



SUMMER ISSUE 2020

WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

In a historic first for the town, local councillors, officers, and members of the public stayed at home and gathered around mobile devices to join Witney Town Council for its first ever 'virtual' Annual Council meeting. They tuned in via a remote conferencing app to witness the election of Councillor Joy Aitman as the new Mayor of Witney on 13th May 2020.

The Covid-19 outbreak has brought about a temporary change in legislation permitting local councils to meet remotely, so that they are able to continue to take decisions that allow them to function and provide continuity in their delivery of services.

Witney Town Council was well prepared for this, having, over the last two years, updated its business continuity and resilience contingency plans. This has included investing in cloud data storage, a web-based telephony system and digitalising its democratic processes that leaves it well placed to work and hold meetings remotely when necessary.

Councillor Aitman has no intention of serving as a virtual Mayor though. She has a straightforward, hands on approach to the role and is looking forward to the end of the pandemic so that she can fulfil her position in the town with the enthusiasm for which she is renowned.

Having served as Deputy Mayor last year Cllr. Aitman has a good idea of what is in store. She is passionate about the youth of Witney, having

taught at both primary and secondary level here and in London.

She said, I am thrilled to be elected as Mayor and look forward to representing Witney. I hope to focus on rebuilding the spirit of the town when our current situation changes. I am sure we will work to celebrate the reopening of Witney.

I am enjoying working with the Youth Council and supporting them in putting on events for the town. They are an ambitious group and have many exciting ideas.

On the Corn Exchange Working Party we are working to create a heart for our community. I am excited that we will soon be seeing some fabulous changes.

I hope to spend my year focused on our young people. They are the future of our town"

Councillor Aitman joined Witney Town Council in May 2019 and represents East Ward. She has chosen to support Guideposts Trust, Homestart and Got2B.



Cllr Joy Aitman, Mayor of Witney pictured in the Town Hall Chamber

Serving as her deputy this year will be Cllr Liz Duncan, while the new Leader of the Council is Cllr Luci Ashbourne and the Deputy Leader is Cllr Vicky Gwatkin.

First
remote
Annual
Council
Meeting
and
Election of
Mayor

Find out more about Councillor Aitman and how to book her for your event on our website: <http://www.witney-tc.gov.uk/council/the-mayor/>

A VERY DIFFERENT LANDSCAPE

COVID-19 WITNEY IN LOCKDOWN

The pandemic and lockdown over the last few months have proved (as if it ever needed any proof) that Witney is a resilient and resourceful town with a huge heart and unified community spirit.

The days of panic buying, empty supermarket shelves and stockpiled toilet paper already seem such a long time ago. This marked the start of lockdown and it quickly became obvious how much of an impact this would have on everyone's lives.

Witney, normally a bustling and busily thriving town suddenly became eerily quiet and abandoned looking. Schools, shops, theatres, cinemas pubs and restaurants closed. We were asked to stay home. People drove less, there was very little public transport and nowhere to go out to for those who were not going in to work.

So much changed, so suddenly and there were new and unexpected demands on people who were also dealing with concerns about job security, health, isolation or worries about providing for their families or caring for others. With no time to prepare or plan, the community reacted to the crisis in the most practical of ways.

Social media came into its own with individuals, groups and organisations using it to reach out, enlist volunteers and plan strategies in a concerted effort across the town to see that everyone had access to the things they needed.

Facebook pages and groups supported local businesses to help them advertise and promote the services they were still able to provide. Residents set up local networks and leaflet dropped across the town,

supporting families and isolated individuals, offering help to those shielding and unable to shop for themselves or those suddenly without work or furloughed.

Prescriptions and emergency food parcels were delivered by countless dedicated volunteers. Window visits were made to people feeling the strain who needed a friendly face. The unfailing strength and generosity of our community manifested itself in any number of ways.



Witney Fridge and volunteers operating from the Corn Exchange – Photo Punam Owens

Matter of factly and diligently, people looked for the need and then offered solutions to problems large and small.

Service providers and dedicated volunteer groups worked together to respond to COVID-19 and its impact on Witney.

Witney Town Council has been working to keep the community informed and supported where it can. The website has a temporary new home page, a dedicated landing page with links to up to date information and advice for individuals, families and businesses about Covid -19 drawn

directly from reliable NHS and government sources. Regular updates on social media and on our website help highlight and signpost community assistance groups, schemes and helplines. Latest information on services such as public transport, road works and news information from the Town, District and County Council is also shared here.

Witney Town Council is the burial authority for the town so our works team have continued to work hard every day to look after the cemeteries and ensure that funerals can take place safely. They have also been maintaining our parks and green spaces and ensuring these were kept closed where necessary to prevent the spread of the virus. They are now working to open and allow access to amenities as and when this becomes safe, with clear signage offering guidance and reminders of any necessary safety precautions.

