant funding.
3. Choose a preferred style of bunting and decide which supplier to use.
4. Consider the proposal to purchase a length of bunting featuring the 20 Blake School students' designs, at a cost of just under £50.