

**WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL**

**Wednesday 13 March 2019**

At the Forty-Sixth ANNUAL TOWN MEETING held in the Corn Exchange, Witney at 7.30pm on the above date

**Present**

Town Mayor: Councillor Brenda Churchill

Councillors:	A K Beames	D S T Enright
	C Brown	A D Harvey
	H W Chirgwin	L M Price
	H B Eaglestone	

Officers:	Town Clerk	Democratic Services Officer
	Office Manager	Operations & Estates Officer
	Communications Officer	Project and Cemeteries Officer
	Administrative Assistant	Public Halls Officer

CLLr Alvin Adams – West Oxfordshire District Council  
CLLr Jeanette Baker – West Oxfordshire District Council  
CLLr Rosa Bolger – West Oxfordshire District Council  
CLLr A Coles – West Oxfordshire District Council

Representing Thames Valley Police: Insp Steve Hookham & Sgt Philippa Payne

Representatives from the following organisations:

Witney Model Club  
Lower Windrush Choral Society  
Witney Talking News  
Windrush Bike Project  
Lunchtime Recitals  
Witney Woodland Volunteers  
West Oxfordshire Community Transport

74 Members of the public

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The Town Mayor welcomed the public to the meeting and thanked everyone for coming.

She proceeded to give a report of her year as Mayor, the highlight of which had been the Armistice Centenary Commemorations.

**2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for their absence from Witney Town Councillors were received from CLLrs Dorward, Doughty, King, Morris, Temple and Woodward.

3. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 March 2018, copies of which were available at the meeting, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4. **MATTERS ARISING**

There were no matters arising from the minutes of the meeting held on 14 March 2018 to be discussed at the meeting.

5. **THAMES VALLEY POLICE**

The Mayor welcomed Inspector Hookham and Sergeant Payne to the meeting. Inspector Hookham explained that he was the Neighbourhood Inspector for the area, and would give an overview of current work and priorities.

The current local priorities were domestic violence, child drug exploitation, child sex exploitation and burglaries. They were working in partnership with other areas. The biggest priority was child drug exploitation. "County Lines" came out of the main cities and Oxford and Witney had good access from London. Initially the organisers had been easy to pick up but it was becoming increasingly harder. Young males and even the elderly were being exploited. The Police worked with social landlords and social services and schools, but this was still a big problem. Child exploitation linked in to this.

The trend for burglaries was upwards in the area. Again this was difficult to manage as offenders were coming across borders.

Witney officers had taken a lead in identifying offenders in the County Lines; however this was not a finished piece of work. Arrests left a gap in the market which would be filled by someone. The police were conscious of what came with this issue such as carrying weapons; the police did have stop and search powers and currently were running a knife amnesty.

In terms of crime figures, last year there had been 8 weapons offences, and 13 this year. Violence against the person had increased to 80% (Including domestic violence) and domestic burglaries had increased from 43 last year to 50 this year. There had also been a spate of commercial burglaries. These were the challenges that the police were facing.

Once again there had been some restructuring and Kidlington had gone back to the Cherwell Team. There were now 2 problem solving teams in West Oxfordshire. There were a few vacancies in the teams and 2 new PCSOs were about to start work. The teams also had increased presence in the night time economy.

Inspector Hookham invited questions.

Cllr Harvey raised the following question on behalf of a resident:

**Q1: Is there going to be any extra policing in Witney? The police are already overstretched. I had reason to try and use the outside phone of the Police station in Witney recently which I was later told did not work! Also there are no cells at Witney and the police station closes at an early hour. The population of Witney is increasing & yet our**

**public services are decreasing, particularly the Police. I predict there will be a 'free for all of crime if nothing is done to increase Police presence & the time it takes them to attend improved. There should be a proper police presence over Friday/Saturday nights in Witney town centre.**

Inspector Hookham replied that there were no plans to increase police numbers. His team was the Neighbourhood Team and not Armed Response and they were trying to direct their targets correctly. In terms of custody at the station, this had been closed for a number of years. People requiring custody would be taken to Abingdon or Banbury. There were always Officers at the front desk. There had not been a decrease in police numbers.

In terms of the night time economy, the police were working with licence holders to manage issues but ultimately it was the licence holders' responsibilities.

**Q2. Can members of the public go to the police station?**

Inspector Hookham replied yes. There were officers in the station and the public could also call via 101 and e-mail too.

