STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Agenda Item: Community Engagement Report

Meeting Date: Monday, 16th November 2026

Contact Officer: Communications and Community Engagement Officer

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

Current Situation

Looking ahead to 2027 and initiatives and projects that are approved and making progress or for consideration.

Witney: Past, Present & Future Working Party

The minutes of the meeting held on 28th October 2026 can be viewed here: 28.10.2026 Witney Past, Present & Future Working Party Minutes

The recommendations from the WP were:

1. That, the arrangements and budgets proposed for St George's Day (£1,000), RAF Brize Norton Freedom Parade (£750), Wayfinding Map Project, and Calendar of Events for 2027 be noted and supported,
2. That, Officers proceed with planning for The Big Lunch 2027 and provision be made within the events programme and budget for a smaller-scale OPA Play Day style event within a budget of £1,000,
3. That, the School Bunting Competition idea be developed by Officers and indicative costs prepared on the basis of an indicative budget of £450 to Stronger Communities Committee on 16 November 2026.

Updates on the above items are covered in the following items.

Age-Friendly Town

Whilst researching ideas to mark Older Persons' Day, Officers were made aware of the Age-Friendly Town and Parish Guide, a joint publication by the Centre for Ageing Better, NALC, and SLCC. Age-friendly Town and Parish Council Guide

The guide and accompanying website were also being promoted at the recent NALC conference, which Officers attended.

This may be an initiative that Councillors wish to explore further, particularly in terms of identifying practical ways in which the Town Council can improve its engagement with older residents and make the town more accessible, welcoming, and easier to navigate for them.

Members will recall a report at this Committee on 23 September 2024 which highlighted an aging population and how the town council would address this in its Community Engagement Strategy. An initial step may be to suggest electing a Councillor 'Older Person's Champion' at the next Annual Meeting to lead on such initiatives.

Citizens Advice Oxfordshire (CAO)

The Deputy Town Clerk recently met with the Director of Business Development at Citizens Advice Oxfordshire (CAO) to discuss the support currently provided by the Town Council. Following the consolidation of Citizens Advice services across the county under the CAO umbrella, the organisation is looking to increase its profile and identify further funding opportunities.

During the meeting, it was highlighted that the Town Council's current grant funding is comparatively modest when considered against contributions made by other town and parish councils in Oxfordshire. The CAO have expressed an interest in exploring the potential for a longer-term funding arrangement or partnership, alongside opportunities for the Town Council to help raise awareness of its services. Officers were also reminded that Citizens Advice is a charitable organisation and does not receive direct statutory government funding for its core services.

A formal funding request is expected to be submitted to the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee in due course. Officers are bringing the matter to the attention of this Committee at this stage because of its relevance to community engagement and awareness, which falls within the Committee's terms of reference. The discussion may also help inform any future consideration of the organisation's funding request.

The Big Lunch – Update

Courtside Hub has expressed a strong interest in being involved in hosting The Big Lunch at The Leys. Further discussions will take place as the event programme and arrangements for delivery develop.

Although Sunday 6 June had previously been suggested by Councillors, this date is less suitable for Courtside Hub, which has indicated a clear preference for Saturday 5 June due to its regular coaching commitments on Sundays.

There are currently no football or cricket fixtures scheduled at The Leys during June, so no conflicts with the proposed use of the space are anticipated.

Witney Town Band has also agreed to move its first concert of the season to coincide with the proposed date. Oxfordshire Play Association (OPA) has indicated that it could provide a scaled-down Playday offer. Most of its activities are available at a cost of approximately £300 each, with the exception of the Go Karts and Body Zorbs, which are considerably more expensive. The previously proposed budget of £1,000 would therefore enable the provision of a fully staffed and resourced OPA offer, including the Smoothie Bike, DIY Face Painting and potentially two further activities from its usual Playday programme.

Officers would also like to approach the 7Cs Group to establish whether they would be interested in taking part, potentially bringing along their karaoke and have-a-go instruments. These have proved particularly popular attractions at previous events and would be a welcome addition to the programme.

Official Bespoke Town Council Bunting

Officers have revisited quotations for the production of bespoke Town Council bunting, providing suppliers with more detailed specifications covering the proposed layout, lengths and sizes required.

Updated quotations have been received ranging from £336 to £387 plus VAT for 80 metres of Town Council bunting. A separate quotation of approximately £55–£60 plus VAT has also been received for a single length (10 Metres) of bunting featuring the school competition designs.

Officers are intending to purchase the full 80 metres of Town Council bunting. As this is likely to be used regularly throughout the year at Council events and civic occasions, it will inevitably experience wear and tear. Purchasing a sufficient quantity at the outset should provide a more practical and cost-effective solution than having to place smaller replacement orders each year.

