STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL

Held on Monday, 21 September 2026

At 6.02 pm in the Gallery Room, The Corn Exchange, Witney

Present:

Councillor G Meadows (Vice-Chair, in the Chair)

Councillors:	D Enright	R Crouch (In place of A Bailey)
	S Simpson	J Treloar (In place of J Doughty)
	R Smith	
Officers:	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
	Derek Mackenzie	Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk
	Annie Hathaway	Admin Assistant - Communications & Engagement
	Polly Inness	Communications & Community Engagement Officer
	Nigel Warner	Responsible Financial Officer
Others:	One member of the public.	

SC449 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A Bailey & J Doughty, Councillors R Crouch and J Treloar attended as substitutes respectively.

Apologies for absence were also received from Councillors A Mubin & T Ashby.

SC450 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest from Members.

SC451 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Stronger Communities committee held on 15 June 2026 were received.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Stronger Communities committee held on 15 June 2026 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the chair.

SC452 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

The Committee adjourned for this item.

The committee received representations from a resident of Kingfisher Meadows concerning Agenda Item 15 (Burford Road – Replacement Bus Shelter Request)

The Committee reconvened.

SC453 **BURFORD ROAD - REPLACEMENT BUS SHELTER REQUEST**

With the permission of the Chair, this item was moved up the agenda so the member of public could hear the discussion and outcome.

The Committee considered a request relating to the replacement of the existing bus shelter on Burford Road to include a sedum roof and received an update from the Deputy Town Clerk regarding historic discussions on the asset and the possibility of potential funding opportunities from S106 monies. Members noted that similar shelters had recently been installed elsewhere at a cost of approximately £10,000.

Whilst recognising that further details and costings would be required before any final decision could be taken, Members were unanimously in support, in principle, for an upgraded shelter and agreed that opportunities for external funding should continue to be explored before any financial commitment was considered by the Council.

Recommended:

That, the replacement and upgrade of the Burford Road bus shelter be supported in principle, subject to funding opportunities and detailed costings being identified.

Cllr J Treloar left the meeting between 6:11pm and 6:14pm – and therefore did not participate in the vote regarding the replacement bus shelter.

SC454 **FINANCE REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) concerning the financial position of items under the remit of the Committee.

Members noted that expenditure remained broadly in line with expectations for this stage of the financial year and considered matters that may require inclusion within the forthcoming budget-setting process.

Members considered future infrastructure requirements including bus shelters, grit bins and street furniture. A Member raised the issue of future maintenance responsibilities arising from the High Street improvement works and emphasised that any future budget provision should relate to ongoing maintenance rather than capital replacement or enhancement works.

Members were reminded that Oxfordshire County Council would be expected to provide an appropriate commuted sum to support future maintenance when responsibility for street furniture was transferred to the Town Council. It was also noted that Oxfordshire County Council should continue to bear full responsibility for delivering and funding the proposed improvement scheme.

Members also discussed the annual provision for maintenance of the Church Clock and noted that this should continue within future budgets. It was further noted that any repair project would be considered separately through the work of the Project Officer.

In addition, Members discussed the RAF's forthcoming 50th Anniversary of the Freedom of Witney in 2027 and noted that provision may be required within future budgets to support commemorative activities associated with RAF Brize Norton. A budget of £750 was unanimously agreed to support the facilitation and refreshments for the celebrations.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and;
2. That, the management accounts for the period 1 April to 31 July 2026 be approved and;
3. That, a budget of £750 be considered within the 2027/28 budget process for the RAF 50th Anniversary of the Freedom of Witney.

The Responsible Financial Officer left the meeting at 6:20pm

SC455 **COMMUNICATIONS REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Communications & Community Engagement Officer.

Members considered the suggestion of developing a Town Council podcast as an additional communications channel. Whilst recognising the potential opportunities to promote Council activity and community initiatives, Members felt that podcasting generally achieved limited engagement for local authorities and that current officer resources would be better focused on existing communication methods. It was also observed that successful podcasts were often driven by individuals rather than institutions. Consequently, Members did not support progressing a podcast at this stage.

