

WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL

Wednesday 9 March 2016

At the Forty-third ANNUAL TOWN MEETING held in the Corn Exchange, Witney at 7.30pm on the above date

Present

Town Mayor: Councillor J S King

Councillors:	Dr S E Bartington	A D Harvey
	A K Beames	D S T Enright
	C Brown	T J Morris
	H W Chirgwin	L M Price
	Mrs B J Churchill	Mrs C E Reynolds
	P J Dorward	D Temple
		C K Woodward

Officers:	Town Clerk	Works Contracts Supervisor
	Responsible Finance Officer	Communications & Events Officer
	Facilities Manager	Bookings Administrator
	Democratic Services Officer	Administrative Assistant
		Burials Administrator

Representing Thames Valley Police: Acting Inspector Matt Fishwick
Sergeant Kerry O'Leary

75 Members of the public/ 2 member of the press

1. **INTRODUCTION**

The Town Mayor welcomed the public to the meeting and said that he was amazed at how many people had turned out on an unpleasant evening. He emphasised that this was people's chance to talk to the elected representatives and to ask questions.

2. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for their absence were given by Cllrs J Doughty and H Eaglestone.

3. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 March 2015, copies of which were available at the meeting, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4. **MATTERS ARISING**

1. District Cllr James Mills asked why his apology for absence for the meeting of 2015 was not recorded. It was explained that only Town Councillors' apologies were recorded.
2. A member of the public asked if there had been any representation from the Town Council to the County Council about the state of the roads. The Town Mayor replied

that this was a regular agenda item on Witney Traffic Advisory Committee. He asked that members of the public report potholes and other problems with the road on the Fix My Street website. The member of the public explained that he felt the louder people shouted, the more would be done.

5. **THAMES VALLEY POLICE**

The Town Mayor welcomed the representatives from the Police, Acting Inspector Matt Fishwick and Sergeant Kerry O'Leary. Inspector Fishwick explained that he would give an overview of what the police did in Witney. There had been restructuring due to budget cuts, but neighbourhood policing had not been affected.

Crime had increased by 7% - this statistic was a little unrepresentative as there had been changes in the way crime was recorded. The fact that the figures had increased meant that more crime was recorded, not committed. Public order offences had decreased by 35% and serious assaults were down by 50%. Crime was extremely low in Witney.

The Police had just advertised for an additional neighbourhood officer. They had also introduced Police Cadets for young people aged 13 – 18 years. The cadets would get 2 hours per week at the station and 3 hours work per month in uniform.

A member of the public asked what the police were doing about cars parked on pavements. Inspector Fishwick explained that this was not actually offence – it was only an offence if the car was blocking access for example to a parent with a pushchair. If these were reported the police would respond, but higher priority items would be dealt with first.

A member of the public complained about the number of people cycling on pavements. He asked if the police were aware of it. Inspector Fishwick replied that the police were aware and if an officer saw it happening they would deal with it. Another resident asked what they should say if they saw it happening. Sergeant O'Leary said there was no expectation of the public to challenge this at all and the police would not want people to put themselves in potentially dangerous situations. However, if a member of the public wanted to challenge a cycle rider on the pavement that would be their decision.

Another member of the public asked if it would be helpful if members of the public took photos of parked cars. Inspector Fishwick said that it would but photos should be date stamped. He added that the police were running a campaign on cycling on pavements and £50 fines would be handed out. Cllr Woodward suggested people could also ring 101 and report issues.

A resident asked what the police would classify as dangerous parking. Inspector Fishwick replied that it was actually what the courts would classify as dangerous and not the police. The resident had concerns about parking at Woodgreen/Woodstock Road/New Yatt Road junctions. Inspector Fishwick promised to take this issue away and ask an officer to look into it.

A resident thanked the police for sharing the news on the decrease in crime in the town and asked if there had been any areas of increase. Inspector Fishwick replied that violent crime in the town had increased by 41%, but again this figure was due to the way that crime was apportioned.

The Town Mayor thanked the police for attending, and encouraged residents to report parking and cycling issues on Fix My Street.

6. REPORTS FROM THE COUNCIL'S STANDING COMMITTEES

A) Amenities Committee

Cllr Brenda Churchill Chairman of the Council's Amenities Committee presented her report.

