

WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL

Wednesday 13 March 2013

At the Fortieth ANNUAL TOWN MEETING held in the Langdale Hall, Witney at 7.30pm on the above date.

PRESENT

Town Mayor: Councillor H B Eaglestone

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

Officers: Town Clerk Deputy Town Clerk
Facilities Manager Democratic Services Officer
Communications Officer

Representing Thames Valley Police: Inspector Louise Roddy
PS Lianne Phillips

35 Members of the Public/1 member of the press

1. INTRODUCTION

The Town Mayor welcomed all present to the meeting. He explained that each Committee Chairman had produced a report for this busy and progressive year. The Council would be working to tight budgets of the coming year; however it was determined to see different projects through. He thanked Councillors and officers for their hard work.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for their absence were received from Councillors Ms C Curry, R F N Curry and S M Way.

3. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 14 March 2012, copies of which were available at the meeting, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4. MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

5. THAMES VALLEY POLICE

The Town Mayor introduced two police representatives, Inspector Louise Roddy and PS Lianne Phillips. Inspector Roddy explained that she was responsible for the neighbourhood teams in the area and that PS Phillips was the Sergeant for Witney. The service had undergone changes over the last few months and the local area had now merged with Cherwell. Colin Paine, who was well

known in Witney, was the superintendent in charge of the whole area. She emphasised that these changes had not affected the front line policing or resources.

Inspector Roddy informed the meeting of their activities over the past few months and was pleased to report that incidences of anti-social behaviour had decreased this year for the area, with a 35% decrease specific to Witney. Working in partnership with others they had been looking at the night time economy, working hard to improve the policing, resulting in a decrease in crime which she hoped would continue to improve. They had also undertaken a multi-agency operation to target illegal parking and undertaking licensing checks.

She was also pleased to report that due to a media appeal a suspect had come forward and admitted the damage to the war memorial. He had offered to undertake voluntary work in penance.

A member of the public was concerned with parking in Corn Street, particularly obstructing the bus stops. PS Phillips remarked that parking was the responsibility of WODC, however the police dealt with obstruction and the particular incident had been handled in an advisory capacity. The member of the public commented that this occurred regularly on both sides of the road and PS Phillips agreed to bear this in mind. A Member of the public commented that there was also a problem of vehicles parking on the yellow lines at the top of Corn Street.

The Police members advised the public to ring them when aware of problems and also to contact the Neighbourhood Action Group. Councillor Churchill confirmed that she was the Chairman of this group and advised anyone to speak to her if they had any relevant issues.

A resident of The Springs commented that they had suffered vandalism to property and vehicles which were connected to the night time economy. She confirmed that the police had been contacted and queried whether this area was included in the operation. The police confirmed that they were not forgetting about the home routes and these were part of the patrol plan, and included The Springs.

A member of public also commented on vehicles parking on the pavement in Corn Street in order to avoid the road parking restrictions. The police agreed to contact WODC regarding this and suggested that the resident contact them by e-mail so that they can update him on the outcome. Also concerns were raised regarding cars stopping to use the ATM machines in Welch Way. PS Phillips confirmed that they were aware of this issue and had, in fact, moved vehicles on earlier in the day.

A member of the public had attended the "Have Your Say" day and remarked that he had been able to have a good conversation with a police officer regarding various issues. However, he was concerned as to whether the police had enough resources, especially with the closure of the Witney cells, which meant that anyone arrested had to be escorted to the cells in Abingdon, taking away officers from the town. The Police officer had suggested that he write to the MP, and the resident queried whether it would be helpful for more people to do this? The officers commented that all public services had been cut to a certain extent, however, there were still adequate officers to deal with problems, and they were also supported by the special constabulary. They were aware of the issues raised by this resident and in relation to the shop he mentioned; they were looking at the licensing and speaking to the shop owner directly.

The Officers confirmed the "Have Your Say" days were held every five weeks outside the Town Hall as well as in other areas. Details were on the website.

In conclusion, the Officers encouraged residents to contact them with any issues and also to make contact with the Neighbourhood Action Group.

(The police officers left the meeting at this point, being 7.55 pm).

6. REPORTS FROM COUNCIL STANDING COMMITTEES

The Chairmen of the Council's standing committees had prepared written reports of the work carried out by their respective committees during the current municipal year. Copies of the reports were circulated at the meeting.

A) Planning & Development Committee

The Chairman of the Committee, Councillor A K Beames presented the report.

Cllr Beames elaborated on the work of this committee and the consultations they had participated in. He advised that the Traffic Advisory Committee reported to the Planning and Development Committee and they had specifically looked at parking for the disabled in the town.

The Committee had looked at the proposed development in North Curbridge and raised concerns regarding school places, particularly at secondary level.

A resident raised a personal issue with regard to the planning process. Cllr Beames confirmed that the Town Council was only a consultee and worked within time constraints set by WODC. He suggested that the resident direct his questions to WODC. He remarked that residents were welcome to attend the Planning & Development Committee meetings and make comments on planning applications which were being considered at the meetings.

The Town Clerk confirmed that the agendas were displayed on the noticeboards, together with a list of applications to be considered.

