

WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL

Wednesday 11 March 2015

At the Forty-second ANNUAL TOWN MEETING held in the Langdale Hall, Witney at 7.30pm on the above date

Present

Town Mayor: Councillor Mrs J C Baker

Councillors:	A K Beames	T J Morris
	Mrs B J Churchill	C Holliday
	P J Dorward	D A Snow
	D S Enright	B J Woodruff
	J S King	C K Woodward

Officers:	Town Clerk	Democratic Services Officer
	Responsible Finance Officer	
	Facilities Manager	Communications Officer

Representing Thames Valley Police: Inspector Ollie Holland

18 Members of the Public/ 1 member of the press

1. INTRODUCTION

The Town Mayor welcomed everyone to the 2015 Annual Town Meeting and thanked them for attending. She said it has been a great privilege being the Mayor and representing the Town of Witney for the past 10 months. The lasting memory from this year will be the amount of amazing organisations and people there were in Witney. Community activities, young people, volunteers and their work, the generosity of businesses, the hard work that goes on to make things 'happen' has made me even more aware of what a wonderful place Witney is to live.

The Town Mayor said she was elected to the Town Council in 2011. Approximately 9 of the Councillors were new to the Town Council and joined re-elected Councillors. Without doubt the first year was a baptism of fire. The first major problem encountered was the instant closure of the Corn Exchange. But we gathered knowledge very quickly and also capitalised on the experience and knowledge of those who had served before.

Going from managing her own business, being able to source information and make decisions quickly to working with a diverse group of 17 people, coupled with having to be process and procedure driven, as is the Town Council, was an absolute shock.

She said because of her business background she saw the Town Council as a Business – The Town Clerk is the Managing Director with reports: she in turn reports to a Board: The Chair of the Board was the Mayor and the Councillors are the Board Members who as volunteers, had a huge collective responsibility and did not take dividends: the public were the reluctant 26,000+ shareholders and had every right to question the Board to know what return they were going to get from their investment!

What became apparent very early in our term, the public, quite rightly, wanted information, communication and transparency. The Town Mayor believed that they had gone some way to meeting that request. She said that the reports from the various chairs of committees would give an indication of the progress made – we were no longer fire-fighting but a proactive council. It takes time to turn such a large vehicle, we are aware there is still some way to go.

The Town is growing and so will the remit of the Town Council. Elected Town Councillors and Officers will listen and make representations on your behalf when and where appropriate. This meeting, hopefully, will give an overview of this past year of the Councils work.

2. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for their absence was received from Councillors Mrs C Curry, R F N Curry, H B Eaglestone, A D Harvey.

3. **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12 March 2014, copies of which were available at the meeting, were approved as a correct and signed by the Chairman.

4. **MATTERS ARISING**

A Member of the public raised the current state of the roads and potholes, to which Cllr King answered saying this was a standing item on the Witney Traffic Advisory Committee of which he was Chair. He commented that they were aware of the issues but they were not being reported to the County Council Highways Department by the public. Cllr King suggested that he should go on the County Councils web site and make the reports which will give the correct feedback.

5. **THAMES VALLEY POLICE**

The Town Mayor introduced Inspector Holland who was in attendance to discuss the Neighbourhood Policing.

He highlighted that the Police force were currently going through a budget review looking at what everyone does and how to improve things. This was to be completed in the next year. They were keen on neighbourhood policing and things were changing to improve issues especially on domestic abuse, and missing persons which takes up a lot of time and resources. He said that anti-social behaviour, which does cause a challenge for them, is split into categories; community anti-social behaviour is still work in progress where there has been a 45% reduction. Regarding crime Witney was a very safe area to live in with a drop year on year. He reported that burglary was also down quite a good percentage. Violence 'against a persons' was down drastically too, the night safe which runs, Thursday Friday and Saturday assisted greatly. Although Witney was safe area they were not complacent.

A Member of the public asked if the street pastors were still about, and Inspector Holland confirmed they were.

The Mayor thanked Inspector Holland for attending and he left the meeting.

