

WITNEY ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

Held on Wednesday, 11 March 2020

At 7.30 pm in the Main Hall, The Corn Exchange, Witney

Present:

Councillors:	J Aitman	D Enright
	L Ashbourne	V Gwatkin
	T Ashby	A McMahon
	O Collins	A Prosser
	L Duncan	R Smith
Officers:	Nicky Cayley	Democratic Services Officer
	Adam Clapton	Office Manager
	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
	Polly Inness	Communications Officer
	Tracy Minns	Cemeteries Officer
	Tomas Smith	Public Halls Manager
	Angus Whitburn	Environmental Services & Compliance Officer
Others:	33 members of the public	
	Inspector S Hookham	Thames Valley Police
	Cllr L Price	Oxfordshire County Council
	Cllr J Doughty	West Oxfordshire District Council

1 INTRODUCTIONS AND WELCOME FROM THE MAYOR OF WITNEY, CLLR DUNCAN ENRIGHT

The Town Mayor, Cllr Duncan Enright, welcomed the public to the meeting and gave an outline of the meeting ahead.

2 OFFICIAL NOTING OF THE TOWN COUNCILLOR APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for their absence were received from Witney Town Councillors Bolger, Butterfield, Eaglestone, Harvey, Jones, King and Temple.

3 TO RECEIVE AND APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING OF 13 MARCH 2019

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2019, copies of which were available at the meeting, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The Mayor then gave an update of his year so far and followed by handing over to the Deputy Mayor for her to provide an update.

4 **THAMES VALLEY POLICE**

The Mayor welcomed Inspector Hookham to the meeting. Inspector Hookham explained that he was the Neighbourhood Inspector for the area and would give a brief outline of the police work.

Policing priorities remained the same as last year: domestic burglaries, domestic abuse and county lines and the associated anti-social behaviour that went with it.

The work on county lines was unfinished as was to be expected and work was still continuing. It has taken 18 months to get one of the leaders convicted and jailed. However, now that he had been removed there would be someone else to take his place. The police were focusing on drug possession and users. Dealing had decreased by 18% as a result of police activity but charges for possession were up to 30% - this meant that officers were targeting the right people. Inspector Hookham emphasised that the police relied on the public to tell them what the issues were.

There had been a 32% reduction in residential burglaries but a rise in garage and shed burglaries (up 100%). Inspector Hookham advised people to mark tools and lawnmowers so that they could be returned if found after they had been stolen.

There had been a 30% rise in ASB (untargeted community, environmental and personal). The police were actively trying to engage with young people and Inspector Hookham advised that that evening he had spoken to 2 members of the Youth Council who had suggested four or five things that the police could be doing.

Operations coming up included night time economy operations across Cherwell and West Oxfordshire and Operation Sceptre dealing with knife crime.

The Mayor thanked Inspector Hookham for attending and said that he would take any questions for the police along with general questions after the Committee Chairs had given brief reports.

5 **TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM EACH OF THE COUNCIL'S STANDING COMMITTEES**

The Mayor invited the Committee Chairs to give brief updates of the committees' work over the past year. He advised that longer and more detailed reports were available at the meeting and on the Council's website.

As the Leader and Chair of Policy, Governance and Resources was unable to attend the meeting due to illness, the Mayor gave an overview of the work of that the Committee had been doing on her behalf.

Following this, Cllrs Gwatkin, Ashbourne and Smith introduced themselves as Chairs of the Halls and Green Spaces Committee, Stronger Communities Committee and Planning and Development Committee respectively. All Chairs gave a brief update of the Committees' responsibilities and an overview of what they had been working on so far this year.

6 **OPEN FORUM TO DISCUSS MATTERS RAISED BY THE GENERAL PUBLIC AT THE MEETING**

Further to the updates from Committee Chairs, the Mayor opened the floor to questions from the public.

Q1. I'm Rev'd Jackie Bone, I'm the Leader of Witney Baptists Church, I moved to Witney in June. My question is about the new development, Windrush Place. I am funded by the National Baptists Union to work with new communities on developments, particularly Windrush Place. What concerns me is that there is no community space due to be built until 2021 when the school is due to open and we are up there already doing events. There is money for artwork – District Council – but I have been in touch with them already and they've said we can't do anything because there's no space so is there any chance of getting something like a portacabin or something on the development so that the community can be there altogether.