**Q3. I see a lot of speeding at night time but not any mobile speed cameras outside of office hours?**

[Inspector Hookham also took a question on speeding at Burwell Drive at the same time.]

Inspector Hookham stated that when they engaged with the public, speeding and parking were always top of the list. The police took speeding seriously and asked the community to help via community speed watch. The police provided training and loaned their equipment and the volunteers fed back information to the police. Persistent offenders would receive a visit and the police would then carry out an enforcement exercise in the area.

60% of people speeding in a certain area were in fact residents of that area. If residents curbed their speed, generally speeding would drop. He encouraged the community to do data gathering.

**Q4. People still drove too fast on Curbridge Road where there had been a tragic accident a few years ago. The speed indicator was on all of the time – did the police receive data from that?**

Inspector Hookham replied that the speed indicators were just indicators.

**Q5. As a young person I'm very concerned about drugs – can the police stop drugs coming into schools or is this something the schools should be doing?**

Inspector Hookham replied that the police always tried to support schools. He stressed that the offenders were the small minority. However, the police needed to talk to the peers in the community as they didn't talk the same language as young males. He strongly encouraged young people to come and talk to the police and engage with them. The drug pushers were very good at spotting vulnerability in young males and the police were tying with the schools to put intervention in before this happened.

**Q6. I would like to thank the Inspector and his team for their excellent work in what must often seem a pretty thankless and difficult job.**

Inspector Hookham said that he would take this back to the Neighbourhood team.

6. **REPORTS FROM EACH OF THE COUNCIL'S STANDING COMMITTEES**

A) Planning and Development Committee – Cllr Alan Beames

Cllr Beames presented his overview of the year to the public. Whilst the Planning Committee had dealt with a significant number of household applications, he wanted to draw people's attention to wider issues such as housing and infrastructure, in particular the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, which was currently running several consultations.

Cllr Beames also highlighted longer term projects such as link roads and the Shores Green junction, which he hoped would take some pollution out of the town.

He invited questions from the public.

**Q1. When Hailey Road had been closed, it highlighted just how much it was used and Dry Lane was very congested. Could we focus on these external links and also Shores Green?**

Cllr Beames agreed that Shores Green would take traffic out of the town and if a West End Link road was built a lot of the traffic would also be taken out of the town.

**Q2. I'm Cllr Rosa Bolger, District Councillor for Witney East. I'm glad you mentioned pollution. We've launched a petition to get Shores Green done. As Chair of the Planning Committee, what can you do to put pressure on this?**

Cllr Beames explained that he felt the best mechanism for this was via the Witney Traffic Advisory Committee which reported into the Planning Committee.

**Q3: As a resident, in the 20 years I've lived in Witney, the commute has got longer and longer. Does the Council have any power to make things such as a park and ride and Shores Green happen?**

Cllr Beames explained that the Town Council did not have direct power but the Traffic Advisory Committee could lobby WODC and OCC.

B) Estates Management Committee – Cllr Jim King

The Mayor explained that due to ill health, Cllr King could not be present and she would therefore present the report on his behalf. The report covered the public halls, phase 2 development of the Corn Exchange, West Witney Sports and Social Club and the Cemeteries. She invited questions from the public.

**Q1. I'm here on behalf of the ICE Centre and there are issues with parking outside to collect my son.**

The Town Clerk replied that this matter was being dealt with by the Council's and ICE Centre's solicitors and she could not comment more at this time.

**Q2. Is there any possibility that we can have a theatre in this building again? There is a serious lack of a good stage. The only other place is the Methodist Church which has restrictions on what can be performed.**

The Mayor replied that a working party was being set up in May after the elections and they would invite all former users.

Cllr Enright stated that this in his view was what phase 2 was about: a stage! He also invited everyone along to the next "Friends of the Cemeteries Group" meeting on 19 March at 10am in the Corn Exchange.

C) Sports and Recreation Committee – Cllr Howard Chirgwin

Cllr Chirgwin presented his report to the public. This covered recreation areas, play areas, allotments, the Lake and Country Park and future plans. He invited any questions.

