

ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

WEDNESDAY 15 MARCH 2017

Amenities Committee

In 2016/17 we made significant progress across a range of key facilities and outdoor areas, continuing our programme of capital improvements, with an emphasis upon public consultation to support decision-making. Our ambitious strategy has been facilitated by strengthening our systems and processes, ensuring we use resources as effectively as possible and protect our much valued assets for the future. A key focus this year has been updating play facilities, with major regeneration projects in progress at Oxlease where we are a step closer to opening the first outdoor gym in Witney, with benefits for health and wellbeing of residents. We have continued to protect our green areas and open spaces and this is supported by our new grounds contractors Continental Landscapes. Our long-term vision is to continue this work, achieving high quality facilities for outdoor sports and recreation which meet the future needs of Witney residents.

PLAY AND RECREATION AREAS

The Leys

Splash Park

The Leys Splash Park has continued to be a popular attraction and we have made a number of changes this year to help with long-term maintenance and protection. During the summer months key works were completed on the waste pump, electrical facilities and grey water pump, requiring additional investment in the facility. Appropriate improvements in drainage and top finishing should help to mitigate these issues. In consideration of the need for our Works Team to conduct annual maintenance, we agreed the area will close for 2 weeks in autumn each year to allow this work to take place after the heavy summer usage period and will review the requirement for planned necessary advance works. We appreciate understanding of users that the site opening schedule may require adjustment to ensure these essential works are completed.

Skate Park

We are very committed to maintaining and improving this key facility; unfortunately agreed work to block in the skate ramps was subject to vandalism. The Neighbourhood Police have supported the Town Council tackling this issue and we continue to work with Base 33 and users to enhance this valued facility.

During the year we continued to experience concerns regarding parking pressures at the Leys, with heavy usage particularly at summer weekends. In addressing this issue we have considered balancing the needs of regular sports clubs, visitors to the Splash Park and other public users. We are aware of the difficulties in finding a parking space and hope to continue to closely monitor the situation.

Recently work was completed to install screening and a hedge around the Leys work depot, improving the aesthetic quality of this site. Our work has also supported local sports clubs; alongside subsidised lettings, we provided grant support to Witney Mills Cricket Club and approved our support for external grant funding applications by Premier Tennis (Awards for All) and Witney Swifts Cricket Club. We also considered the increase in formal and informal outdoor fitness classes and reviewed our policy to ensure that all organised activities have public liability insurance and risk assessments in place, to ensure safety of users.

Oxlease Play Area

The major focus of our ongoing play area regeneration projects this year has been the Oxlease Play Area (known locally as Wadard's Meadow) in Cogges. The year was a focus of activity in fundraising, consultation and design production for the site. We were delighted to successfully secure a £50,000 grant offer from the WREN Landfill Communities Fund scheme, obtained in partnership with the Cogges Meadow Park Community Group. The Town Council also supported the Cogges Meadow Park Group in fundraising activities, including the successful award of £12,000 from the Tesco Groundwork Bags of Help Scheme. Further grant support has been provided by Cottsway, Greggs Environmental Fund, Witney Round Table, Witney Town Hall Charities, Bruce Wake Charitable Trust and Witney Lions. We are grateful to all those residents who have supported the project and look forward to opening the facility in summer 2017.

Park Road Play Area

Our plans to re-open Park Road play area were unable to progress significantly this year due to the historical land registration. For this reason, the project has been placed on hold and we will continue to update residents as and when the project is able to proceed.

Play Area refurbishments will be continued on an agreed rolling programme in the 2017/18 municipal year.

OPEN SPACES

The major change was the award of a new five-year Grounds Maintenance contract in October 2016. To ensure maximum value for our residents, Councillors and Officers contributed to the comprehensive process of tender evaluation and scoring, with the selection of Continental Landscapes for our estates management.

We have worked closely with sports clubs to understand better their usage of our sports pitches and monitor usage. Following findings from the recent Sports Turf Research Institute report, we agreed that Continental Landscapes will increase the maintenance regime of the Council's football pitches over the next five years.

Officers have also worked closely with the support of the TVP Neighbourhood Policing team to tackle issues of anti-social behaviour and vandalism across many outdoor spaces. This has been successful in reducing incidents and we are most grateful for their responsive support in this regard.

Witney Town Council has continued to maintain an excellent environmental sustainability record, with a new commitment to replace bins with recycling units over the next two years. We are in the process of conducting an audit of all bin facilities across the town.

LAKE AND COUNTRY PARK

We have worked closely with the Lower Windrush Valley Project to support the Lake and Country Park. This area is currently managed on a very small budget each year to provide essential maintenance. This year the grazing areas were rested to help protect the land and members of LWVP and the Wychwood Project visited the site, to consider potential opportunities for the site. We agreed to seek the views of users and in summer 2016 conducted a visitor's survey jointly with LWVP, receiving 220 completed responses. This information was collated and presented to Councillors, and we recommended to provide additional "lake scene" public amenity items such as benches for which grant funding will be sought. Once these items have been secured members will consider future recreational use for the area. We will also work with LWVP partners to support

development of a long-term vision including a land management plan for this beautiful site, considering protection of biodiversity, ecology, site access and signage for the benefit of visitors.

OPERATIONAL IMPROVEMENTS

The Works Team have continued to work hard this year to deliver improvements across all sites. This work really keeps our facilities looking well and is often unnoticed compared to major projects. Staff changes this year have included appointment of Operations & Estates Officer John Hickman to lead the delivery of operations and improvements of the Council's services and facilities. Although this has been a year of transformation, the new service structure provides improved efficiency and has the benefit of expert knowledge of our own facilities. We have also introduced a matrix structure, to provide clear milestones for completion of ongoing projects and capital improvements, providing clear short, middle and long-term plans. There remains much to do and a number of projects commenced in 2015/16 will continue into 2016/17.

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

Overall the expenditure of the Amenities Committee is forecast to come in at 96% of the budget equating to an actual spend of £231,180. During the year we laid the groundwork for future savings, particularly due to our new 5-year Grounds Maintenance Contract which may provide additional services as necessary. We have also continued to work efficiently, investing in staff skills development, resources and effective systems to ensure as many projects as possible can be delivered by our teams and contractors.

SHAPING THE FUTURE

At the start of the next Municipal Year, the Amenities Committee will undergo restructuring with the formation of two new Committees: Sports and Recreation and Estates Management. This change reflects the substantial volume of facilities and services that we manage and potential future major capital projects. This new structure will enable respective Committee Members to give detailed consideration to all issues as they arise. We will also need to be responsive to meet the challenges of a growing population and respond in the way we approach the organisation of our services. Our purpose and role will remain unchanged and we will continue to work closely with the residents of Witney in all our activities.

Cllr Dr Suzanne Bartington, Chairman of Amenities Committee