

# **WITNEY ANNUAL TOWN MEETING 2020**

## **REPORT TO THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING FROM CHAIR OF THE HALLS & GREEN SPACES COMMITTEE – CLLR VICKY GWATKIN**

This is a new Committee, which amalgamated the responsibilities of the former Sport & Recreation and Estates Committee, meeting six times a year. It deals with public halls notably the Corn Exchange and Burwell Hall, cemeteries, burial responsibilities, closed churchyard and war memorial obligations, all recreation grounds, parks and public open spaces, sports activities upon any recreational ground and allotments.

### **An Empowered Community**

An important part of our work over the past few months has been building relationships and trust. As a committee we are very keen to support and facilitate community initiatives, recognising the time and efforts devoted by many volunteers within our community.

We have met with many clubs and associations to better understand their needs and remain keen to proactively work with them going forward.

We have worked with Parkrun to improve facility access and are hoping to help them address the winter viability of their run route.

The Council hopes to take on additional sport pitches at Madley Park, offering better changing facilities, and potentially social facilities, in the hope of providing a more secure and suitable home for one of our football teams.

### **A Respectful Community**

The committee was privileged to be able to make the decision to have Lucy Harris added as the final name on the Witney War Memorial, allowing Lucy's role, and more generally the role of women in periods of conflict, to be official recognised and remembered.

Accessibility and equality of access has been a focus of the committee. We have arranged for a smooth path to be installed from Buttercross works footpath to the Leys to facilitate older residents. We have also funded disabled ramps at West Witney and the Leys Bowls Clubs.

We have worked with Friends of the Cemeteries to improve the reliability of access to Tower Hill cemetery.

### **An Engaged and Supported Community**

As part of the committee's rolling program of investment, the Council is in the process of upgrading five of Witney's play areas at King George's, Fieldmere Close and Moorland Road with smaller improvements at the Leys and Burwell Recreation Ground. Initial conversations

have taken place on planned improvements to the Leys skatepark and wheeled sports provision in general.

At their request, we have increased the number of junior pitches available on the Leys for the Witney Vikings girls football team.

The committee will continue to work with Witney Swifts to make amendments to the cricket pitch at West Witney following their decision to relocate their first and second team from the Leys next season.

### **A Vibrant Local Economy**

The Corn Exchange Working Party has been formulating a vision for the long-term future of the Corn Exchange. Arts consultants have been appointed to look at acoustics, lighting, retractable seating, capacity, accessibility and the potential for installing a café and bar.

The Council is hopeful that improvements planned for the Corn Exchange will make it a focal point for the whole community and provide a 'destination' arts facility we can all be proud of.

### **A Beautiful Witney**

Climate change is obviously an important issue for Witney going forward and is now taken into consideration in all the decisions made by the Halls & Green Spaces committee. Whilst Council owned land is overseen by this committee, there is considerable cross over with the Stronger Communities committee who primarily deal with tree planting and other 'green' initiatives through the Climate Change & Biodiversity Subcommittee.

Last year the Council worked alongside the Witney Land Army and the Wychwood Project to sow an experimental wildflower border on King George's Field. If this is successful, consideration will be given to extending to other council owned green space, and further wildflower planting is planned for Witney Cemetery.

### **A Forward Looking Town Council**

A key objective of this committee has been, and continues to be, improving the sports facilities within Witney. One of the first actions taken was to review the Council's sports strategy for the town by recommissioning a sports consultant. This has coincided with similar reviews at District and County Council level.

Sports consultants KKP have been commissioned to deliver local football facility plans (LFFPs) by the FA for its National Football Facilities Strategy. This has been delivered over four tranches of local authority and the Town Council is in the final tranche. LFFPs set the ten-year vision for football facilities in each local authority and will drive community investment. These plans will include commitments to affiliated football but also will invest in social, recreational and other forms of football delivery in a range of settings and with a variety of partners (including multi-sport facilities).

The Council has and will continue to work hard to have a voice in these consultations in the hope of securing desperately needed funding for Witney, as a sports centre for an expanding population - not just in Witney but also in surrounding villages. This may take a little longer than initially hoped, but it is important the right decisions are made and that the Council does not place the town at a disadvantage by moving too quickly.

The Committee has also been working to improve community access to existing sports facilities, pushing the District Council for a 4G pitch to be placed at West Witney and striving to provide the very best for the town! To focus this drive and demonstrating the Council's commitment to improvement, the Sports Strategy Sub Committee has recently been set up.

A very complex issue has been the legal dispute around Park Road playground. The Committee understands the importance of this area to the immediate community and is doing everything possible to ensure something is in place as soon as possible.

**Cllr Vicky Gwatkin, Chair of Halls and Green Spaces Committee**