

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

**Held on Monday, 15 November 2021**

**At 6.00 pm in the Gallery Room, The Corn Exchange, Witney**

**Present:**

Councillor O Collins (Chair)

Councillors:	J Aitman	H Eaglestone
	D Butterfield	A Prosser
	L Duncan (In place of L Ashbourne)	
Officers:	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
	Simon Wright	Democratic & Legal Services Officer
Others:	No members of the public.	

**SC569 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors L Ashbourne, R Bolger and V Gwatkin.

Councillor L Duncan attended for Councillor L Ashbourne

**SC570 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillors Aitman, Collins & Duncan declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda Item No. 11 – Grant Aid to Local Organisations by virtue of involvement in the Witney Twinning Association.

Councillor Collins declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda Item No. 12 – Budget by virtue of being a volunteer with West Oxfordshire Community Transport.

**SC571 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2021 were adopted and signed as a correct record by the Chair.

Min No. SC475 – The Town Clerk advised that Historic England had not supported the old Pill Box at Langel Common being used as a planter. This did not preclude the continuation of the project to provide a QR Code and signage at the site.

Min no. SC476 – Officers undertook to check the position with Oxfordshire County Council regarding the provision of salt bins on the footpath connecting Madley Park and Oxford Hill as part of the Active Travel Scheme.

The Committee thanked all those involved in organising the Remembrance Sunday event which had been greatly appreciated by those attending.

SC572 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

SC573 **PUBLIC BENCHES - WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL REQUESTS**

The Committee considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk regarding the Council accepting ownership and ongoing maintenance for public benches being proposed by West Oxfordshire District Council.

Consideration was given to suggested locations for the benches being proposed. Members agreed that the siting of a bench on Bridge Street, suggestion 1, was not suitable as it would take up a lot of the pavement and was not ideal as vehicles idled at that point causing pollution. It was therefore suggested that an alternative location should be considered.

Members supported suggestion 2 for a bench outside 53 High Street and indicated that a double-sided bench would be preferable. The final location for a bench on Market Square was supported.

The Committee agreed that the Town council should take on ownership and maintenance responsibilities.

**Resolved:**

1. That the siting of a bench on Bridge Street is not supported and an alternative location be suggested;
2. That a bench outside High Street is agreed with a double sided bench being the preferred design;
3. That the provision of a bench on Market Square be supported; and
4. That Witney Town Council takes ownership of the benches together with ongoing maintenance responsibility.

SC574 **OPEN SPACES INFRASTRUCTURE**

The Committee received an update on progress with the Action Plan associated with the adopted Open Spaces Strategy. In addition ratification of updated Memorial Bench and Tree policies was sought.

Members considered whether thresholds should be established for bins in Witney. During discussion it was considered that it would be difficult to set prescriptive rules and each application should be considered on the basis of likely usage and distance from other bins. The issue of responsibility for bins on other publicly owned land was discussed and it was noted that the District council had undertaken an audit of it's facilities and had introduced a zoning system for providing bins.

Members expressed support for the updated Memorial Bench and Tree policies subject to the addition that information be made available to the public by appointment and a suitable GDPR statement being added.

**Resolved:**

1. That, no specific threshold be set for the placement of bins with each application being decided on the basis of likely usage and distance from other bins;
2. That, clarification be sought if the District & County Council's are agreeable to the Town Council's contractor to collect from bins on their land; and
3. That, the updated Memorial Bench and Tree policies be approved subject to the information being made available to the public by appointment and suitable GDPR statements being added.

SC575 **TOWER HILL BUS STOP IMPROVEMENTS**

The Committee received an update report from the Project Officer updating on progress with the provision of a bus stop in connection with the Kingfisher Meadows development.

Members noted that further discussions had been held between interested parties. Consideration was given to the recommendation in the report and it was clarified that the Town Council would take on ownership and maintenance responsibilities if Oxfordshire County Council instigated a scheme.

**Resolved:**

That, the decision on how to utilise the allocated funds to procure and install bus stop improvements at Tower Hill, in line with both authority's climate priorities, is made by Oxfordshire County Council as the Highways Authority and keeper of the Section 106 funds.

SC576 **OXFORDSHIRE BUS SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

Consideration was given to the report of the Deputy Town Clerk updating on the Oxfordshire County Council Bus Service Improvement Plan submitted in October 2021. A response from the Department for Transport's assessment and what funds it will be awarded under the Strategy was awaited.

Members noted the evaluation by the Independent Parish Transport Representative on how proposals could impact on Witney. In particular the proposed increased frequency of buses to Oxford, albeit not all from Witney, and minimum standards for bus stops were highlighted.

**Resolved:**

That, the report be noted.

SC577 **IN-BLOOM COMPETITIONS**

The committee considered the report of the Communications & Community Engagement Officer in respect of future participation in the Britain In Bloom competition.

Members expressed support for continued participation and highlighted the success of this years entry in engaging with interested groups in the town. The committee indicated support for schemes in targeted areas rather than right across the town.

In respect of budget it was clarified that £6k was allocated and the committee considered this to be sufficient at this stage and requests for further funding could be made as necessary. It was agreed that a task & finish group should be established to progress the project.

**Resolved:**

1. That future entry in the Britain In Bloom competition, be supported with entries being for individual areas; and,
2. That a task and finish group, with membership being agreed at Full Council, is established to consider the future of any such entry or future projects involving community gardening groups and schools, such as the suggested sustainable project.

SC578 **COMMUNICATIONS & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT**

An update report on communications and community engagement activity was received and considered.

Members agreed with the suggestion for various coffee mornings and it was acknowledged that the timing of such events, particularly Councillor surgeries, may be dependent on ongoing discussions about future operation of the 1863 café bar.

It was suggested that contact details of community support groups, as shown in the notes appended to the report be made available to members for their information.

**Resolved:**

1. That, approval to run community coffee mornings and in particular the Crafting Coffee morning in the 1863 café bar be agreed;
2. That, the option of hosting Councillor surgeries/coffee mornings be supported in principle subject to consideration of the future operation model by the Corn Exchange Working Party.

SC579 **GRANT AID TO LOCAL ORGANISATIONS**

An application for grant aid from Witney Twinning Association was received and considered.

The Committee expressed support for continuing to fund the association and noted the excellent work being undertaken.

**Recommended:**

That, the application for grant aid submitted by Witney Twinning Association be approved.

SC580 **BUDGET**

The Committee considered the report of the Town Clerk updating on budget issues. Additional papers regarding grant aid for Witney Carnival were also received.

Clarification was given, in light of earlier discussions regarding bin provision, that £4k was allocated for bin collections with capital costs coming from other budget headings. In respect of other budgets it was noted that the Youth Services Grants, that had been oversubscribed this year, was less than that allocated for other projects. Whilst acknowledging it was unfortunate

that the Town Council was having to fund youth provision due to budget cuts elsewhere it was agreed that a request for an additional £10k should be made.

The committee considered details of a grant funding application for Witney Carnival. Members expressed 'in principle' support but felt that further clarification was needed regarding income and expenditure and details of what the grant is to be used for. It was asked that additional information be requested before consideration by the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee.

**Resolved:**

1. That, the budget report be noted;
2. That, an increase in the budget allocation for Youth Grants from £30k to £40k be recommended; and
3. That, in principle support for grant funding of Witney Carnival is supported subject to further information be provided prior to further consideration of the application.

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The meeting closed at: 7.25 pm

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Chair