



## **Community Statement**

Witham Town Council by definition is the 'local' authority, and the Council places this mentality at the very heart of its work, defending local interests and positively promoting strong community cohesion.

### **Engagement with the Community**

Witham Town Council operates an open door policy for all public enquiries whether they be through correspondence, telephone calls or visits. The Town Hall acts as a principal anchor for the Newland Street Conservation Area and the Council has proudly ran the town's Information Centre, one of the last information centres to remain open in Essex. Far from going out of fashion, a recent £24,000 redevelopment of the centre has helps diversify the space in accordance with consumer demand and footfall continues to grow as key services from free recycling and dog waste bags to providing an emergency safe space for those fleeing domestic abuse or suffering mental health crises.

The Council has also increased the number of public consultations it carries out on its business, asking itself at every turn whether a public consultation is necessary and adds value to any particular project. Recently, the Council has achieved a number of successful traffic regulation orders and changes to highways regulations through the power of public consultation. By evidencing clear support and demand for proposed schemes from local citizens, the Council has successfully achieved positive change by demonstrating to principal authorities that it acts as a conduit for local opinion. In addition to this, the Council runs six committees with non-council members who provide invaluable input into the Council's work with an open door policy for those who are interested in getting involved on any committee open to the public. The Council now engages actively with the public via its growing social media presence including publishing all committee papers via its website and social media channels for maximum exposure of local issues taking place.

### **Leadership in Planning for the Future of the community**

The Council has recently notified the Local Planning Authority of its intention to commence the Neighbourhood Plan process after the Planning Inspectorate rejected the LPA's second attempt at adopting a local plan, which is now severely out of date. The Council believes that a Neighbourhood plan may now be the only way to protect the local community against speculative and irresponsible development and ensure that new development is of net benefit to Witham.

In addition, the Council is developing its own Prospectus for Devolution, a highly ambitious plan to return control of principal and key assets that were once ran under the auspices of the former Witham Urban District Council, dissolved in 1974. Respecting the longstanding local sentiment that Witham needs control of its own affairs, the Council is examining ways to centralise control of key local amenities with the Town Council for greater accountability and transparency and to relieve the burden of open space management from principal authorities who are under greater budgetary pressures and statutory requirements that are outside the scope of the Town Council. The business case being developed by the Council is broad in scope and ambitious in detail that upon its publication, the authority hopes to reignite the national argument for Localism & Devolution by making a case study example of Witham and the clear benefits to all tiers of local government in genuine engagement towards devolution in real terms. Leading the way on the Prospectus for Devolution, Witham Town Council intends to deliver a credible business plans to the door of the District & County Councils and galvanise public support for a fundamental change in local government organisation in Essex.