

**STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE  
WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL**

**Held on Monday, 15 March 2021**

**At 6.00 pm in the Virtual Meeting Room via Zoom**

**Present:**

Councillor O Collins (Chair)

Councillors:	J Aitman	H Eaglestone
	T Ashby	L Duncan (In place of L Ashbourne)
	D Enright	V Gwatkin
	D Butterfield	
Officers:	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
Others:	3 members of the public.	

**SC127 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Cllr L Ashbourne advised she would be leaving the meeting early and was being substituted by Cllr L Duncan. Cllr D Enright would be joining the meeting later.

**SC128 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no interests declared by members at the meeting.

**SC129 MINUTES**

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the Stronger Communities meeting held on 25 January 2021.

**SC130 TO ADOPT AND SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 25 JANUARY 2021**

**RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 25 January 2021 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**SC131 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES NOT COVERED IN THE SUBSEQUENT ITEMS**

There were no matters arising from the minutes of the Stronger Communities Committee meeting held on 25 January 2021.

SC132 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

The Committee adjourned for this item.

David Inman from the Rural/Market Group and Beth Sherlock from Witney Pride to address the committee on agenda items 5 and 12 respectively.

*The Committee reconvened following public participation.*

SC133 **WITNEY PRIDE**

The Committee received and considered requests from the Witney Pride Group concerning the international day of homophobia, transphobia on 17<sup>th</sup> May, as well as its planned event on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2021.

Members were supportive of both causes and welcomed the opportunity to be able to promote the events individually as well as through the Town Council's social media platforms.

**RESOLVED:**

1. That Witney Town Council supports the Witney Pride event on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2021 by promoting the event on its social media and by members sharing video messages or photos to help generate support and interest; and,
2. That Witney Town Council flies the Pride flag on the 22<sup>nd</sup> May instead of 1st June to coincide with the Witney Pride event; and,
3. That the Corn Exchange is lit up in LGBTQ colours to mark the international day against homophobia, transphobia and biphobia on 17<sup>th</sup> May 2021.

SC134 **RURAL/MARKET TOWN GROUP**

The Committee had heard from the representative of the Rural/Market Town Group under public participation and were encouraged to hear of its increasing membership and the benefits membership would bring.

As the free membership had been extended until September 2021 due to the pandemic, members were happy to defer the decision on becoming a paying member until later in the summer.

**RESOLVED:**

That the decision to become a paid member of the Rural/Market Group be deferred until September 2021.

SC135 **INCLUSIVITY & DIVERSITY PANEL**

The Committee received and considered a verbal update from the Chair who presented recommendations from the panel following a recent meeting.

Members heard that a 'Belonging in Witney' page would be beneficial on the website which could include a form where people could share their experiences and stories anonymously. These forms would be passed onto and looked at by the panel directly, with issues being fed back to the Council.

The creation of an affiliated Town Council Facebook page, to create a forum area to discuss ideas and information was agreed. This would be specifically in relation to the Inclusivity & Diversity Panel and some of its members would be moderators.

Finally, it was agreed the Town Council would promote 'Belonging to work' webinars, offered for free by panel members among its network of local organisations.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Committee notes the recommendations of the Inclusivity & Diversity Panel; and,

1. Creates a 'Belonging in Witney' page on the Town Council website - this will have a statement about the endeavour, and a webform for people to share their experiences and stories with the Town Council anonymously; and,
2. Creates a group linked to the Town Council's Facebook page to establish a forum that people can join to talk and share information/posts/ideas.
3. Promotes through its networks, free 'Belonging at work' Webinars for local businesses to ensure as many local organisations have the opportunity to take part.

SC136 **OPERATIONS REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Operations & Estates Advisor which provided updates on the Christmas Lights Tender, floral displays and hedge maintenance at Curbridge Road/Thorney Leys.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Operations Report and its contents be noted.

SC137 **TREES - UPDATE**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Operations & Estates Advisor concerning Wychwood Project tree planting and required remedial work on trees at Pensclose and Cogges Hill Road.

Members heard that Wychwood Project had unfortunately not been able to complete their planting work so it would be finished in the next season. As such they had yet to draw down the budget of £500 awarded by the Council so this would be rolled over into the new financial year.

The Committee also discussed the remedial works suggested by the Landscape & Forestry Officer concerning trees T792 and T794. The Council's tree consultants had advised a pull test should be carried out at the cost of £1,926 to investigate their viability and safety. The results may provide time for replacements to be planted before their inevitable felling and it was unknown what impact Ash die-back might have on these trees in the meantime.

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the report be noted; and,
2. That the suggested works to trees T792 and T794 be undertaken; and,
3. That replacement trees be planted this autumn in preparation for their future removal.

SC138 **BIN REQUESTS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Project Officer which concerned several new litter and dog bin requests across the town.

Members were sympathetic to the requests made by members of the public but were aware of the associated costs and the strain on the Council's budgets now and in the future. The collection of waste was being considered as part of the Council's Open Spaces Strategy so it was agreed these requests should be deferred until after its publication. The Committee was mindful that a policy would be required to ensure that any new bins were well situated and absolutely necessary in the area.

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the report be noted; and,
2. That the requests for new litter and dog waste bins be deferred until after the publication of the Town Council's Open Spaces Strategy; and,
3. That a policy on the installation (and ongoing emptying) is created by Officers to inform residents and guide future requests.

SC139 **COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Communications & Community Engagement Officer concerning upcoming events and initiatives.

Members welcomed community engagement regarding In Bloom planting at the flowerbed near to Langdale Hall and a town-wide Heritage Open Day event post Covid-19. There was also agreement on running the Council's Christmas competitions this year and commemorating the Queen's Platinum Jubilee as a Town Council in 2022.

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the report be noted; and,
2. That the Town Council allows the Witney Horticultural Society to plant the flowerbed adjacent to Langdale Hall; and,
3. That the Town Council wishes to run a community engagement event for Heritage Open Day this year promoting local eateries, breweries and food producers; and,

4. That the Town Council should run the usual three Christmas competitions: Civic Christmas Card, Christmas Light and Mayor's Carol Service song sheet. The first two of these being run online and the latter being offered to residents in the town's residential and care homes; and,
5. That the Town Council establishes a task and finish group to organise the Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations in 2022, membership being confirmed at the Annual Council Meeting.

SC140 **WITNEY CARNIVAL**

The Committee received and considered a request from the Witney Carnival Committee for a grant of £4000 towards the 2021 event.

Members were supportive of the event and recognised that the community would be looking forward to such events this summer. There was, however, still uncertainty on the Covid-19 pandemic roadmap to normality. The Town Council had lost income in the last year and would not want to exacerbate that by pledging additional funding if the event may get cancelled.

It was possible individual elements of the Carnival could be funded or the Town Council could procure them directly but a budget would first need to be located and it was not possible to make a decision at this meeting without knowing where the funding could be budgeted from.

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the grant request from the Witney Carnival Committee be noted; and,
2. That Witney Town Council supports the Carnival and refers this request to the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee to see if a budget above the £1000 already committed can be found.

SC141 **NATIONAL AUTISM AWARENESS MONTH**

The Committee received and considered a request from Guideposts for the Town Council to support National Autism Awareness month in April.

Members welcomed the initiative and agreed the Council should support the Awareness month in April.

**RESOLVED:**

That Witney Town Council supports National Autism Awareness month in April by sharing a purpose made video on its communication platforms, provided by Guideposts.

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The meeting closed at: 7.04 pm

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Chair