

STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Date: 19th July 2021

Title: Communications and Community Engagement Report

Contact Officer: Communications and Community Engagement Officer - Polly Inness

Background

A brief update on Communication and Community Engagement matters.

Current Situation

The communications officer is looking to update and augment the Town Council's range of communications and its strategy.

The Town Council is also starting to look forward and plan for events and projects for 2022 now.

Communications Strategy

A draft copy of the Communications Strategy is circulated as a separate report to this committee. The scope is intended to cover most of what the Council does to communicate with residents, partners, other organisations and across departments. It is intended to be reviewed after the first year of adoption and thereafter every year, due to the rapid changes in communications technology and social media.

Communications Software

The Communications & Community Engagement Officer has identified software packages which would help make the Council's output more professional, these programmes are as follows:

- **Professional version of Adobe or similar PDF editor** – this will be really useful during the production and drafting phases of the newsletter between the Town Council and the Print and Design company

- **Photoshop Lite** – Currently the image editing software in use is very outdated or free online versions with many restrictions and adverts
- **Video editing** – For the further dissemination of information via Social Media and recording small ad-hoc pieces for the Council.

The Council's IT support providers may be able to supply information on multiple licences and suitable packages or cut down packages that will suit needs.

In Bloom Judging Day Thurs 29 July

Currently this is provisional but likely to go ahead. The mayor will join the Judges, with two officers and other officers will meet at the Leys and Tower Hill to ensure that there is some careful distancing observed.

The sofa in Bar 1863 has been reserved and the Venue and Events Officer will provide refreshments when officers and the Mayor meet with the judges as they arrive. Community gardening groups will also be invited as a thank you and the Town Crier will be invited to the refreshments too as a little local colour. The Mayor and judges will select the winning wheelbarrows when they reach the Leys. These are being displayed by the Coffee Shed, who have kindly agreed to have them for the summer.

The Council's beds are all fully planted and the NHS Thank you banners are in place.

In Bloom planting for 2022

Whether or not Councillors decide to continue with In Bloom going forward the planting schemes for the Town still must be decided now for planting next summer. A list of the usual plants available is attached, but this is not exhaustive, and the Council could request some different plants if required.

The hot bright schemes followed for the last two years have been very popular and drawn lots of positive comment. There doesn't seem to be any need to change that and Councillors might like to continue with this or select something different based on a theme or event. It is the Queen's Platinum Jubilee next year and we could plant with that in mind. Rather than a slightly predictable red, white, and blue we could for example adopt pastel colours such as those that the Queen is frequently dressed in, such as pale lilacs, lime greens and yellows along with some silver plants to represent platinum. These would naturally not draw the eye in the way that the brights do.

The Contractors have also asked Council to consider what the Council would like to see on the Welch Way and Curbridge Road/Thorney Leys roundabout to replace the worn-out sustainable planting schemes. A wildflower planting scheme could be considered.

Love your Parks Campaign 26 Jul- 1 Aug

Although no plans have been made for physical events in any of our parks, it is suggested that the Council supports the campaign through social media messaging, highlighting some of Witney's parks over the course of the week. See attached item.

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.

- Removing the sustainable and drought resistant planting scheme will have extra watering implications
- Wildlife planting will attract insects, but to a busy traffic area

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

Described here or as stated in the report above.

- There is a budget for newsletter/communications of £3k for the current financial year which covers the cost of the quarterly newsletters – the final year end amount of this budget is not currently known, there may be the possibility the funds can come from this budget but if not, a supplementary budget may be required. One off costs attached to software packages would be:

- Photoshop elements 21 £71.99 - Graphics
- Premiere elements 21 £74.99 - video
- Boxed together £91.50
- PDF Pro £47.96
- £286.44

There may be additional update costs per annum for the software and it may be possible for the Council's IT provider could negotiate a licence discount if the Committee is favourable.

- There may be some additional costs to the grounds contract with plant selection and planting scheme decisions.

Recommendations

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

- Agreement on procuring software as listed to enhance and further professionalise Council communications,
- The planting schemes for the summer of 2022 - consideration could be given to a task and finish group for these decisions,
- Supporting 'Love Your Parks' week 26 July – 1 August