The Committee welcomed the revised format of the annual budget survey and agreed that a shorter and more accessible approach would encourage greater public participation. Members felt that asking residents to identify their key priorities would provide clearer feedback than requiring the ranking of multiple individual services.

Members also considered the proposed Town Guide and remained supportive of developing the publication as an additional communication tool. It was noted that one of the Committee's Terms of Reference was *"to oversee community engagement with all residents of Witney, relevant stakeholders and businesses"* and Members considered that the Town Guide would help fulfil that objective. Members welcomed the fact that the publication would be produced biennially, would not place a significant burden upon officer resources and would provide an additional opportunity to promote Council services, local businesses, visitor information and community organisations.

With regard to website accessibility, Members welcomed the considerable work already undertaken by officers to improve compliance and accessibility. They were satisfied that the current approach provided an appropriate level of assurance and agreed that it would not be necessary to subscribe to the proposed external monitoring service at the present time. Members expressed their appreciation to officers for the progress already achieved in improving accessibility across the Council's website.

The Committee discussed future arrangements for distribution of the Spring Newsletter and acknowledged that no delivery method had proven entirely reliable. Members discounted the use of Royal Mail, citing previous experience which suggested it had not been effective in reaching residents. Whilst recognising that hand-delivery was not without its limitations, Members considered it to be the most effective option currently available and were keen to continue supporting a local delivery company.

Members also considered options for the provision of lockable noticeboards at play areas and recreational facilities. The Committee welcomed the proposal and unanimously supported the fourth example presented within the report. It was noted that three boards would be required and that £1,500 should be included within future budget discussions to allow for their purchase.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted.
2. That, the revised budget survey be adopted;
3. That, development of the Town Guide continue;
4. That, hand delivery remains the preferred method for future newsletter distribution and;
5. That, provision of £1,500 be considered within the 2027/28 budget process for the installation of three lockable noticeboards.

SC456 **PRESS COVERAGE**

The Committee received details of recent press coverage relating to the activities of the Town Council.

Members welcomed the breadth of positive media coverage achieved during the reporting period and noted the continuing efforts of officers to promote Council services, community events and local initiatives.

Resolved:

That, the report be noted

SC457 **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Communications & Community Engagement Officer (C&CEO) which provided updates on Heritage Open Day, Christmas activities, the Eco Fair, World Mental Health Day and the forthcoming Citizen of the Year Awards.

The Committee was pleased to hear of the success of Heritage Open Day and noted the positive feedback received from residents regarding the opportunity to access local heritage sites, historic buildings and local heritage displays.

Members also welcomed proposals for World Mental Health Day and agreed that the promotion of resources relating to social media usage, doom-scrolling and personal wellbeing should proceed as outlined within the report.

Members noted that no nominations had been received for the Young Citizen of the Year category in either 2024 or 2025. The Committee agreed that councillors should actively promote

the award within their communities and that additional youth organisations should be contacted directly to encourage nominations to come forward.

In response to a Member's question regarding the Christmas Light Switch-On event, Officers advised that discussions between Witney Rotary Club and Oxfordshire County Council remained ongoing in relation to the potential impact of the High Street improvement works and it was hoped that no issues would arise affecting delivery of their event.

The Committee considered proposals relating to Town Council bunting and reviewed designs produced by pupils from Blake C of E Primary School. Members praised the quality and youthfulness of the work undertaken and felt that similar opportunities should be offered to all Witney primary schools. It was suggested that bunting produced by schools could be showcased within the Market Square and supported by an online gallery to celebrate the work of participating pupils. Members agreed that development of the wider schools' bunting initiative should be referred to the Witney: Past, Present & Future Working Party and that it be developed as a St George's Day activity for 2027, allowing completed bunting to be displayed in the Market Square as part of the celebrations.

Members also considered the procurement of Town Council bunting and expressed a preference for a modern design featuring both the Witney logo and the Town Council logo. It was agreed that two lengths of bunting be purchased at a cost of £374 per length.