**Q1. I'm a member of the fire service. Regarding Langel common, the wet meadows and the lake and country park, last year we had a very good summer but there was a huge spike in fires from undesignated barbecues. Could there be dedicated barbecue areas set up to stop the fire service having to go and put fires out?**

Cllr Chirgwin replied that this is why a working party had been set up and the Fire Service could be invited.

**Q2. Park Run was a great initiative but I also want to thank the Witney Woodland Volunteers for their work keeping the area tidy. Do you have a time frame for when the issues with Park Road Play area will be resolved, as you are right, it has been going on far too long?**

Cllr Chirgwin replied that the Council was pushing the solicitors as hard as possible to get this sorted but he could not give an exact time frame.

D) Community Services Committee – Cllr Craig Brown

Cllr Brown presented his report to the public. This covered events, including the Armistice Centenary Commemorations, the In Bloom competition, benches, bus shelters, communication (including the Town Council app) and the Youth Council.

**Q1. Not all of us have apps. Where else can we get information?**

Cllr Brown replied that this was just one way of communication on offer, people could ring or visit the Town hall at any time.

**Q2: I have given my e-mail address to the Council and I have the app – which I find hard to use- but I am not getting any communication from the Council.**

Cllr Brown acknowledged this and promised that this would be looked into.

E) Policy and Resources Committee – Cllr David Harvey

Cllr Harvey explained that he was not going to read his report as he was sure that people had already looked at the copies on the tables. Broadly speaking, this Committee took reports from all of the other committees and looked at how the Council could fund things. It was not the Town Council's money; it was the taxpayer's money.

However, spending had to be balanced and therefore the budget was set annually. This year the Town Council had raised the precept by 5 pence per week. The Town Council tried very hard to use the money wisely. One major grant funded project had been the West Oxfordshire Community Transport buses of which the Town Council was very proud.

The Council received no funding from central government, so it was all about getting the balance right. The Council was under pressure all of the time from other tiers of government to take on services which would mean spending more money. The Council therefore had to say no as it was the public's money not the Council's.

Cllr Harvey opened the floor to questions.

**Q1. It was reported in the Witney Gazette that the Town Council would help the Muzo Academy find new premises when they lost their old one. What happened?**

The Mayor advised that they had found a place on their own. She had offered to help and had given them telephone numbers and had done everything she could.

**Q2. The new premises is only temporary.**

The Mayor said that she had been very supportive.

**Q3. The people who are using the WOCT bus service are very appreciative of the service and the Town Council should be proud of this.**

7. OPEN FORUM TO DISCUSS MATTERS RAISED BY THE GENERAL PUBLIC AT THE MEETING

Cllr Harvey as the Leader of the Council read out questions that had been received before the meeting and that had not already been covered, and provided answers as detailed below:

**Q1. Please can you provide more information on what constitutes the "Corn Exchange Phase II Redevelopment" - more specifically, will this redevelopment allow for provision of a more traditional stage (not the existing platform) that will enable the Corn Exchange to be used by community theatre groups.**

Whilst this had already been discussed, Cllr Harvey stated that if he was re-elected in May he would push for a stage at the Corn Exchange.

**Q2. The bus shelter in Newland: why has this bus shelter been equipped with such an excruciatingly dysfunctional seat? It is impossible for anyone either to sit on it or to rest their**

**backside upon it. If Councillors have not experienced this seat, I recommend a visit, when they are feeling strong enough to cope with it. There are much better seats in other bus shelters in the town. Are there any plans to replace it? If not, I urge such a plan upon the Town Council.**

Cllr Harvey explained that this matter had been considered by the Community Services Committee on 19 November extract and the seat could not be changed as it would cause other issues.

**Q3. Why are there so many shops closing on the Witney High Street and what is the Town Council doing to try to stem / overcome this very visible decline?**

Cllr Harvey stated that Witney was fortunate as it had fewer shop closures than most other towns. There was not anything that could be done by the Town Council, but the District Council could do more.

**Q4. How is Witney Town Council preparing for Brexit? What is Brexit likely to mean for the residents in the short term?**

Cllr Harvey stated that the Town Council did not involve itself in international politics.

**Q5. More and more houses are being built in and around the outskirts of Witney it would appear no extra infrastructure is being put in to accommodate all these people for example the doctor surgeries have waiting times of over three weeks before I can get an appointment. This is not acceptable.**

Cllr Harvey explained that the Planning and Development Committee was consistently pushing for infrastructure before housing development and for it to be put in as early as possible. The Mayor added that the campaign to re-open Deer Park Medical Centre was still running if anyone wanted to join.

