

**WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL**

**Wednesday 14 March 2018**

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

**Present**

Town Mayor: Councillor C Woodward

Councillors:	A K Beames	C Holliday
	C Brown	J S King
	H W Chirgwin	T J Morris
	Mrs B J Churchill	L M Price
	H B Eaglestone	Mrs C E Reynolds
	D S T Enright	D Temple

Officers:	Town Clerk	Democratic Services Officer
	Responsible Finance Officer	Asst Operations & Estates Officer
	Operations & Estates Officer	P.A. to the Town Clerk & Mayor

CLlr Jeanette Baker – West Oxfordshire District Council

Representing Thames Valley Police: Sergeant Chris Cochrane

Representatives from the following organisations:

Volunteer Link Up  
Homes 4 All  
Parks Tennis  
Witney Model Club  
Citizens Advice Bureau

30 Members of the public

1. **INTRODUCTION**

The Town Mayor welcomed the public to the meeting and thanked everyone for coming.

Each Councillor introduced himself and explained which ward they represented.

2. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for their absence were received from Cllrs Bartington, Dorward and Doughty.

3. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 March 2017, 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 of the meeting held on 15 March 2017 to be discussed at the meeting.

5. **THAMES VALLEY POLICE**

The Mayor welcomed Sergeant Cochrane to the meeting.

Sergeant Cochrane introduced himself and explained that he was now covering a much wider area. Witney was a lovely place to work and he had now been covering the town for 18 months.

He explained that the police were going through changes and budget cuts which were leading to different ways of policing. Old fashioned crime such as robbery and burglary had gone up, but Witney was still one of the safest areas. The police had found that criminals from other areas had been coming to Witney, committing crimes and then leaving. High end car theft had also been a problem and burglary in particular had been a problem last summer.

For the last three months, Thames Valley Police had worked with neighbouring forces and crime rates had gone down. Sgt. Cochrane felt that the police had a very good relationship with the Town and District Councils.

Sgt. Cochrane admitted that the public might not see the police on the street as much as previously – this was due to cutbacks and the fact that they had to use their resources carefully. The police relied on the public to tell them where the problems were so that they could deploy their resources appropriately.

Sgt. Cochrane invited questions from the public.

**Q1. What were the police doing about speeding cars and people using mobile phones in cars?**

Sgt. Cochrane replied that there was a community speed watch run by volunteers who would pass number plate details to the police who would take the appropriate actions, including issuing fines. The same applied to mobile phones.

**Q2. Was this the same for bikes cycling on pavements?**

Sgt. Cochrane replied that broadly it was. People tended to dismount if they saw a police officer. Education was the most important thing, especially in schools.

**Q3. How many PSCOs covered the area, and would the number be increased/reduced?**

Sgt. Cochrane replied that there were 8 in total covering the whole area. There were no plans to reduce this number.

**Q4. Are there any drugs problems in Witney and what was the current situation like regarding underage drinking?**

Sgt. Cochrane stated that there were drugs everywhere and it did involve children. The police were targeting suppliers. Reducing drugs helped to reduce other crimes too. There had been 3 warrants out the previous week for drugs. There were issues with drug suppliers coming from out of the area. The police also worked with agencies to give the right support to users. Underage drinking was not too bad in the town – mainly in the summer in the parks or at a house party.

**Q5. I tell kids cycling on pavements that they can be fined £50, is that right?**

Sgt. Cochrane explained that no one under the age of 16 could be fined.

**Q4. Do you have any figures for crime as per last year and it seems that the police are taking a reactive approach to crimes – were the police actually fighting it proactively?**

Sgt. Cochrane replied that in terms of fighting crime, officers were sent to give leaflets out but the best thing to fight crime was to educate the public.

He was happy to give crime statistics which were as follows:

<b>Thames Valley (Whole)</b>	<b>Witney (standing alone)</b>
Overall crime up by 9%	Overall crime down by 22%
Burglaries to houses by 17%	Burglaries to houses up by 65%
[No figures given]	Violence against people down by 38%
Domestic incidents up 6%	Domestic incidents up 2%
Domestic violence up by 6%	Domestic violence up by 3%
Drugs up by 2%	Drugs up by 39%
Shoplifting up by 2%	Shoplifting up by 39%
Theft from a person – no change	Theft from a person down by 9%

**Q5. We are expecting a spell of very cold weather again at the weekend – what is the police’s plan for this? A public meeting should be held to educate people on the causes of homelessness.**

Sgt. Cochrane replied that the police would direct homeless people to the right agencies and were happy to engage and signpost but this was the limit of their role. The police did not take the lead on this issue but would engage in conversation.

**Q6. I understand that a lot of time is taken up by social matters and there is nothing the police can do about this. I understand why we are not seeing police on the street but then it looks like the police are not doing anything. Police on the beat are needed.**

Sgt. Cochrane replied that he would love to have more police on the beat – this is why most officers had joined up. PSCOs had now replaced the bobby on the beat. The Police and Crime Commissioner for the Thames Valley had addressed this issue by returning to custodian helmets.