The Committee discussed the possibility of a Big Lunch event in June 2027 and agreed that partnership working with local organisations represented the most practical method of delivery. Members welcomed the potential involvement of Courtside Hubs CIC and the Witney Town Band in any future event. Following discussion, a vote was taken on a proposal to support an additional Children's Play Day with a budget of £1,000 as part of the event. The proposal was carried with four votes in favour, no votes against and two abstentions.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted.
2. That, support be given to the development of a community-led Big Lunch event in June 2027 and;
3. That, provision of £1,000 be included within the 2027/28 budget process to support an additional Play Day associated with the event and;
4. That, officers proceed with the purchase of two 80 metre lengths of Town Council bunting at a cost of £374 per length and;
5. That, the development of a schools' bunting competition be referred to the Witney Past, Present & Future Working Party and;
6. That, councillors and officers actively promote the Young Citizen of the Year category and engage with youth organisations to encourage future nominations.

SC458 **WITNEY FORUM MINUTES**

Resolved:
The Committee received the minutes of the Witney Forum meeting held on 30 June 2026.

That, the minutes of the Witney Forum meeting held on 30 June 2026 be noted.

SC459 **WITNEY: PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE NOTES**

The Committee received the notes of the Witney: Past, Present & Future Working Party meetings held on 26 May and 15 July 2026 from the Chair of the Working Party.

Members noted the ongoing discussions regarding plans to mark the 50th Anniversary of the granting of the Freedom of Witney to RAF Brize Norton in 2027. It was recognised that early budget provision would assist the Venue & Events Officer with planning in support of the commemorative activities.

Members discussed the scale and significance of the occasion, noting that 2027 would also mark the 90th Anniversary of the establishment of RAF Brize Norton. It was agreed that an appropriate budget provision should be made to support the facilitation of the event and the provision of refreshments for participants and guests. A sum of £750 was unanimously supported for inclusion within the 2027/28 budget considerations.

Recommended:

1. That, the notes of the Working Party meetings be noted and;
2. That, provision of £750 be recommended for inclusion within the 2027/28 budget to support activities associated with the RAF's 50th Anniversary of the Freedom of Witney.

SC460 **YOUTH COUNCIL**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Administrative Assistant - Communities & Engagement together with the minutes of the Youth Council meeting held on 3 September 2026.

Members welcomed the continued enthusiasm shown by Youth Councillors and were pleased to note that two additional members had joined. It was further noted that the Annual General Meeting of the Youth Council would shortly take place, allowing members to elect office holders and review future priorities.

Members welcomed progress on the forthcoming "A Slice of Politics" event planned for 29 October and recognised it as a valuable opportunity for young people to engage with councillors and local decision makers. In considering the catering options presented, Members noted that the preferred option represented the best value for money.

The Committee also considered a request from the Youth Council to amend the upper age limit for membership. Members recognised the importance of retaining young people whilst they completed post-16 education and discussed a number of options, including the creation of a mentoring role for former members. During discussion, concerns were raised regarding safeguarding responsibilities, accountability and the potential requirement for safeguarding training should a formal mentoring arrangement be introduced. Following consideration of the options presented, Members unanimously agreed that Youth Council members should be permitted to retain their position until the end of the academic year in which they reach the age of 18, allowing continued membership whilst undertaking full-time education and therefore providing a practical upper age limit of 19.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and;

2. That, Business 1 be approved as the supplier for refreshments for the "A Slice of Politics" event at a cost of £75 and;
3. That, Youth Council members be permitted to retain their position until the end of the academic year in which they reach the age of 18, allowing continued membership whilst in full-time education and therefore providing a practical upper age limit of 19 and;
4. That, no formal mentoring category be introduced and;
5. That, the minutes of the Youth Council meeting held on 3 September 2026 be noted.

Cllr R Crouch left the meeting between 7:13pm and 7:16pm.

SC461 **YOUTH SERVICES UPDATE**

The Committee received and considered the report along with a verbal update from the Deputy Town Clerk concerning youth services within Witney.

Members noted that all 2026/27 Youth Services Grant agreements had been completed and that a sum of £3,500 remained ringfenced for any further youth related grant applications. Members also noted that monitoring reports had been requested from previous grant recipients so that they may be assessed as part of the grant monitoring arrangements.