She highlighted the opening of the Corn Exchange, the new splash park at The Leys and the forthcoming celebrations for the Queen's 90 Birthday.

District Cllr Andrew Coles thanked the Council for the installation of handrails at Tower Hill Cemetery. He asked if there was any news on improvements for Park Road Play area. Cllr Churchill replied that there would be improvements coming along in the form of a similar project to that currently happening at the Oxlease play area. The key was community involvement.

A member of the public asked if there was any chance of having CCTV at The Leys. Cllr Churchill explained that once the tennis club had installed wi-fi, this would be happening.

Another member of the public said that he didn't think the newly opened Corn Exchange was anything to be proud of and he saw it as a featureless box, which no longer had the things that he had liked about it, such as banked seating. Cllr Churchill said that the Council had done their best with the money that was available. There was a lot that was currently happening with the Shadow Trust too.

District Cllr Jeanette Baker said that she was a member of the Shadow Trust and there were currently negotiations happening on the lease between the Trust and the Town Council. There would be a meeting to try to resolve outstanding issues. She promised that there was a lot going on behind the scenes but until the lease was sorted out she couldn't be more explicit. A member of the public thought the fact that the building had been opened by the Mayor's Ball which had been invitation only had been undemocratic. It was explained that this was not actually an opening event but a charity fundraiser.

A member of the public complained that there was no longer a pantomime in Witney. Cllr Churchill advised her to "watch this space". Another member of the Public who was also a member of the Amateur Dramatic Society was sorry that there was nowhere in the town to put on a pantomime or a show. Cllr Churchill said that the current Corn Exchange was intended only as phase 1 of a 3 phase project.

A member of the public complained that he had not received any communication from the Council by e-mail despite having registered and telephoning to check that the Council had the correct address.

A member of the public said that he understood that the intention was for the Corn Exchange to be taken over by the Trust who would run it as an arts centre/theatre/community hall. The Trust should be asked what the intended uses were, not the Town Council. A member of the public asked if there was a problem in the Trust securing a lease. Cllr Churchill replied that there was no problem, but negotiations were on

going at this point. The Town Mayor added that the lease was for 30 years and needed to be right.

Cllr Enright left the meeting at 8.10pm

B) Community Services Committee

Cllr Chris Woodward, Chairman of the Community Services Committee presented his report.

It was explained that this was a new Committee and the remit included communications, and oversaw the website and production of the quarterly newsletter, events (civic and community led), In Bloom and schools competitions, town wide floral displays and tree stock, street furniture and infrastructure, CCTV and Christmas lights. Cllr Woodward gave a short update on each area.

He highlighted the production of the newsletter and encouraged people to respond to the survey. All responses would help the Council form its Corporate Plan. Cllr Woodward then introduced the Town Council's new app, available on Google Play and the App Store. It was a very intuitive app and easy to use, he highly recommended it.

A member of the public asked what people were supposed to do if they didn't have up to date phones or computers. Cllr Woodward replied that the Town Council had done its utmost to communicate with the electorate by delivering newsletters to every house. A show of hands illustrated that around 65% of people attending had received newsletters. One member of the public commented that she hadn't realised that was what was referred to as a newsletter as there was no news in it. Cllr Woodward replied that at this time of year, people most often asked what their Council Tax was being spent on and therefore the newsletter had been focused on that. All feedback was welcome and this could be fed back to the Communications Steering Group.

A member of the public wanted to talk about why a hedge had been cut down at Thorney Leys. The Council staff had stripped it and there was no nothing to stop people running onto the road. Another member of the public agreed with him and complained that children were now running across his lawn onto the road.

Cllr Dorward said that he had had a look and he understood that the hedgerow had been stripped back in order to assess the condition of the hedge. He knew that the hedge would be replaced but not when. He thought that there should be a barrier in place until this time, as he had heard that cars were driving through the area too. He was happy to champion this at Council. He hoped that better communication would take place from now on. Cllrs Dorward and Woodward offered to speak to both members of the public after the meeting.

C) Planning and Development Committee

Cllr Alan Beames presented a report as Chairman of the Planning and Development Committee. He said that it had been a busy year with 254 applications being reviewed. He also touched on the purpose of the Traffic Advisory Committee and also encouraged people to use Fix My Street.