**Q6. {From a Councillor} Would Sgt. Cochrane be able to tell people a little more about Neighbourhood Watch and how to get involved?**

Sgt. Cochrane said that he was a big fan of Neighbourhood Watch and of the community looking after each other. There were 5 sectors of Neighbourhood Watch in Witney with Coordinators that fed into the Community Resilience Action Group, reporting to multi agency meetings. If you went to the police station or on line, you could find your local coordinator and how to join.

The Mayor thanked Sgt. Cochrane for attending the meeting and invited him to stay for the remainder of the formal meeting so that the public could talk to him afterwards.

6. **SUMMARY REPORT FROM THE TOWN MAYOR ON THE WORK OF THE TOWN COUNCIL SINCE THE LAST ANNUAL TOWN MEETING AND PROJECTS PLANNED FOR THE FUTURE**

The Mayor gave a report of the Council's work over the last year and a little about each committee in particular. Reports from the Chairman of each Committee had been circulated to the public attending the meeting. He thanked the public for coming and invited questions.

**Q1. Parking in Queen Emma's Dyke was terrible, and this was mainly down to bus drivers. What could be done?**

The Leader of the Council replied that on street parking was a county council matter delegated to WODC. They had a new parking strategy and Corn Street was one of the first areas to be looked at. He said that he would get details from the member of the public after the meeting and take the matter up.

**Q2. Why had no Conservative Councillors fought to keep the Elms Day Centre Open? The only people to help were Laura Price and Andrew Coles!**

The Leader replied that Oxfordshire County Council had run this centre and they had had to make some difficult decisions. The Conservative councillors might not always be visible but they did take things up. He handed over to Cllr Laura Price.

Cllr Price stated that she had fought hard to maintain the Elms Service but savings had been pushed through and they had reduced the service. The County Council had been hit by massive cuts from Central Government. It had kept some spaces across the county in a new service. She asked users and families to report back on what they thought of the new service. She was working hard with community groups to try to plug the gaps and would keep fighting for services.

**Q3. Could the crossing at Marriott's Walk be a pelican crossing? There used to be a proper controlled crossing before the shopping area was built. Also the white lines in that area were wearing away as they were printed on block paving.**

Cllr Harvey reported that he had been trying very hard to get things sorted at Queen Emma's Dyke in terms of parking and the District Council had taken it on board as part of their strategy. Regarding the Marriott's Walk crossing, he had been working with OCC through the Traffic Advisory Committee. The trees hid the belisha beacons when they were in leaf but the County were now putting in pea lights and some planters to help delineate the road and

the pedestrian area. He could raise the issue of a pelican crossing at the next Traffic Advisory Meeting.

7. **OPEN FORUM TO DISCUSS MATTERS RAISED BY THE GENERAL PUBLIC AT THE MEETING**

**Q1. There are less people here than last year and there was a lack of ethnic diversity and younger people. How could the Council engage with them? The agenda was not exciting and it would be better to have interesting topics for the town to debate!**

The Leader replied that usually less people attended when the Council was getting things right! Ever since he had joined the Council this question had been raised internally. The Council had an app, a newsletter and very active councillors. The meeting was set in statute and therefore the agenda was a set format. The Council had decided to deal with the formal business and then be available for people to come to speak to them afterwards. He added that he was also a member of the Round Table which struggled with a membership of 12 in a large town like Witney.

**Q2. Last time we hear about Witney Vision. What has happened because I have been to one meeting and not heard anything further?**

The Leader explained that this was not a Town Council lead plan but a Community Led Plan. He handed over to Cllr Holliday who had been leading on Witney Vision.

Cllr Holliday advised that the project had started well but had then got side-tracked and they had been overwhelmed by the volume of interest and responses. His intention was to restart the project this year. The Leader advised that a resident with an additional query speak to Cllr Holliday after the formal business had concluded.

**Q3. I have been coming to meeting for years and the meetings have only been busy when the allotments were moved and the Corn Exchange was shut.**

**Q4. Is Woodford Way car park going to be built on?**

The Leader replied that this was in the draft local plan but it was also defined as an important area in the parking strategy. Housing and parking could be integrated as demonstrated at Marriott's Walk.

**Q5. What was happening about affordable housing for young people?**

The Leader of the Council replied that housing developers were businesses but a member of the District Council cabinet was pushing for 100% affordable housing schemes.

The Mayor thanked everyone for attending the meeting and explained that after a quick change around, people would be welcome to meet the councillors and speak to them. He also thanked the exhibitors in the foyer and the Council's officers. He advised that there was an exhibition of bus shelter art in the Gallery Room if people would like to see it.

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The meeting closed at 8.40pm.

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Chairman