PICTURED:

The Corn Exchange has become temporary home to community projects such as Witney Community Fridge.

The Council arranged for its use to allow them to function on a much larger scale while need is greater. The extra space also means safe social distancing for volunteers.



"I'm delighted that work is underway to install the brand new 1863 bar and cafe in the foyer of the Corn Exchange. As restrictions on day-to-day life are slowly lifted, it will provide a great place to meet, eat, drink and socialise in one of Witney's most beautiful and iconic buildings, right in the heart of our town.

It will also make the venue an even more attractive proposition for those looking to stage events, concerts, and other activities.

This is the first milestone on the road to revitalising this much-loved building, and creating a modern, accessible, and inspiring arts centre that the entire community can be proud of.

Cllr Owen Collins,

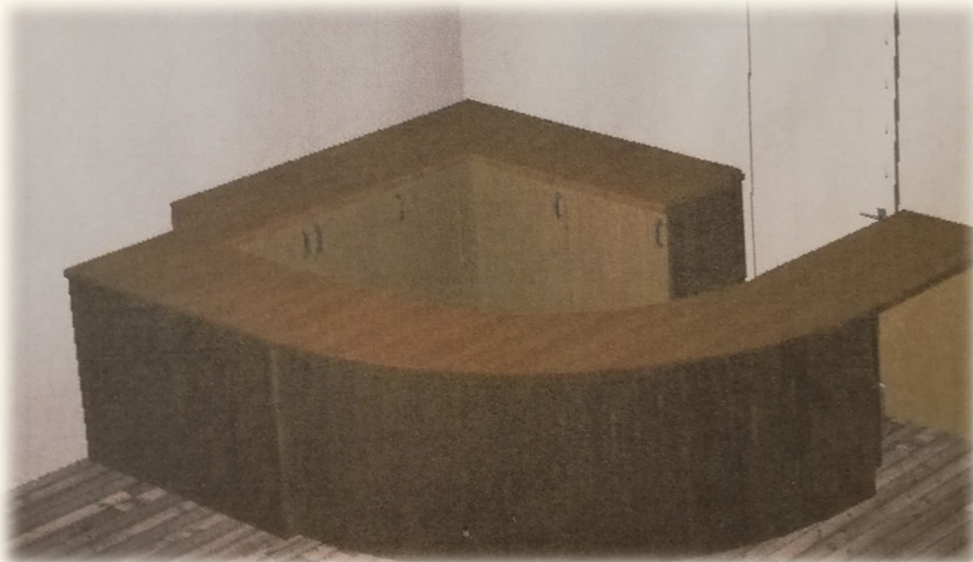
Chair of the Corn Exchange Working Party

Witney Town Council is delighted to announce that work has begun in the Corn Exchange to improve the services and facilities for both our regular hirers and the people of Witney. A bar/café is in the process of being installed which will be named '1863' (the year the Corn Exchange was built), forming part of the Council's continued investment in refurbishment.

The café will be a great asset to the Corn Exchange and it will open for all (when allowed!) serving fantastic local products and will be there to welcome people to come and spend time in this wonderful heritage building. For people attending evening events held by the Town Council the option to get drinks from the bar in the evening will be a brilliant addition to some already unforgettable nights.

Further planned improvements include improved seating, lighting, and sound in the main hall, the aim being to unlock the full potential of the Corn Exchange as an inspiring and vibrant town centre venue.

Additionally, the Town Council is also working on a dedicated website specifically for the Corn Exchange which should make it easier to get in touch, book events and to find out what's on and coming up. There will be more information about all these exciting new developments soon, keep an eye on social media pages and we hope we will be able to welcome you all back to a new and well-equipped Corn Exchange in the very near future.



ARTISTS IMPRESSION OF THE NEW 1863 CAFÉ AND BAR AREA IN THE FOYER OF THE CORN EXCHANGE

Follow Witney Public Halls on Facebook and Instagram for information on all our events



<https://www.facebook.com/publichallswitney/>



https://www.instagram.com/publichalls_witney/

NEED TO REPORT SOMETHING AMISS?

Services provided in and around Witney by different councils.