Members welcomed an interim update provided on the work of The Station Detached Youth Service. The Deputy Town Clerk provided a verbal update outlining the significant success of the converted milk float project, which had substantially increased engagement with young people across the town. It was noted that detached youth sessions which had previously engaged with around ten young people were now regularly engaging with between fifty and eighty young people, with one recent session attracting 112 young people. Members were also pleased to hear that the mentoring programme continued to perform well and noted that the next stage of development would be the creation of a youth café run by young people for young people.

The Committee was pleased to note the reduction in anti-social behaviour at The Leys during the summer period and welcomed the positive outcomes reported through Thames Valley Police's Operation Just. It was also suggested that the opening of Courtside Hubs CIC had contributed positively by increasing the presence of users of the facilities creating a more active and supervised environment.

Members agreed that the services being provided continued to deliver significant social value and acknowledged the importance of maintaining support for youth-related initiatives through the budget-setting process. In considering future provision, Members supported the continuation of the Youth Services Grant Scheme, ongoing funding for Home-Start Oxford and the inflationary uplift required under the Service Level Agreement with The Station.

Members noted that no further information had been received from APCAM regarding the Mental Health Drop-In Sessions and agreed that consideration of future funding should be deferred pending receipt of this additional information.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted.
2. That, a budget of £20,000 be retained for the Youth Services Grant Scheme in 2027/28 and;
3. That, a budget of £12,000 be retained for Home-Start Oxford in 2027/28 and;

4. That, provision of £29,250, subject to inflation, be included within the 2027/28 budget for The Station Detached Youth Service and;
5. That, future provision for APCAM Mental Health Drop-In Sessions be considered once further information has been received.

SC462 **IN BLOOM**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Communications & Community Engagement Officer regarding In Bloom initiatives for 2027.

Members welcomed proposals marking the tenth anniversary of wheelbarrows being used for the Schools In Bloom Challenge and supported the continuation of existing arrangements which have proven successful in encouraging participation from schools and community groups. Members agreed that the existing Schools In Bloom voucher value of £40 remained appropriate and noted that compost would continue to be provided. Given the increasing cost of plants and gardening materials, Members unanimously supported an increase in Community Gardening vouchers to £75.

The Committee noted that the Town Council would not be submitting an entry to the Thames & Chiltern In Bloom Awards during 2027. Instead, efforts would be focused on continuing improvements to Unterhaching Park, including the introduction of additional features such as sensory gardening, woodland planting and other environmental enhancements with the aim of preparing the site for future entry. In response to a Members comment, officers would liaise with West Oxfordshire District Council regarding their proposals for a sensory style planting and landscaping within the green space at Marriotts Walk adjacent to Underhaching Park in order that they complement each other.

Members welcomed proposals for special tenth anniversary prizes and supported visits to Witney Lake & Country Park for schools, led by the Council's Green Spaces and biodiversity staff. It was felt that this would provide an enjoyable educational opportunity whilst helping to promote the facilities and environmental work taking place by the Council at the Country Park.

During discussion, Members considered possible themes for the anniversary challenge. Following several suggestions, it was agreed that the theme should simply be" The Number Ten", providing schools with maximum flexibility and encouraging creative interpretation by participants.

In considering future financial requirements, Members agreed that a budget provision of £4,200 be recommended for 2027/28. This would comprise funds to support the Schools In Bloom Challenge, awards and community gardening initiatives together with £2,200 earmarked for improvements at Unterhaching Park.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and;
2. That, Schools In Bloom vouchers remain at £40 and;
3. That, Community Gardening vouchers increase to £75 and;
4. That, the theme for the 2027 Schools In Bloom Challenge be "The Number Ten" and;
5. That, the proposed tenth anniversary prizes of visits to Witney Lake & Country Park be approved and;
6. That, a budget of £4,200 be included within the 2027/28 budget, including £2,200 for improvements to Unterhaching Park.

SC463 **WODC CONSULTATION - PROPOSED CONTROLS RELATING TO DOG FOULING**

The Committee Clerk provided a verbal update regarding the consultation that was undertaken by West Oxfordshire District Council on proposed Public Space Protection Order controls relating to dog fouling.

