

WITNEY ANNUAL TOWN MEETING 2020

REPORT TO THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING FROM LEADER OF THE COUNCIL AND CHAIR OF POLICY, GOVERNANCE AND RESOURCES COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE – CLLR ROSA BOLGER

As Leader of the Witney Town Council I am proud to introduce a year of hard work by our Councillors and officers, in which a great deal has been achieved. Our committee chairs have prepared excellent reports on their areas. I'd like to thank them for their work this year.

We have moved all of our main Council meetings to the Corn Exchange this year, to make them more accessible, and we have all been pleased to see increased attendance from Witney residents. You are welcome to attend our meetings and we value your contributions.

We are delighted to welcome a number of new officers to the Council team in the last 12 months. We were pleased to create new posts for the Venue Manager, as well as a Compliance & Environment Officer to help the council and our partners meet their statutory responsibilities.

Our draft strategic plan, informed by people in Witney through a widespread consultation, prioritises action in six areas:

A Vibrant Local Economy; an Engaged & Supported Community; a Beautiful Witney; a Forward-Looking Town Council; an Empowered Community; and a Respectful Community.

We have set a budget for the year to come that makes progress on the things our town needs and that we all care about. The Town Council share of Council Tax will rise just over a pound a month for the average home, to pay for the priorities you told us were needed and to invest in the future of our town. This plan includes some long-awaited and long-term projects, including the new future of the lovely Corn Exchange. It also includes steps towards zero-carbon Witney and a much-needed investment in our children and youth services.

I was proud to chair a packed public meeting in the Corn Exchange in the summer to discuss the Climate Emergency, with experts from across the County. Since then I have chaired our newly formed Climate and Biodiversity Sub Committee, hearing from people from Witney and beyond, working with officers, and putting in place the plans we need.

The Policy, Governance and Finance Committee is chaired by the Leader. We've revised the grants budget to encourage more groups in town to help build a stronger community. We have been pleased to support activities including the Town Twinning, and we flew the flags of our twin towns, and that of our own town, when the UK left the European Union as a sign that we remain committed to our twin towns.

Making the grants process more accessible has meant we have been able to support many local organisations; we continue to support our town band, the Citizen's Advice, Volunteer Link Up and we have funded the continuation of our town's much loved big community events, including the carnival, Lib Fest and the Witney Music Festival. We've also been pleased to receive many requests for support from local environmental organisations, and have proudly supported the Witney Woodland Volunteers and XR Witney, to name a few.

I'd like to thank the Town Clerk and her team for the professional way the finances of the Council have been managed this year. At a time when much is going on, it is good to see them receive a clean audit and remain in a healthy position to face future challenges.

Cllr Rosa Bolger, Leader