

**CLIMATE, BIODIVERSITY & PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE
WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL**

Held on Tuesday, 26 January 2021

At 6.00 pm in the Virtual Meeting Room via Zoom

Present:

Councillor R Smith (Chair)

Councillors:	A Prosser	M Jones
	J Aitman	A McMahon
	L Ashbourne	
Officers:	Adam Clapton	Office Manager
	Angus Whitburn	Compliance and Environment Officer
Others:	1 member of the public.	

P45 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr R Bolger and Cllr V Gwatkin.

P46 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr R Smith declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda items 7, 12 and 13 as some of the proposals, in part were near to where she lived.

P47 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No members of the public present wished to speak on any item at the meeting.

P48 MINUTES

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the Climate, Biodiversity and Planning Committee meetings held on 24 November 2020, 15 December 2020 and 5 January 2021.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Climate, Biodiversity and Planning Committee meetings held on 24 November 2020, 15 December 2020 and 5 January 2021 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

With the express permission of the Chair, agenda items 7, 12 and 13 were grouped together and brought up the agenda so the member of public attending could hear the discussion.

P49 **EAST WITNEY STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT - CYCLE AND FOOTPATH CONNECTIVITY AFFECTING LAND AT ETON CLOSE PLAY AREA, MANOR ROAD/COGGES HILL ROAD, OXLEASE AND THE COUNTRY PARK'**

The committee received and considered correspondence from West Oxfordshire District Council, asking if the Town Council agreed to the use of several areas under its ownership to facilitate new cycle and footpath connectivity from the Witney East Development at Cogges.

Members welcomed this request and discussed the merits of each proposed area while offering several further suggestions for consideration.

RECOMMENDED:

As an enthusiastic advocate of active travel, Witney Town Council supports the addition of better cycle and footpaths from the Witney East Development. It therefore agrees that they may cross land in its ownership, providing the costs are covered by the developer, and the following points are taken into consideration for each of the four areas consulted on;

1. Eton Close Play Area – the Town Council welcomes this proposal and asks that the path be kept near the housing side of the site to avoid infringement onto sports pitches and requests that it is a suitable width to allow shared foot and cycle use. The natural drainage in this area during the winter can be problematic so the Town Council also asks that the surface, while remaining similar to the existing Cogges network, is suitable and the best quality for this environment. The current gate system onto Eton Close would need to be re-modelled for continued access, safety and provide an opening for the cycle users.
2. Manor Road/Cogges Hill Road – the Town Council welcomes this suggestion and considers it to be a sensible continuation of the current connectivity to facilitate safer and greener travel.
3. Country Park – the Town Council supports a scheme across its land here and has lobbied for a controlled crossing at Farm Mill Lane, to facilitate onward travel to Henry Box School and the Leys for some time. The unlabelled dotted line on the proposal map would have less of an impact on the park itself and could also use the newly built bridge near to Farm Mill Lane.

The Town Council would also support a route further south, possibly across the disused railway bridge, to join up and take people to Witney Lake, Station Lane Industrial estates and supermarkets beyond.

4. Wadards Meadow/Oxlease Open Space – The Town Council's welcomes a route here as part of the wider active travel scheme and its preferred option would be to have a cycle/footpath along the existing southern side path from east to west, going around the corner along the tree line and joining the main cycle path behind Blake C of E Primary School, and on towards Cogges Manor Farm.
5. That these comments be passed to the Policy, Governance and Finance Committee for agreement on behalf of the Council, and then forwarded to West Oxfordshire District Council by way of response to the request.

P50 **CONSULTATION FROM OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL - WITNEY ACTIVE TRAVEL SCHEME**

The Committee received and considered consultation documents from Oxfordshire County Council concerning an active travel corridor route between Tower Hill and Madley Park, Witney.

As enthusiastic supporters of active travel, members welcomed this report and were pleased that previous suggestions and lobbying on this issue had been heard.

Overall, the committee felt the plans could have been more wide-ranging but understood that these were limited, short term measures that had to be implemented relatively quickly due to funding timescales. The proposals encompassed a raft of modifications, including reduced speed limits, shared pavements, extra crossings and new cycle paths along the whole route which, it was agreed would improve safety and make a difference in this part of Witney.

