

WITNEY ANNUAL TOWN MEETING 2020

REPORT TO THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING FROM CHAIR OF THE STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE – CLLR LUCI ASHBOURNE

This committee meets six times a year and is primarily concerned with maintaining infrastructure, organising Civic events, and helping facilitate community led events. It supports the Youth Council and oversees the Council's communication and publications and is committed to implementing good joint working practices with other principal authorities across the town, bringing out the best in Witney, and ensuring that the people of the town are the primary benefactors of council decisions.

An Empowered Community

The committee has been helping to make Witney a safer, cleaner and more welcoming town through a variety of initiatives, including deciding on the best use of funding from the District Council for 'community clean-up' use. Through consultation, the committee will identify various local groups and organisations that could play a part in this clean-up, and share funding across them, enabling the residents of Witney to take a hands-on approach to creating a clean, green and appealing town.

The Town Council has also been involved in making Witney safer, working in conjunction with local County Councillor Laura Price to set up a community Speedwatch initiative – again, empowering residents to take responsibility for making Witney's roads safer for drivers and pedestrians alike.

An Engaged and Supported Community

The Committee has been taking steps to make sure that the people of Witney are proud of their town, and are engaged as an active part of it, so that the Town Council can be as representative of the people it serves as possible. To this end, councillors have initiated Witney's first cross-party, cross-authority residents' surgeries, which have taken place in the Corn Exchange on Saturday mornings. Bringing together councillors from the Town, District and County to hear people's concerns and issues, these have been highly well-received events which have gone a considerable way to boosting residents' faith in their local representatives.

Other efforts to empower and support the people of Witney have included the One Witney plan, setting out the strategic vision of the new Town Council, and which was put to the people for their feedback during the winter consultation stage.

The Committee organised a community Christmas cook up – inviting residents to bring their families along for a ready steady cook style event.

The Stronger Communities committee has also set the wheels in motion for Witney's first ever Community Piano, to be placed in a public location and available to be played by all. The piano, which was donated by a local resident, will be painted according to the designs of a student from Abingdon and Witney College, following a Dragons' Den-style contest to inspire the creative minds of Witney's next generation.

A Vibrant Local Economy

The committee has been proudly taking action to support the many and varied events and initiatives that serve to engage residents, as well as welcoming new visitors to Witney. Our work this year has included the support of grassroots organisations such as Homestart and Guideposts, but also pledging the Council's continued support to West Oxfordshire Community Transport, to whom we have given both our financial and administrative backing.

A Respectful Community

The Council is proud to be celebrating Witney's history, as well as looking to the future, through facilitating the town's celebrations of the 75th anniversary of VE Day this May, to continually developing relations with our twin towns of Unterhaching and Le Touquet. We have also displayed the town's solidarity with the displaced peoples of the world, becoming one of the first local authorities in the country to fly the striking orange and black Refugee Nation flag to mark World Refugee Day last year.

A Beautiful Witney

Through the In Bloom Sub-Committee, the Stronger Communities committee has received excellent feedback on the town's floral displays in summer 2019, receiving a Gold Award for its work on making The Leys a colourful and verdant hub of green space.

The Stronger Communities Committee will also, through its Christmas Sub-Committee, be retendering the town's Christmas lights following discussions on how to provide the festive magic the people of Witney have come to expect, whilst also being progressive and conscientious in terms of environmental impact.

We have been upholding Witney Town Council's newly-declared commitment to climate action through various measures, each seeking to tackle climate change whilst continuing to keep Witney a beautiful and attractive town to live in. These initiatives include the spearheading of England's very first Tiny Forest to be planted on land next to Eton Close this coming Saturday. The prestigious honour of being the first town in the country to plant a Tiny Forest, a worldwide phenomenon, shows the Council's desire to give residents a town that reflects its rural surroundings, and quite literally ground-breaking.

A Forward Looking Town Council

As well as its work for the environmental and ecological future of Witney, the Stronger Communities committee has also been working hard for the social future of Witney, through its establishment of the Youth Services Working Party. This group has been working with

representatives from Witney Youth Council and other relevant stakeholders to help the young people of the town achieve their potential, as well as increasing opportunities for socialising, recreation, and engagement. Witney Town Council has committed a £30k funding pot to support open access organisations and detached youth work, and is building a visual, clear and accessible asset map of education, play, recreation and support services from birth to adulthood.

Cllr Luci Ashbourne, Chair of Stronger Communities