A resident advised that the college had provided secondary education in the past and maybe there was an opportunity for this to be considered again.

B) Leisure & Recreation Committee

The Chairman of the Committee, Councillor C K Woodward, presented the report.

The Chairman was pleased to report the success of the Diamond Jubilee celebrations in Witney and thanked Councillor Ms C Curry for chairing the Working Party. Together with the Olympic celebrations, Witney had had a very enjoyable year and he was hopeful that the town could continue to work together in the future. The In Bloom events were very close to his heart and he congratulated the schools taking part. He also commented that the Christmas Switch On event had been very popular and that the Council was continuing to look forward to ensure that this event remained successful and enjoyable for everyone.

C) Public Halls Committee

The Chairman of the Committee, Councillor T J Morris presented the report.

The Chairman commented that he had been frustrated with the delays in the Corn Exchange project, and it had been a learning curve in dealing with the processes and debates. He emphasised that the Committee considered that it was important to make the right decisions in

order to fulfil the needs of the residents to ensure that the Corn Exchange is developed in the right direction. He was pleased with the façade of the building and particularly the reinstatement of the balcony.

He thanked the Facilities Manager for her hard work in carrying out the refurbishment of the Langdale Hall which made it fit for purpose for the next few years. A variety of events had taken place in the hall over the last year. Burwell Hall was a very busy hall and the Committee was looking to improve the outside with the removal of the graffiti. Madley Hall was up and running and was operating under a Trust.

A resident queried how much the defects associated with Madley Hall, and in particular the floor, had cost the residents of Witney. Members were unable to give exact costs as this had occurred in previous municipal years, and the full figures would be made up of several components. However, a Councillor confirmed that the Council had followed due process and had been advised along the way. He confirmed that the Council had sought to get the best deal for the people of Witney and those decisions had been taken by full Council and not individual councillors. The Council had learnt by the process and were keen to ensure that the Council would never find itself in the same position in the future.

A Member commented that the cost of the hall had been covered by developer contributions and emphasised that Madley Hall was a wonderful hall and very well used.

In answer to a question with regard to the Corn Exchange, the Chairman remarked that he was also unhappy regarding the time the Corn Exchange project was taking, however he now realised that it took time to carry out the necessary steps to ensure that the final design was what was wanted and needed. He assured the public that the Council had not lost any enthusiasm for the project and was looking forward to receiving the Feasibility Study in April.

A Member commented that there was a lot happening behind the scenes, however, there was no information to pass onto the public until the feasibility study was available. With regard to funding, again this would be clearer after receipt of the study.

A member of the public suggested that it might have been easier to “put right” what was wrong. The Chairman explained that this was not the case.

D) Finance & General Purposes Committee

The Chairman of the Committee, Councillor H B Eaglestone, presented the report.

A member of the public enquired where the legal costs for Madley Park Hall were shown in the accounts. It was confirmed that these were included in last year’s accounts under a separate cost centre for Madley Hall. A Member reassured residents that the Council’s finances come under close scrutiny by an independent auditor.

7. QUESTIONS SUBMITTED IN ADVANCE OF THE MEETING

Not questions had been submitted prior to the meeting.

8. MATTERS RAISED BY THE GENERAL PUBLIC AT THE MEETING

a) Bollards

A resident was concerned with the instalment of bollards in various areas of the town, e.g. Woodgreen and Vanner Road. She agreed that although they do have a place, they did very little to stop parking in Woodgreen. It was confirmed that the Town Council had not installed bollards in Vanner Road.

The resident also commented that she had written several letters to the Council several years ago, and had not received any replies. It was agreed that this was unacceptable and should not happen in the future.

b) West Witney Sports & Social Club

District Cllr Andrew Coles remarked that he was also attending as a representative of West Witney Sports and Social Club. They were concerned with regard to the future of the club as in the current circumstances they were unable to apply for funding. He was aware that a motion would be presented at the next Council meeting with regard to the future of the site; their members were looking for reassurance as to the club's future.

The Member, who was proposing the motion, remarked that he hoped it would be supported and that the Council can then work with the users to ensure it stays where it is. He concluded that he could say no more until after the Council meeting.

A Member commented that he could share the latest information regarding the S106 agreement between North Curbridge developers and WODC. Discussions were concluded and waiting to be signed off. Within the agreement there was provision of a BMX track, to be given to the Town Council which would be entirely funded by the developers. Also included was an amount of £100,000 towards the Corn Exchange refurbishment; £250,000 for West Witney Sportsground for refurbishment of the grounds and club at discretion of the Town Council. He stressed that this had been extremely hard fought by WODC team and would be a landmark for S106 agreements in this area. He believed that this should go some way towards providing for future of facilities (including allotments). The Member commented that this would be going before the Lowlands Planning Committee of WODC on Monday for agreement.

c) Footpath at the Leys

This had been raised at last year's meeting and the Mayor commented that the Council was hoping to get S106 agreement from the new estate next to the Leys. This was still under negotiation.

9. TOWN MAYOR'S CLOSING REMARKS

The Town Mayor thanked everyone for attending the meeting and hoped that they have found it instructive.

The meeting closed at 8.50pm