The members discussed at length the varying sections of the corridor and provided comments on each area which forms part of the Council's response below.

RESOLVED:

1. That Witney Town Council welcomes this consultation on an active travel corridor from East to West Witney and acknowledges the timescales involved in implementing the measures. It would like to make the following observations concerning each section.

Tower Hill – Corn Street

The Town Council accepts the positive moves here overall and acknowledges that nothing will be perfect; it is regrettable but likely necessary to lose parking spaces to achieve the cycle lanes. The Town Council supports the measures to reduce traffic into Holloway Road, the addition of a controlled crossing near to Marlborough Lane, the 20mph scheme, the central line in the hope of making vehicle users drive safely, and the cycle and bus lane at the start of Corn Street. After discussion on the merits of the build outs and the way they contribute to pedestrian safety, it agreed that ultimately, there simply needs to be enough space for the scheme here to be successful and safe.

There may be some future merit in extending the one-way system in Corn Street and improving the crossings to assist cyclists at the five ways roundabout.

Corn Street – Langel Common

Witney Town Council supports the proposals in this section of the corridor and accepts they marginally improve what is currently in place. It would however ask that consideration is given to extending the 20mph zones on the approach to the crossing on Witan Way to improve safety and ask that the crossing itself is modified for cyclists, so they do not need to dismount. An improved long-term solution for travel from Witan Way to Corn Street would be welcomed.

Church Lane - Oxford Hill – Madley Park

The Town Council welcomes the inclusion of a toucan crossing at Oxford Hill, the upgrading of gravel tracks to laid foot/cycle paths and the increased lighting in certain stretches of this section.

Consideration should be given to a 20mph zone in the vicinity of King George's Field to Judd's Close as this stretch of road is well-used route for Wood Green School students. The route is likely to become used even further with the development in east Witney. There would also be some benefit in bringing the cycle crossing point to as near as possible to Church Lane it would almost be straight across the road. The Town Council also feels that priority for lighting needs to be by the allotment gardens, between the bridges for night-time security as the footpath away from buildings near the wooded area will not be as safe, even if lit.

2. That these comments be forwarded to Oxfordshire County Council in response to the Witney Active Travel Scheme Consultation.

P51 **OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL CONSULTATION – VARIOUS ROADS (WITNEY) PROPOSED 20MPH SPEED LIMIT & ACTIVE TRAVEL MEASURES**

The Committee received and considered consultation documents from Oxfordshire County Council proposing 20mph zones and active travel measures in Witney.

Members welcomed these proposals but noted some obvious absences in the scheme which would have been beneficial. The Committee did, however, understand that the additions were the roads most shared by vehicles and cyclists and the funds for the scheme had to be spent quickly. Members were also mindful that areas such as Bridge Street, Mill Street and Tower Hill were too narrow to have any major works carried out in a short time-frame available, but this should not deter more ambitious future plans. In conclusion it was agreed that vast swathes of the town, including the centre were included in the proposals, which was a large-scale change and improvement on what was already in place.

RESOLVED:

1. That Witney Town Council welcomes the proposals for 20mph speed limits and active travel measures by Oxfordshire County Council. It looks forward to seeing more ambitious plans as the project progresses and asks that further consideration is given to extending the 20mph speed limits into Oxford Hill and Witan Way. This would improve safety for cyclists and pedestrians in those areas and compliment the active travel, east to west corridor.
2. That these comments be forwarded to Oxfordshire County Council in response to the consultation.

Cllr A McMahon left the meeting at 7pm

P52 **PLANNING DECISIONS**

The Committee received and considered a schedule of planning applications received from West Oxfordshire District Council.

RESOLVED:

The Committee noted the planning decisions and were interested in the decision for WTC/109/20 which appeared to have been refused due to its modern design, contrary to the Town Council's response.

P53 **PLANNING APPLICATIONS**

The Committee received and considered a schedule of planning applications received from West Oxfordshire District Council.

RESOLVED:

That the comments, as per the attached schedule, be forwarded to West Oxfordshire District Council.

