

ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

WEDNESDAY 15 MARCH 2017

Community Services Committee

The Community Services Committee was formed in May 2015. Its remit includes communication and therefore oversees the website and production of the quarterly newsletter, events both civic and community led, the In bloom & schools competitions, town wide floral displays and the Council's tree stock, street furniture and infrastructure such as litter bins, benches, bus shelters, CCTV and Christmas Lights.

It has been a very good year to be involved with the Community Services Committee, as Chairman, I feel we have achieved a great deal from last year's feedback.

In Bloom & events

All the Schools in Witney are invited to participate and it is one of our great pleasures to judge their landscaping and environmental projects every year. We are always hugely impressed by the knowledge and dedication of the children and teachers in making their school grounds a place of beauty. Last year the theme coincided with Queen Elizabeth II's 90th Birthday, and schools were invited to plant a 3 tired planter. This year, we are looking to create a 'mobile' theme for Schools In Bloom with possibly a planted wheelbarrow being the central focus for judging at Witney Carnival.

Schools in Bloom forms part of the Britain (Thames Valley) in Bloom project where Witney is judged on its floral displays, landscaping and community and business involvement. The Council completed its grounds maintenance tender in 2016, with Continental Landscapes now providing services to the Town Council. The Councillors and Officers are working with the contractors to ensure Witney enjoys the very best environment, and looks forward to seeing the results from its entry into the 2018 competition.

This year's carpet bedding display at Welch Way will commemorate the Battle of Passchendaele, and the Witney Horticultural Society will be planting the bed at Langdale Gate in celebration of their 70th Anniversary.

We also received feedback about the sustainable planting on Church Green, we are pleased to report that this feedback has been considered fully and has been acted upon. The raised sleeper beds will be removed soon and return to traditional floral planted beds ready for the summer season. Whilst this has a higher on-going maintenance cost, it is appreciated that long lasting floral displays are what the residents get pleasure from.

Civic and Ceremonial Activities

The traditional Civic activity has continued this year with:

- Witney Feast Open Air Church Service on the Golden Gallopers;
- Remembrance Sunday; and the
- Mayor Ebenezer Holliday's Carol Concert,

Other Civic events included **Armed Forces Day**; we took pride in flying the flag, with many service personnel present in salute. **Somme 100 Commemoration**, the Council invited and facilitated the Somme Company, Oxfordshire (The Rifles) BN ACF to arrange a short service of remembrance to commemorate the 100 years of the Battle of the Somme. We were one of only a few towns in the county to mark the occasion, and were delighted with the attendance.

Community Engagement

The Community Services committee picked up an incredible gauntlet at the earliest point in our years business, by granting £10,000 to start-up and help facilitate the town's bus services, which had been curtailed by County Council cutbacks. The Town Council, through its various committee meetings, has pledged its on-going support to the bus services so that as many people as possible can get in to and around the town. The Council worked extremely closely with stakeholders, chiefly the Witney Bus Users Group, to ensure an efficient network was set up and viable. I congratulate my colleague in the chair Cllr Bartington, David Miles and our Officers for the work on the Public Transport Working Party for a job incredibly well done.

The World War One working party formed primarily to commemorate the centenary of the the First World War. However it has been tasked with looking into a permanent memorial on The Leys, working closely with the District Council which also has funding for a public work of art from developer funding. The project is in the early stages of creating a design brief, but it is hoped that this new memorial to Witney's own fallen will be unveiled during 2018.

Communication - Newsletter and Website

In the spirit of openness and transparency the Council has published how it spends our portion of the Council Tax in the February edition of the Witney Newsletter in order to reach every householder. The Council is also about to launch its annual residents satisfaction survey to find out how our service delivery is rated. Look out for this online via www.witney-tc.gov.uk, or the Witney Town Council APP, hardcopies available at the Annual Town Meeting and it will also be available in the April edition of the Witney Letterbox with a freepost return address.

Whilst we received a good response to the 2016 survey, much of it fell outside of the Town Council's remit, with only 1 in 4 replies related to Town Council responsibilities. The rest of the data was shared with partner authorities. Please do take this opportunity to respond to this year's survey. This data will be used to inform the Council's Corporate Performance Plan for 2017 and help shape the work that committees shall undertake going into the future. We have a brilliant working relationship with Letterbox who assists with getting our most important news to households in an affordable way.

Our website continues to be expanded and updated. Not only does it give information about the Town Council and how it operates, its meetings, minutes, policies and procedures, but it also holds community information, including an Events Diary in which local organisations can have their events and meetings listed and publicised. Our App has been downloaded by several hundred local (and not so local – as our twinning partners in Unterhaching use it!), and has had a good use of its link to Fix My Street.

Our social media pages, Facebook and Twitter, continue to grow and have a very good network of users and followers. We are extremely pleased to see that social media is playing a bigger part of communication, with fresh news coming from the Town Hall daily and regularly shared and disseminated.

Christmas Lights & Events

The Council once again facilitated several charitable groups (the Rotary, Round Table and Lions) to provide a Christmas lights switch-on evening. Following public feedback from last year, the Community Services committee was tasked with coming up with a plan to create a bigger and better display for the town to enjoy during the festive season. We believe that the display this year was one of the best in recent memory, gathering plaudits far and wide. The Council very much looks forward to the expansion of the Christmas Lights to be as encompassing to the town as possible.

The Council also put on a free Advent Fayre in the Corn Exchange with lots of 'hands on' activities for children to partake in – such as writing letters to Father Christmas – who was also in attendance thanks to a very early letter sent from Breckon and Breckon. There was also decorating cakes, storytelling and soft play. This event was hugely successful and well attended – my thanks to the Officers and Cllr. Jane Doughty for their work in creating such a brilliant event.

The Officers and fellow Councillors are thanked for their help and support over the last year, and a tremendous final thank you to you, the public for your support and feedback; it has been a privilege to serve you.

Cllr Chris Woodward – Chair of Community Services Committee