6. REPORTS FROM THE COUNCIL'S STANDING COMMITTEES

A) Planning & Development Committee

The Chairman of the Committee, Councillor Alan Beames presented his report.

Cllr Beames elaborated on the work of his Committee and the consultations they had participated in. A Member of the public raised a question regarding Hailey Road/Eastfield Road and North Witney and wanted clarification if these were two separate issues, Cllr Beames said they were. The resident said there were issues with flooding as she lived in Eastfield Road. Cllr Enright commented that the Local Plan had just gone to the Inspector for consideration, but there were concerns regarding the flooding.

B) Amenities Committee

The Vice Chairman of the Committee, Cllr Brenda Churchill gave the report on behalf of Cllr Chrissie Curry who was unwell. There were no questions from the public on the report.

C) Recreation Committee

The Chairman of the Committee, Councillor Chris Holliday presented his report.

A Member asked what "S106 funding" was, Cllr King advised that it is for the much needed drainage works for the football pitches and changing facilities at West Witney.

The Mayor said there are many displays on the boards of the Splash park for everyone to see which is a very exciting project.

D) Public Halls Committee

The Vice Chairman of the Committee, Councillor Chris Woodward gave the report on behalf of Cllr Roger Curry who was away.

A question was asked about the unsuccessful Heritage lottery fund bid. The Member of the public wanted to know if the Council had looked towards Europe for any funds there. Cllr Jeanette Baker responded that there were not any funds available but the point had been taken. She brought to the attention of the meeting the photos and information on the Corn on display this evening. The main contractors have made good progress on the building. She said that the Mayors Charity evening was going to be held on the 15th May.

E) Policy & Finance Committee

The Chairman of the Committee, Councillor Jeanette Baker presented her report. There were no questions from the public.

7. MATTERS NOTIFIED PRIOR TO THE MEETING

The Town Clerk has received one request to speak from a representative from West Witney Sports and Social Club.

Sue Wilson addressed the meeting and gave the following statement: West Witney Sports and Social Club would like to use this public forum to extend our thanks to Witney Town Council for their support with our recent Fire Risk and Health and Safety review. We can now report that all of the high priority items have been addressed and a programme of improvements is on-going. A survey recently carried out on the condition of the building has highlighted a number of further items which the Town Council and the Club have made a commitment to address.

West Witney Sport and Social Club are pleased that we have been given the opportunity to start negotiations on a further lease, our preferred option at this time is for a 25 year lease which would enable the Club to apply for grant funding to carry out an upgrade of the facility, but accept that a lease expiring in 2018 would align with other leases presently running on the site. Going forward we would hope that an umbrella lease could be granted to a Community Interest Company who would then be able to grant sub-leases to all of the user clubs.

Over these last month's the on-going communication and dialogue which has been established between West Witney Sports and Social Club and Witney Town Council has been much appreciated and we wish to continue and strengthen this partnership going forward.

Mayor congratulated the Club on what they had achieved in a short space of time.

8. MATTERS RAISED BY THE GENERAL PUBLIC

A Member of the public congratulated the Council on what the Council had done over the last year with the Corn Exchange and Splash park which was good for Witney. However he was not happy about the lack of communication, he said he had heard nothing about this meeting until last night. Generally he would like to hear more of what the Council was doing.

The Mayor said that the minutes from last year were on the website and this meeting was advertised in the Witney Gazette under public notices. She said the Council was working very hard to open up lines of communication. He then said but what about those who do not have computers or internet connection, and suggested hard copies via a request line.

Someone suggested better signage for the Town Hall as most people thought the Corn Exchange was the Town Hall. The sign should include opening times.

9. TOWN MAYOR'S CLOSING REMARKS AND THANKS

The Town Mayor thanked everyone for attending and hoped it was informative. She thanked her fellow Councillors for their reports, commitment and hard work during the year; she thanked the Officers of the Town Council, Claire, John, Mervyn and the hardworking maintenance team: Polly, Elaine, Michelle, Adam and Suzie covering maternity leave for Nicky and most importantly to the Town Clerk, Sharon Groth.

The meeting closed at 8:39pm