The Mayor thanked Rev'd Bone for her question and said that this was something that would need further discussion by the Town Council and they would let her know when and where it would be discussed. He commented that he thought it was a terrific idea.

Cllr Price said that as a County Councillor she shared the frustration at the lack of infrastructure accompanying new developments and was aware of the impact it could have on the community. She promised to look at section 106 money from a county perspective to see what could be done, if Rev'd Bone would pass on her details.

Cllr Doughty, a District Councillor, added that she was also aware of this. There was section 106 money in the system but it needed researching. When a new estate was built it needed adopting by the County Council which could take years and sometimes section 106 was not released until right at the end.

Q2. I'm new to understanding how the town council, district council and county council all work together but there needs to be a plan for infrastructure so that the Secretary of State doesn't call the shots. There needs to be a plan to make sure that all the services such as doctors and such are all in place.

The Mayor replied that the District Council Local Plan was now in place and the Town Council was very aware of infrastructure. Cllr Ashbourne added that the District Council had been about to implement CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) but sadly they had decided to put a 0% levy on large estates. There was currently a consultation on this and she urged people to respond to it.

Cllr Smith spoke about the pollution of the rivers and asked the public to sign the community petition.

Q3. Where is the tiny forest that was mentioned earlier in one of the councillor's reports?

The Mayor replied that it was at Eton Close, Cogges.

Q4. Why is there no bus shelter at the shops at Burwell? There are others in the town like the one at Marriott's Walk that is unused so why can't it be moved?

Cllr Smith explained that the Council had replaced the bus shelter at the other end of Burwell but the one that the lady had spoken about was unfortunately regularly vandalized and therefore the Council was trying to find one that would stand up to vandalism. The Town Clerk added that there was a budget for this to be done and the Council had been informed by Oxfordshire County council the Marriott's Walk bus shelter would not survive being moved.

Q5. What are the plans to safeguard Witney as a retail hub?

The Mayor explained that the Town Council didn't own any retail units and didn't control business rates or rents. He hoped that people could be encouraged to buy locally and that the council would source locally too. The Town Council worked with the District Council on the environment – there was free parking which was a great bonus for visitors. He asked for any ideas that the public had to help with this. A resident commented that the free parking should be kept as it encouraged people to spend longer in the town. Another resident suggested a Trade Fair on Church Green once again.

Q6. What is the Town Council's plan to pressure Oxfordshire County Council to repair roads?

The Mayor advised all issues to be reported on Fix My Street. The town had a number of "superusers" and they were permitted to use spray paint to mark areas needing repair, potholes had to be 20cm wide and 2 cm deep. The superusers effectively cut out the middleman and were able to order the repairs direct from the contractor.

Q7. Can we stop the temporary fixes? How many potholes have been repaired several times?

Cllr Price explained that often a temporary fix was a response to an emergency situation. It just prevented immediate danger. She did agree that there had been a lot of temporary fixes in relation to the West End roundabouts. The County Council had increased its budget for potholes and also the Chancellor had announced further funding that day. Hopefully improvements would start to be seen.

Q8. I want to say that people who live around Church Green and Corn Street can't park for more than 2 hours without being slapped with a parking ticket!

The Mayor advised that this was something that the District and County Councils were working on.

Q9. Is there a guarantee period for repairs?

Cllr price advised that the contractors were accountable if a substantial fix had been carried out and Highways staff did go out and check these. However, there were not enough staff to do this all of the time. However, there were stricter regulations coming in where the Council held a bond from companies such as utilities doing works.

Q10. Is it still intended to build on Woodford Way car park?

The Mayor replied that this was an allocated site in the local plan but there was no firm plan or when or what it might look like.

7 TOWN MAYOR'S CLOSING REMARKS AND THANKS

The Mayor thanked the public for attending the meeting and invited them to stay on now that the formal business was concluded to hear a presentation by the Youth Council and to take part in a Youth Services Provision focus group.

The meeting closed at: 8.35 pm

Chair