

STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Date: Monday 6 July
Title: Events Report
Contact Officer: Communications & Events Officer - Polly Inness

Background

A round up of recent and forthcoming events

Current Situation

Most of the events for 2020 have been postponed indefinitely during the Covid -19 outbreak. Officers will be looking to reschedule as many of these as reasonable, when possible.

VJ Day

This is just a month away. Nothing has been planned for at this stage. There have been no meetings so no format in mind. The Town Council held a very successful Radio event in conjunction with Witney Radio for VE Day and it would be possible to approach them to see if they will collaborate in a similar way.

Remembrance

Members will be aware from previous reports the shift from the Royal British Legion taking responsibility to the Town Council – this is a national directive and not just a local one.

The Town Council has received further correspondence from The Royal British Legion that reiterates that they are not able to pay for road closures or man barriers to facilitate parades as they do not wish to use their funds in this way and do not want to pay the additional insurance costs.

“Where a branch, or county or district, has to be the Event organiser (because the Civic Authorities refuse) they may take this role but there can be no street Parade, no road closure and, therefore, no need for a Temporary Traffic Management Operation (TTMO) unless this aspect of the event is owned by a Civic Authority. Whilst the branch can be involved in determining a Parade route, it should not itself contract with a third party and may not take responsibility for the design, planning and deployment of a TTMO. On the day of the Parade, the RBL and its volunteers must not engage in the deployment, management or removal of any TTMO. This includes, for example, placing barriers, directing traffic or driving vehicles that are involved in the TTMO.”

The Town Council met with representatives of the Witney branch at the end of last year and very early this year to discuss this change.

The focus for the veterans and many others on the day is the respectful marking of the moment and the acts of remembrance that centre around the wreath laying displaying of the standards and the services that take place at the memorial and the church. The parade, though part of the spectacle, is secondary to this.

On its own the Town Council does not have sufficient manpower to man all the barriers required for a full road closure of the type used for the usual parade. There is an additional problem in that the previous parade marshal is not qualified and therefore neither the RBL nor the town council are able to insure him in that role until he has undertaken and passed the required training. Having spoken with him earlier in the year he told officers he would seek to take the training course if possible but is unlikely to be able to do that this year.

A further solution to the problem is to reduce the size of the road closure to a size that can be managed by existing staff and volunteers without too much trouble. Closing off just Church Green and allowing crowds to gather on the grass and participants such as wreath layers, standard bearers, the band and clergy to gather in their normal spots around the memorial. There would be no requirement for a bigger road closure without the usual parade and social distancing measures, if still in effect, will be easier to manage.

It could be that because the Pandemic finds us in exceptional circumstances that it is necessary to change what happens for this year at least and is a good chance to experiment with other ways of working with RBL to facilitate a service of Remembrance that is different but equally respectful and thankful.

This year it's the 100th anniversary of the Unknown soldier on Remembrance day and this is an international thing marked in around 60 countries who each have an unknown soldier, so this could be a focus based on a brotherly union across nations.

Environmental impact

Having declared a Climate Change Emergency at its Council meeting on 26 June 2019 – with this in mind Councillors should have due regard to the environmental impact of any decisions they make with regard to its facilities and services it operates.

Risk

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

Financial implications

There may be additional costs to the Council attached to Remembrance such as additional insurance and the cost of First Aid which RBL wish to pass on to the Town Council as organisers of Remembrance as a civic event.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and consider the following:

1. How to mark VJ Day
2. Achieving a meaningful and manageable Remembrance Day this year