Members were reminded that the consultation document had been circulated to the Committee during the consultation period to allow comments and observations to be submitted for consideration.

It was noted that no responses had been received from Members and, consequently, no official response had been submitted by the Town Council to West Oxfordshire District Council regarding the proposed Order.

Resolved:

That, the verbal update be noted.

SC464 **COMMUNITY & CIVIC EVENTS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Venue & Events Officer.

Members welcomed updates relating to events held during the summer including Witney Pride, Witney Music Festival, Witney Carnival, Oxfordshire Play Associations Play Day and other community events facilitated on Town Council land.

Particular praise was expressed for the continued success of OPA's Play Day and the contribution made by volunteer organisations in delivering accessible activities for local families.

The Deputy Town Clerk provided a verbal update and advised that a detailed report had been requested from the organisers of Witney Music Festival for consideration by the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee on 28 September as part of future budget discussions.

The Committee also received an update regarding forthcoming civic events, including Remembrance Sunday and the Advent Fayre. The Deputy Town Clerk advised that officers were continuing to engage with those responsible for the High Street improvement scheme and were preparing contingency arrangements should the works not be completed by the anticipated completion date of 3 November.

Members recognised the importance of councillor participation in supporting delivery of the Advent Fayre and one Member encouraged Members to ensure that 29 November was reserved in their diaries to maximise support for the event.

Members noted that the revised dates for Circus Ginnett had resulted in the event taking place closer to other activities than would normally be desirable. It was noted that officers would encourage earlier booking of future circus events to provide greater flexibility and reduce the likelihood of clashes with other events in the Council's calendar.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and;

2. That, subsidised use of The Leys be approved for Witney Pride and Witney Carnival in 2027 and;
3. That, provision of £1,000 for the existing annual OPA Play Day be retained within the 2027/28 budget process.

SC465 **WINTER PREPARATIONS**

The Committee received and considered the report concerning winter preparations and the provision of grit bins.

Members reviewed existing grit bin provision across the town and identified two locations where additional bins may improve public safety. The Member suggesting he would send location specifics to officers for submission and consideration by Oxfordshire County Council.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and;
2. That, the installation of two salt bins be recommended for approval at South Lawn and Burwell Meadow for the sum of £600 for both.

SC466 **NEW PUBLIC BINS POLICY & REQUESTS**

The Committee received and considered the proposed Public Bins Policy.

Members discussed several requests received from residents and acknowledged continuing concerns regarding litter and dog fouling across parts of the town. Whilst recognising public expectations, Members reiterated that responsibility for the provision and maintenance of bins on land outside the Town Council's ownership rested with West Oxfordshire District Council.

The Committee felt that the proposed policy provided a clear and proportionate framework for future decision making whilst ensuring that resources remained focused upon land and facilities owned or managed by the Town Council.

Recommended:

1. That, the Public Bins Policy be approved and recommended to the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee for formal adoption.
2. That, no outstanding requests for bins made to the Town Council should be progressed.

SC467 **WITNEY TOWN CENTRE WAYFINDING**

The Committee received correspondence from West Oxfordshire District Council regarding the proposed wayfinding scheme. Proposed illustrations of potential signage, together with a draft Memorandum of Understanding relating to an archway project, had been received from West Oxfordshire District Council, circulated to Members and tabled for consideration at the meeting.

Members welcomed the principle of providing improved wayfinding within the town centre and considered the example designs provided. It was generally felt that any signage should reflect the heritage, identity and character of Witney, including reference to the town's blanket-making heritage, whilst retaining a modern appearance. Members also supported the inclusion of clear mapping and visitor information to assist residents and visitors navigating the town centre.

The Committee also considered correspondence relating to the potential Langdale Court archway project. Members supported the principle that any future agreement with West Oxfordshire District Council should clearly protect the Town Council's interests as landowner and ensure that ownership, maintenance, liability and future costs are fully considered.

Resolved:

1. That, the wayfinding project be supported in principle and;
2. That, officers continue discussions with West Oxfordshire District Council regarding detailed designs and future proposals and;
3. That, the Town Council's position as landowner be protected through any agreement associated with the project with points raised by officers.

The meeting closed at: 7.56 pm

Chair