A member of the public commented that the road in Curbridge was in a dreadful state as was the footpath from the entrance to Thorney Leys to the roundabout. Cllr Beames said

that the road was outside of the parish of Witney but he was happy to look into it and at the footpath. District Cllr Mills explained that work was scheduled for that section of the road in Curbridge. He added that the more people that reported issues on Fix My Street the better.

A member of the public asked what was being done to stop HGV's going down Mill Street. Cllr Beames understood the problem with this as he frequently visited the area. He said that the Council needed to focus on transport and infrastructure and he would be holding a meeting concerning this later in the spring, to drive forward a vibrant Witney. Such feedback was important as it would be fed into the Corporate Plan which hopefully would lead to a Neighbourhood Plan.

A member of the public said that they liked the second surface in Corn Street and asked if it could be put down throughout the town. Cllr Beames replied that this was in fact the County Council.

Cllr Enright re-entered the meeting at 8.55pm.

A member of the public asked what a Corporate Plan was and what a Neighbourhood Plan was and the timescale for both. Cllr Beames explained that it was a vision for Witney and the Corporate Plan would hopefully start in May. Once that was completed a Neighbourhood Plan could begin. However, the last time this had been looked into the cost was £100,000.

Another resident asked why Thame had had a neighbourhood plan for several years and Witney didn't. Cllr Beames explained that cost was an issue and some sources of funding no longer existed.

D) Policy and Resources Committee

The Town Mayor gave a report on the work of the Policy and Resources Committee as the Chairman.

A resident asked who was responsible for pavement on Church Green. The Town Mayor replied that this was the County Council.

There were no questions on his report.

7. ITEMS SUBMITTED TO THE TOWN CLERK PRIOR TO THE MEETING

There had only been one item submitted to the Town Clerk and this was in connection with parking issues. The member of the public was not present but another Corn Street resident explained that there was great difficulty for residents parking their cars on street as the time limit was 2 hours, meaning that cars had to be moved continually. The same issues occurred at Church Green and there was a lengthy discussion on this. The main request from residents was for a permit to allow them not to be prosecuted for parking outside their homes.

Cllr Harvey spoke as a District Councillor and portfolio holder for the Environment which included parking. A light touch was operated across the district and the objective was to keep traffic flowing. There was a Parking consultation happening at the moment and he encouraged people to respond to this. He took all comments on board. He added that unfortunately if you charged for on street parking the law was that off street parking would

have to be charged for too. One reason why people came to Witney was because of the free parking. He would raise this at the next Traffic Advisory Meeting.

A member of the public had lived in Witney for over 40 years and had visited many other places. The more places he visited, the more he was proud of Witney. The free parking was the envy of other towns. He thanked everyone for making Witney such a nice place to live in.

8. MATTERS RAISED BY THE GENERAL PUBLIC

A member of the public asked who was responsible for the lighting outside the Methodist Church as it was poorly lit. The Town Mayor commented that this was the County Council.

A member of the public asked how the Town Council was telling the public about Fix My Street. The Mayor replied that it was on the Town Council's new app (launched this evening) and website, and there had been articles in the Gazette and the Oxford Mail recently.

A member of the public asked if information about the app was on the noticeboard at the Town Hall in case she could not remember what to tell her friends. It was not yet on the noticeboard as the official launch was that evening.

A resident of Riverside Gardens thanked the Council for clearing the river at Riverside Gardens. It was explained that this was the County Council who were responsible.

A resident expressed surprise that no one had mentioned the threat to bus services. He thanked those Councillors who had held local meetings about it. The Mayor said that the Council had responded to the consultation. Cllr Bartington said that she appreciated the concern about bus services and thought other strategies needed consideration, including community bus services. She would put a motion to Council for a Public Transport Working Party. A member of the public asked who would be prepared to pay more to keep the bus service. A show of hands showed that 50% of people attending would.

Cllr Enright added that the issue had not been discussed in detail by the Town Council and officers certainly did not have the time or expertise to run a bus service. He asked people to join Witney Bus Users Group. The idea was to get a community bus service operating. Funding would likely be a mixture of fares and fundraising.

9. TOWN MAYOR'S CLOSING REMARKS

The Town Mayor thanked everyone for coming. He commented that he was pleased that 300 residents had returned the Town Council survey already.

The meeting closed at 9.55pm.