P54 **CONSULTATION FROM OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL– VARIOUS ROADS (CHERWELL & WEST) AND (OXFORD CITY) PROPOSED DISABLED PERSONS PARKING PLACES**

Members received and considered a consultation from Oxfordshire County Council on proposed disabled persons parking places at Ashcombe Close and Woodgreen, Witney.

RESOLVED:

That Witney Town Council welcomes and supports the proposed disabled persons parking places in Witney.

P55 **COMMUNICATION FROM OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL - LOCAL CLIMATE INITIATIVES**

The Committee received and considered a communication from Oxfordshire County Council regarding local climate initiatives.

The Chair noted that Zero Carbon targets were broadly the same as the Town Councils, with a date of 2050 set for the whole of Oxfordshire. The committee discussed initiatives concerning the piloting of community, wind and solar power, as well as a county-wide policy on electric vehicle charging in public car parks. The committee agreed that the Town Council should be considering how best to work collaboratively with the County Council on achieving these aims, possibly allowing use of the car parks in the Council's estate in the future.

RESOLVED: that the communication from Oxfordshire County Council be noted.

P56 **COMMUNITY ORCHARD**

The committee received and considered the report of the Compliance & Environment Officer which was in response to a resident request for the planting of a Community Orchard.

Members agreed that since initial discussions on tree planting in 2019, the Town Council had developed a more measured approach to the positioning of new trees; land at the Country Park was no longer considered appropriate following consultation with the Wychwood Project. There was agreement that this idea should be explored further to determine available and appropriate Council-owned land and funding. Pieces of land at Farmers Close, Cogges and Park Road were suggested as possible locations and there was support from members that if pursued, it should be near to a school so children would be able to learn from the environment as these projects are more successful with involvement from the local community who effectively take ownership of it.

RECOMMENDED:

1. That Witney Town Council supports the provision of a Community Orchard in principle and asks that it be incorporated into the Town Councils Open Spaces Strategy discussions; and following the outcome of these,
2. That the project be referred to the Councils Stronger Communities Committee for consideration as a community initiative, paying particular attention to the siting of trees which is covered by that committee.

P57 **SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER NO 48(A)**

RESOLVED:

That Standing Order 48 (a) be suspended to allow the meeting to continue as it had now passed two hours in length.

P58 **FLOODING**

The committee received a verbal update from the Chair who advised that the flooding which occurred in the town over the Christmas period had shown shortcomings in the response for those affected. The worst hit areas were Central, North and East Witney but surface water from other wards feed directly into the river catchment area, so it was an issue for the whole town.

There was discussion on what had caused the floods, with many facts unknown but climate change and development in the catchment areas had not helped. Members were also concerned that lessons had not been learned following the floods in 2007 and there needed to be a comprehensive report or public enquiry to establish the facts. If this was not forthcoming, the committee agreed that it should be requested by the Town Council.

Once a report was published the Town Council would be in a better position to see if there was anything else it could do or suggest in gaps, engineering or in lobbying the District Council and other authorities on measures and planning policy changes.

As a Town Council, without remit for flooding or water courses and as a consultee on planning applications only, it was difficult to envisage what else could practically be done to help alleviate flood risks other than by scrutinising applications, such as the Witney North development and others. There was agreement that future application observations, particularly in the affected areas should ask for mitigation from the loss of drainage land. The Committee also agreed that it should note strategic features that helped during the flooding and ensure thought is given to emergency vehicle access in the future.

Members also noted that an emergency planning response had been debated by the Stronger Communities Committee and this would help signpost residents in the future.

RESOLVED:

1. That Witney Town Council waits for the West Oxfordshire District Council report into flooding in Witney on 24th and 25th December 2020 before deciding on a practical strategy in relation to flooding; and in the meantime,

2. That Witney Town Council notes the loss of permeable drainage ground in future consultee planning application responses where it considers the need for surface water flooding mitigation is required; and,
3. That the Town Council considers practical local knowledge in relation to future planning applications, such as access for emergency services in the event of flooding; and,
4. That Witney Town Council recognises and notes the key features such as walls in flooded areas which may have helped alleviate its seriousness, and which should be protected from future development.

The meeting closed at: 8.15 pm

Chair