Proposal: Witney Spring Clean 2027

Following a proposal from the Witney Eco Forum at the Council's Eco Fair in September 2026, it is proposed that Witney Town Council coordinate a town wide community litter pick, provisionally titled *Witney Spring Clean 2027*, during Spring 2027. The initiative would bring together residents, schools, businesses, community groups and local organisations to remove litter from roadsides, verges, footpaths and public spaces across the town. This would be a similar approach to OxClean. Spring is considered an ideal time, as litter is more visible before grass cutting begins and hedges and vegetation come into leaf. The initiative would promote community involvement, environmental responsibility and pride in the town.

Subject to available resources, the Council would coordinate the event and arrange litter collection, while exploring partnership opportunities with West Oxfordshire District Council, particularly for waste collection and the removal of bulky or fly-tipped items. Officers would develop a delivery plan covering volunteer coordination, publicity, health and safety, equipment and resource requirements. The initiative supports the Council's Strategic Plan 2025-2029 objective to *"make Witney a great place to live, work and visit"* and contribute to maintaining a cleaner, more attractive town.

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

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 initiatives outlined in this report aim to support an inclusive and engaged community. In particular, exploring Age-Friendly Town principles provides an opportunity to consider how the Council can better engage with older residents and improve accessibility within the town. Community events and partnerships will seek to provide opportunities for participation across different ages and backgrounds.

b) Biodiversity – No direct impact on biodiversity is anticipated from the initiatives outlined. Any outdoor events will make use of existing public spaces, with appropriate consideration given to their responsible use and protection.

c) Crime & Disorder – Community events and activities encourage positive social interaction, strengthen community relationships, and promote civic pride. The provision of inclusive, well-managed community activities can contribute positively to community cohesion and the perception of safety.

d) Environment & Climate Emergency – The proposed activities are not expected to have a significant environmental impact. Officers will seek to minimise waste and consider sustainable options when arranging events and purchasing materials, including the proposed bespoke Town Council bunting.

Risk

The initiatives outlined in this report present relatively low levels of risk and can be managed through established Council procedures and appropriate officer oversight.

Potential risks include event delivery, weather conditions for outdoor activities, staffing and resource capacity, and the financial implications of any future partnership or funding commitments. Appropriate risk assessments will be undertaken for events, and any proposed expenditure or longer-term commitments will be subject to the relevant approval processes.

Social Value

The initiatives outlined in this report provide opportunities to strengthen community connections, encourage participation, and support local organisations and voluntary groups.

The proposed Big Lunch offers an opportunity to bring residents together through a shared community event, involving local organisations, performers, and activity providers. Exploring a relationship with Citizens Advice Oxfordshire may also help improve awareness of important support services available to residents.

Similarly, exploring Age-Friendly Town principles could help ensure that older residents feel more connected, supported, and able to participate fully in town life. The proposed bespoke

bunting will also support the Council's civic identity and provide a reusable resource for future community events and celebrations.

Collectively, these initiatives support community wellbeing, local partnerships, and a stronger sense of belonging within Witney.

Financial Implications

The initiatives outlined in this report are at varying stages of development and consideration. Any associated expenditure will be managed within approved budgets wherever possible, with value for money considered when procuring services, materials, and event activities.

- The proposed purchase of bespoke Town Council bunting is currently estimated at £336–£387 plus VAT for 80 metres, with a further £55–£60 plus VAT for the school competition bunting.
- The potential costs associated with The Big Lunch, including the proposed OPA activities, will be considered as event arrangements develop. Any future funding arrangement or partnership with Citizens Advice Oxfordshire would be subject to a separate funding request and consideration by the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee.
- There is no budget for this initiative. Costs would include litter pickers, gloves, bin bags, skip etc.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and consider the initiatives and opportunities outlined, particularly:

1. Note and approve the recommendations of the Witney: Past, Present & Future Working Party.
2. Whether to explore the Age-Friendly Town and Parish Guide further, with a view to identifying practical opportunities to improve engagement with and accessibility for older residents.
3. The potential for further engagement with Citizens Advice Oxfordshire, including opportunities to raise awareness of its services and any future funding or partnership proposals.
4. The proposed arrangements for The Big Lunch at The Leys, including the preferred date of Saturday 5 June, and the potential involvement of Courtside Hub, Witney Town Band, Oxfordshire Play Association and the 7Cs Group.
5. The proposed purchase of 80 metres of bespoke Town Council bunting, at an estimated cost of £336–£387 plus VAT, together with a separate length of school competition bunting at approximately £55–£60 plus VAT.
6. That the Committee considers the proposal for a community litter pick in principle and, if agreed that officers explore partnership arrangements and develop a delivery plan for Spring 2027; and recommend a suitable budget to cover potential costs of £500.