Witney Town Council 01993 704379	West Oxfordshire District Council 01993 861000	Oxfordshire County Council 01865 323000
Allotments Burials Cemeteries Grants Grass Cutting (WTC Land) Lake & Country Park Play areas Street Furniture Trees (on WTC land) Public Halls 01993 702309 	Benefits Bins (household, recycling, dog, litter) Car Parking Dogs Elections Environmental Health Fly Tipping Grass Cutting (WODC land) Housing & Council tax Leisure Centres Licensing (street trading& taxis) Litter & Street Cleaning Market Pest Control Planning & Building Regs Public Toilets Street Naming Trees (on WODC land) Waste & Recycling West Oxfordshire District Council Emergency Out-Of-Hours 0151 34 32 945	Blue Badges Bus Passes Education (Schools) Highways Libraries Pavements Potholes Registrar Services Roadside Verges Roadworks Social Services Street Lighting

COMMUNITY CONTACTS

ADVICE, HELP & INFORMATION

Carers Oxfordshire 0345 050 7666
Citizens Advice 03444 111 444
Citizens Advice Consumer Service 0808 223 1133
Jobcentre Plus 0345 608 8551
NSPCC helpline (freephone) 01793 683 100
RSPCA cruelty line 0843 557 5201
Samaritans 01865 722 122
SSAFA 01993 842269 or 0800 7314880
Trading Standards 01865 815 000
Victim Support 0845 389 9528

COMMUNITY

Age UK West Oxfordshire 0345 450 1276
Churches Together 01865 723801

Dix Pit 01865 880 782
Royal British Legion Witney Branch
01865 375052/01865 243056
Royal Voluntary Service 01295 264 214 (Banbury)
Volunteer Link Up 0300 770 80 90
Witney Food Bank 01993 890 000
Witney Fridge 01865 904 222
Witney Land Army
sheild@oxfordshire.gov.uk
Witney Library 01993 703 659

HEALTH & HOSPITALS

Lloyds Chemist (Windrush) 01993 705 644
British Red Cross Forest Medical Centre
020 8535 6888
Cogges Medical Practice 01993 700 505

Nuffield Health Centre 01993 703 641
Windrush Health Centre 01993 702 911
Witney Hospital 01865 904 222
NHS Direct 111

POLICE & FIRE (dial 999 for emergencies)

Police (non-emergency) 101
Action Fraud 0161 2349 230
Anti-terrorist hotline 0800 789 321
Crime-Stoppers 0800 555 111

PUBLIC UTILITIES

SE Electricity 07951 297 336
British Gas Emergency Service 0800 111 999
Thames Water leaks 0800 980 8800

Having moved to formalise 'Witney's Big Green Plan', Witney Town Council will continue to feed local details and wish lists into work being prioritised by the County and District Councils and will look at how it can access the funding available to facilitate measures which reduce vehicle miles in the town and promote active travel choices by creating new walking and cycling spaces. The plans will capitalise on emergency measures already planned and implemented in response to the need to get the town 'open' again following the Covid -19 lockdown. It is hoped to find ways to extend these temporary measures and make some of these permanent.



Improving existing infrastructure and connectivity will benefit those with a rediscovered appreciation of walking and cycling as a safer, greener and cheaper option for getting around. Active travel reduces both air pollution and congestion and therefore meets the criteria of the Town Council's Climate Emergency sustainability priorities.

Cllr Ruth Smith, chair of the Climate, Biodiversity and Planning committee, says,

"Everyone I have corresponded with - at county, other Witney councillors, our MP - states the two parallel purposes of improving active travel now: responding to the COVID-19 crisis and starting to embed the changes we know we need regardless. As a town council, we have resolved to look for opportunities to make Witney greener and healthier at every turn. We know there are people who have to drive, so we will seek solutions that acknowledge that, whilst leading the call for safer and more connected all-age cycling and walking."

To comment on the social distancing changes to the town centre, which can be adapted, please contact: West Oxfordshire District Council at enquiries@westoxon.gov.uk

Or use this Oxfordshire County Council survey to have your say on how the government's Reallocating Road Space Phase 2 funding should be spent in Witney, <https://consultations.oxfordshire.gov.uk/consult.ti/OxfordshireActiveTransport>

KEEPING IN TOUCH



WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL MEETINGS



		ZOOM MEETINGS							
CLIMATE, BIO-DIVERSITY & PLANNING	6:pm	Tue	16 June† 30 June 21 July*	11 August 1 September 22 September*	13 October 3 November 24 November*	15 December 5 January 26 January*	16 February 9 March 30 March*	20 April	
SPORT & PLAY	6:pm	Mon	22 June*	7 September	2 November	11 January	1 March		
HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS	6:pm	Mon	29 June	14 September	9 November	18 January	8 March		
STRONGER COMMUNITIES	6:pm	Mon	6 July	21 September	16 November	25 January	15 March		
POLICY, GOVERNANCE & FINANCE	6:pm	Mon	13 July	28 September	23 November	1 February	22 March		
COUNCIL	7:pm	Mon	27 July***	12 October	7 December	15 February	12 April		
SUB - COMMITTEES AND WORKING PARTIES									
Personnel sub-committee part of PG&F		Mon	13 July	28 September	23 November	1 February	22 March		
Corn Exchange Working Party	5:pm	Mon	20 July	5 October		8 February		27 April	