**Q 6. What is being done about the road systems? The horrendous A40 at any time of day carries too much traffic with over an hour to get to Oxford from Witney being normal, a distance of 12 miles.**

**It is not enough to just put a new roundabout on the A40 to carry traffic from the new housing estate (Downs Rd end of town) which has already caused 3 car accidents to my knowledge.**

**This is also putting pressure on the Woodstock Road going out of Witney through Long Hanborough as people are using it to avoid the A40. Coming out of Madley park onto the Woodstock Rd during rush hours is a nightmare with traffic going past the junction of Harvest Way (the main thoroughfare through Madley Park) on a regular basis.**

**This causes misery and pollution on a daily basis.**

**Why isn't re-opening the train station at Witney being considered?**

**Tiny places like Long Hanborough, Coombe, Finstock, Charlbury & Kingham all have train stations and, in my opinion, this is because it suits politicians and the wealthy pockets of Oxfordshire to keep these train stations. It would make perfect sense to re-open Witney train station but we are still considered the 'poor relation' so no politician is supporting such**

**a plan. When it suits this can be done. It suited to put a rail system in from Oxford Parkway to Marleybone London. Supporting new housing and presumably Bicester Village.**

**We in Witney have new housing by the bucket load.**

Cllr Harvey explained that all of these issues were being dealt with by other tiers of council.

**Q7. We are going to be paying the highest increase in council tax possible in our area and yet our services are not improving.**

Cllr Harvey referred to his earlier comment that Council Tax was only increasing by 5 pence per week and the Council had increased costs.

**Q8. What is being done about all the pot holes around Witney? It seems to be weeks on end before anything is done.**

Cllr Harvey shared this frustration but this was a County Council issue. He encouraged everyone to report issues on the Fix My Street website or app.

**Q9. What is being done about youth services in our area? What is the strategy?**

Cllr Harvey replied that this issue had been raised by Cllr Laura Price in response to which a Youth Forum had been set up, and a very successful first meeting had been held.

**Q10. Are there going to be more Doctors surgeries in Witney to accommodate a higher population due to all the new housing?**

Cllr Harvey explained that the Town Council had no control over this but the Planning and development Committee would continue to push for such things.

**Q11. I am generally pretty satisfied with life in Witney, but would like to raise the issue of the amount of rubbish that is thrown around our very pleasant town. Could the matter of rubbish bins, their numbers and locations, be addressed? In addition, could there be a discussion about organising more citizens' rubbish pick-ups, getting young people to use the bins, and involving local businesses (particular the shops that sell the goods whose packaging makes up a lot of the rubbish we see) in making our environment cleaner and tidier?**

Cllr Harvey advised that there was a group called Witney Community Litter Pick and also Madley Park residents association did regular litter picks. The Town Council has a rolling system of replacement for bins in its own areas. Other authorities also had responsibilities – it was something that was shared between authorities.

**Q12. I am generally pretty satisfied with life in Witney, but would like to raise the issue of the amount of rubbish that is thrown around our very pleasant town. Could the matter of rubbish bins, their numbers and locations, be addressed? In addition, could there be a discussion about organising more citizens' rubbish pick-ups, getting young people to use the bins, and involving local businesses (particular the shops that sell the goods whose packaging makes up a lot of the rubbish we see) in making our environment cleaner and tidier?**



Cllr Harvey advised that this issue would be referred to the County Council at the next Witney Traffic Advisory Committee.

Cllr Harvey invited questions from the floor.

**Q13. Is the Council going to do anything about wet wipes blocking pipes this summer?**

Cllr Harvey commented that this was a national problem. The Town Council did not have an Environmental Department but it could be passed to the Environment and Scrutiny Committee at the District Council in due course.

**Q14. Picking up on the earlier question about Newland bus shelters seat, could a councillor please come and try to sit on it and bring a first aider?**

Cllr Harvey replied that he would happily come along to try it out if the resident spoke to him after the meeting.

8. **TOWN MAYOR'S CLOSING REMARKS AND THANKS**

The Mayor thanked the public for coming and also Richmond Villages for serving the refreshments and also the Town Hall staff for their work that evening.

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The meeting closed at 9.14pm.

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Chairman